POSITIVE OUTLIERS SERIES

Sanger Unified School District

Positive Outliers Case Study

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Executive Summary

Located just southeast of Fresno in California's Central Valley, Sanger Unified School District (USD) serves approximately 12,000 students in 20 schools. Sanger USD students are predominately from low-income families (73%); most are Latino/a (70%), and about one in five (18%) are English learners. During the accountability era of No Child Left Behind, Sanger had earned the reputation of being a turnaround district based on district students' steep and steady improvement on California's Test of Basic Skills between 2004 and 2012. Its success hinged on developing an organizational culture of continuous improvement and an instructional regime of direct instruction for students' basic skills mastery. This case study addresses the question of how Sanger USD managed to shift instruction and student support to achieve exemplary results on the new state assessments of students' deeper learning.

Sanger USD is one of seven districts studied by researchers at the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) in a mixed-methods study that sought to learn from positive outlier districts in which African American, Latino/a, and White students did better than predicted on California's math and English language arts tests from 2015 through 2017, after accounting for differences in socioeconomic status. This in-depth case study describes the critical practices and policies within Sanger USD that have promoted student learning, especially among students of color, in the context of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the deeper learning they seek to foster.

Through analyses of interviews, observations, and documents—and building upon the authors' prior research on Sanger's turnaround—this case study describes key factors that enabled district students to outperform their peers on tests of deeper learning:

- **Sanger USD built on a strong collaborative learning culture developed over the previous decade**. By the time California adopted CCSS, Sanger USD had created a districtwide culture and systems to support ongoing professional learning and continuous improvement. Teachers were accustomed to working in grade-level/course group professional learning communities (PLCs) with support from teams of school and district leaders. Collaboration and grounding decisions in evidence had become norms. Vacancies in school and district leadership positions began to be filled almost exclusively by existing staff—an internal pipeline of well-prepared leaders.
- **Sanger USD leaders continued to follow three overarching principles for leading change**. The district's turnaround in the 2000s came about through school and district leaders' growing understanding of how to lead shifts in educators' mindsets and practices: (1) take a developmental approach, (2) ground decisions in evidence, and (3) build shared commitments and relationships to sustain change. These principles were key to their success in implementing CCSS for teaching and learning.
- **The district strategically named and established two top priorities for improvement**. Sanger leaders concentrated on two carefully named initiatives and consistently communicated how they built on teachers' prior knowledge and skills. Effective Instruction focused on integrating good instructional principles, including direct instruction, with content and pedagogy aligned with CCSS. Multi-tiered systems of support focused on integrating a pyramid of social-emotional support for students with

existing academic and behavioral supports. It aimed to develop a robust system for struggling students to militate against the possibility of widening achievement gaps under the more demanding state standards.

- **Sanger USD started small and matched supports to expected instructional shifts**. The district ensured that educators were not overwhelmed by demands for change by allowing each school to sequence its own priorities for making particular instructional shifts to promote students' deeper learning. The district tailored its support to each school on the basis of the school's priorities and capacities. At the same time, teacher PLCs were in charge of designing instructional units and formative assessments aligned with CCSS, a gradual and long-term process. The district supported this process in multiple ways, including professional development in grade-level and course content standards, access to CCSS-aligned instructional resources, and on-site guidance and coaching.
- **Sanger USD engaged principals and teachers in creating tiers of student supports**. As with its instructional initiative, district leaders took a developmental approach to the multi-tiered systems of support initiative. Leaders consistently communicated its coherence with prior systems of support for Sanger students, and they supported schools to develop (and share) approaches to weaving social-emotional supports into their academic and behavioral support systems. In elementary schools, the district initiated a pilot program for tiered social-emotional supports that, based on its success in 1st-grade pilot classes, gradually spread to all grades. The district also introduced Universal Design for Learning, a framework that provides multiple approaches to increasing opportunities for all students to engage in academic learning.
- **Sanger USD adapted resources for change to the district context**. In designing and contracting for professional development to support educators' transition to CCSS instruction and creation of robust systems of student support, district leaders sought partners willing to customize their practice to the district schools and teachers. They rejected one-size-fits-all programs and approaches and avoided relying on the "usual suspects" in their region. Instead they vetted providers, programs, and workshops around the state and selected those highest in quality that matched their specific needs, especially the needs of English learners.
- **Leaders streamlined access to data and support for using evidence to guide improvement efforts**. Central to Sanger USD's culture of continuous improvement is the use of data and evidence to focus, design, evaluate, and refine policies and practices. With the advent of CCSS, the district invested in building a comprehensive data system to support both enhanced measures of students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development and the ability of district and school leaders and teacher PLCs to utilize data at different levels of aggregation (e.g., at the district, school, and grade/course levels as well as by student group). Beyond using the comprehensive data system, district leaders also used evidence from pilots and teacher feedback to guide decisions about program adoptions and to hone their supports for professional learning.
- **Sanger USD invested in building and maintaining trust and support for CCSS in the community as well as in the district**. Sanger's mantra, "Every Child, Every Day, Whatever It Takes," focused Sanger leaders and educators and the broader community on the vision and moral imperative that ground district improvement efforts. District administrators invested in developing all leaders' deep understanding of the CCSS, and together

school and district leaders worked to assuage fears in the district and community. They consistently communicated that the new standards were good for Sanger students, that the shift would be gradual, and that it would eventually pay off in deeper student learning and life achievements. They won the trust and patience of all constituencies.

Sanger USD stayed focused on two key initiatives, grounding them in educators' prior knowledge and skills and strategically drawing on resources to support continuous, systemwide learning and transition to CCSS. In so doing, Sanger USD's experience offers a model of how to avoid top-down district mandates and compliance mentalities that often sabotage real change. The district's success in promoting deeper learning among all Sanger students attests to the district's strong, long-standing commitment to equity and its culture of collaboration and shared accountability for all students' success.

Introduction

> Our success in the transition to Common Core is the culture we already had established: Our professional learning communities collaborate based on data. The data changes and broadens, but the foundation stays the same.
>
> —Adela Jones, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction[1]

Sanger Unified School District (USD), located a few miles southeast of Fresno, CA, serves approximately 12,000 students in 20 schools. More than 70% of students are Latino/a, 18% are English learners (ELs), and nearly 73% qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

During the accountability era of No Child Left Behind, Sanger earned the reputation of being a turnaround district based on its students' steep and steady improvement on California's annual tests of basic skills. Between 2004 and 2012, under the leadership of Superintendent Marc Johnson, Sanger USD moved from being one of the lowest-performing California districts, in need of improvement and under threat of state takeover, to exceeding the district average on the state's Academic Performance Index. By 2012, most of Sanger's 20 schools ranked in the top 10% compared to demographically similar schools, and many had received Blue Ribbon awards from the state. Sanger students, including ELs, outperformed their counterparts across the state on math and English language arts (ELA) tests of basic skills.

With the shift to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), California suspended annual state testing for 3 years in order to give school districts and their teachers time to become familiar with the new standards for deeper learning. Across the state, districts were challenged to shift instruction and supports in ways that would prepare their students to succeed on tests that demand more evidence of their knowledge and skills. Since 2014, when California's Smarter Balanced Assessments began, Sanger students continued to outperform their demographic peers in math and ELA, as well as on other measures of student outcomes, such as dropout and suspension rates. (See Appendix A.) Their strong performance suggests that district educators have been successful in moving instruction toward CCSS.

Past research from 2013 has documented how the district made its initial turnaround,[2] and this current case study examined the district's response during CCSS implementation in 2016–17. The case study is part of a larger quantitative study of district performance in California[3] and part of a larger qualitative study that examines trends across seven case studies of districts, such as Sanger USD, that performed better than predicted on California's state assessment from 2015 through 2017.[4] For more information about the methods used in this individual case study, see Appendix B.

Sanger USD's success in meeting new state standards for student performance clearly builds upon its capacity for continuous improvement developed over the previous decade—its collaborative culture and systems for developing a strong pipeline of leaders. It also reflects district leaders' strategic decisions about how to tackle the challenge of bringing students up to CCSS.

Sanger's Foundation for Continuous Improvement

By 2012, when Sanger USD educators began dipping their toes into the daunting sea of CCSS, they were strong in professional capacities for learning—collaboration in professional learning communities, broad leadership, shared accountability within and across system levels, and intentional plans for sustainability. When asked what best accounts for their early success on CCSS assessments, Sanger administrators and teachers invariably point to the district's culture of collaboration. This section's description of Sanger's foundational work for continuous improvement comes from previous research conducted in the district by the authors of this case study,[5] as well as our current case study.

Professional learning communities (PLCs). Back in 2005, Sanger administrators invested in developing PLCs as their primary strategy for turning around student performance. To implement PLCs, Sanger relied on training and materials developed by Richard DuFour, a pioneer in the PLC movement. All administrators and teachers in the district participated in DuFour training sessions at least once over the next few years. The district's approach and the DuFour training focused on two things: (1) developing teachers' skill in using standards-based assessments and data to evaluate and improve instruction, and (2) engendering teachers' shared accountability for all students' success.[6] The district invested in professional development, selected instructional frameworks, and dedicated time for PLC meetings—in contrast with more traditional approaches of relying primarily on the adoption and implementation of textbooks or specific curricula.

In moving to a PLC strategy for continuous improvement, the district invested heavily in developing teacher leadership, creating positions in schools to support teacher learning (curriculum support providers, or CSPs), and focusing principals on leading learning in their school's teacher PLCs.

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PLCs became the way of doing business among Sanger USD teachers and administrators alike. By 2012, the district had developed effective systems and routines for professionals to work together to ensure that all students achieve to high standards:

- Teachers worked in PLCs at grade level or in their subject area, each facilitated by a lead teacher.
- School principals and PLC lead teachers made up a school leadership PLC.
- A district area administrator and group of four to five principals formed a PLC that observes and learns from classrooms in each other's schools.
- Several PLCs at the district office level worked to support teacher learning in content areas and collaboration between special education and general education.
- The district cabinet operated as a PLC to shape and refine district-level decisions and supports.

Sanger USD's collaborative culture extended beyond district boundaries. Sanger USD has sought—and been sought by—networks, partnerships, and foundations that offer opportunities for learning and sharing. The district's choices have been strategic based on the perceived fit with Sanger USD's needs and the time commitments involved.

Stable, well-prepared teaching force. Sanger USD's culture and norms of collaboration, strong school and district support for teacher learning, and leadership opportunities made Sanger USD highly attractive to prospective teachers. By the middle of Marc Johnson's tenure as Superintendent, Sanger no longer had trouble attracting and retaining teachers. This shift was enhanced by Sanger USD's agreement with Fresno State University's teacher preparation program to host intern teachers, as well as Fresno State's on-site training for administrator credentialing. With teacher retirements and the recruitment of newly credentialed teachers, the average tenure of district teachers has shifted over the past decade from 20–25 years to 10–15 years.

Having a stable, well-prepared teaching force continued to be a strength for Sanger, based on the data collected for the current case study. Superintendent Matt Navo told us that all job openings for the 2017–18 school year had been filled with well-qualified candidates by March 2017. Notably, the district has been successful in filling special education positions with provisional and credentialed teachers; the six resource specialist teacher openings for 2018–19 had been filled by May 2018. In the context of a regional and statewide shortage of credentialed special education teachers, Sanger's recruitment success is exceptional. Superintendent Navo attributes this to the district's culture of collaboration and its strong Special Education Department leadership. The district has earned a reputation for supporting the work of special education teachers and for unusually effective collaboration between general education and special education teachers.

A decade ago Sanger's Special Education and General Education departments ceased to operate as silos, developing open channels of communication and ways of supporting each other's work in schools and classrooms. Further, Sanger USD's Local Control and Accountability Plan allocated increased funding to hire school psychologists, and the district now employs proportionally more psychologists than typical—16 psychologists for 20 schools.[7] Sanger assigned these psychologists to particular schools (two psychologists in the middle school and in the high school, and the rest in elementary schools). The psychologists devoted most of their time to student needs and mediating between general and special education teachers, with only a small portion of their time spent on the traditional role of testing for students' special needs. Our current case study interviews showed that the Special Education Department and district psychologists continued to work to integrate academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports for struggling students as part of the district's multi-tiered systems of support initiative. These pieces continue to combine to make Sanger USD an attractive district to special education teachers.

Broad and deep leadership. Sanger invested heavily during the past decade in developing principals' knowledge and skills in leading professional learning in their schools. The district's School Academic Achievement Leadership Teams developed routines for observing and learning from one another's schools, as described below in the context of adapting to CCSS.[8] Sanger principals' primary charge, in addition to making school a safe and well-organized place for students, was to lead and support teacher learning and the development of teacher leadership. They allocated time and other resources essential to teacher PLCs' success and to working with PLC leads on problems of practice.

By nurturing principal and teacher leadership over the past 10 years, Sanger USD has created a pipeline of educators with strong instructional and team leadership skills ready to step into school—and eventually district—specialist and administrative positions. The leadership pipeline began with teacher leaders of PLCs organized by grade level and PLCs organized by course content. Some of these teacher leaders became CSPs who work with all teachers in each elementary school and with subject-area teachers in the middle school and high school. The district designed the pipeline to move leaders from teacher teams to the district office. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1
Sanger USD Leadership Pipeline

Shared accountability for all students' success. Sanger's culture of collaboration and leadership is rooted in the moral imperative that district personnel share accountability for all students' success. From teacher PLCs, in which "all students are our students," to the district office, in which administrators and staff take responsibility for each school's success, strong norms and systems enforced shared accountability a decade ago and continued through the implementation of CCSS.

Sustainability. Continuity of district leadership has been key to establishing and sustaining Sanger USD's culture of continuous improvement. Marc Johnson served as Superintendent from 2002 to 2013 and was succeeded by Matt Navo, who had previously served as a Principal, Director of Special Education, and Area Administrator. In fall 2018, Navo was succeeded by longtime Sanger educator Adela Jones, who began her career as a teacher and previously served as Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction for 3 years.

Sanger USD's board of trustees has consistently supported district administrators' strategies for continuous improvement. Mottos from Marc Johnson's early years as Superintendent—"Together we can!" and "Every Child, Every Day, Whatever It Takes"—capture their shared commitment to bringing all students up to standards that ensure lifelong learning and success. And the board fully endorsed Superintendent Navo's motto: "Dream Big, Work Hard, Believe."

These prior district conditions—professional collaboration, a stable and well-prepared teacher force, broad and deep leadership, shared accountability, and sustainability—constitute Sanger USD's capacity to shift teaching and learning toward CCSS.[9]

Priorities for Change

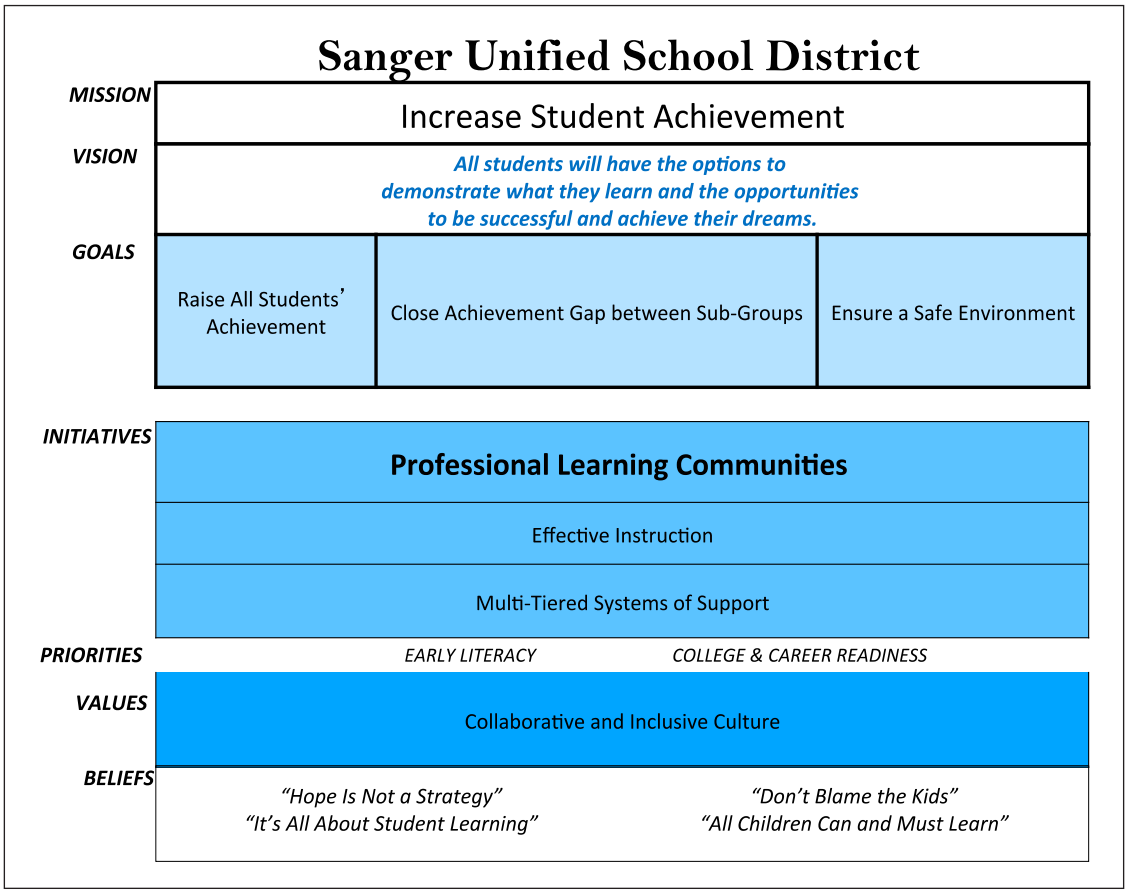
This current case study, conducted in 2016–17, examined Sanger USD's transition to the demanding CCSS standards. District leaders reasoned that if Sanger students were to perform well on the more ambitious standards, then not only would instruction need to shift, but students would need more support. Teaching would need to shift from a focus on basic skills mastery toward the kinds of deeper learning targeted by CCSS, and students would need to take a more active role as learners in the classroom and in completing complex projects.

To support these shifts, Sanger USD defined three initiatives:

1. Professional learning communities
2. Effective Instruction
3. Multi-tiered systems of support

The district highlights these three key initiatives in its graphic of mission, vision, goals, initiatives, priorities, values, and beliefs, referred to as its Goals and Coherence Map (see Figure 2). Note that professional learning communities—a core strategy for continuous improvement in Sanger USD—is positioned in the graphic as an umbrella for the two new district initiatives.

Figure 2
Sanger USD Goals and Coherence Map



Source: Sanger Unified School District.

Professional learning communities (PLCs). Although PLCs were well established in the district culture, the continuation of this initiative reflected the need for teacher PLCs to adapt their practice to address CCSS. In particular, the district's original PLCs assumed fairly straightforward student learning objectives and measures, whereas the new standards call for deeper learning and complex, performance-based assessments.

Sanger's PLC initiative provided additional time and resources for teacher teams to work together, as well as PLC training to deepen collaborative practices. District PLCs worked to deepen their understanding of CCSS for their grade level or course, to design and improve standards-based instruction, to create authentic assessment tasks to measure student mastery, and to use assessment data to refine instruction and design interventions for struggling students.

Effective Instruction. The district's focus on Effective Instruction was strategic in building a bridge between effective practices under the Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI) approach prior to CCSS and the instructional approaches under CCSS. In the expanded meaning of Effective Instruction, teachers would need to move away from their emphasis on direct instruction for basic skills mastery toward more active student roles and deeper learning outcomes. Teacher PLCs' common formative assessments would also need to shift toward broader and deeper learning objectives. Early literacy and college and career readiness were specified as priorities to meet CCSS's demands on student literacy and range of learning outcomes beyond academic skills.

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). This initiative anticipated that more students would struggle to meet the new academic standards, especially those transitioning to English as a second language. Building on California's guidance and support for the model, the district MTSS calls for integrating academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports.

Prior to CCSS, district teachers were experienced in using Response to Intervention (RTI) in their PLCs to address academic needs and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports to address behavior issues within and beyond the classroom. So the district's challenge was to integrate these established systems and weave in levels of supports for students' social-emotional development and safety, in order to form a complete MTSS. The initiative recognized that a student's struggle in any one of these areas undermines his or her academic success and transition to an effective adulthood. It also responded to evidence of growing mental health stress and crises among youth in the region and beyond.

Principles for leading change

As important as what Sanger USD is doing to address the challenges of CCSS is how it is leading the change process. Four key principles for leading change grounded district leaders' earlier success in accelerating student achievement between 2004 and 2012.[10] These principles were also evident in district and school leaders' later work implementing CCSS.

1. **Taking a developmental approach.** This guidance is based in knowledge of how students and educators learn. It entails starting small and building over time, providing educators with repeated opportunities to learn in multiple ways: from formal professional development, from coaching, from colleagues, and from students.

2. **Adapting resources and supports to district context.** This acknowledges that the effective supports for change are aligned with the particular history, culture, and needs of a district and its schools. It entails seeking out support providers and partners who are ready to codesign the work with district and school leaders and who are skilled in adapting their supports to local contexts.

3. **Using evidence to ground decisions.** This calls for collecting data to focus improvement efforts, translating the data into action, and using data to refine actions. It includes testing out new ideas on a small scale, building in feedback loops, and tracking student progress closely at all levels.

4. **Building leadership and trust relationships to sustain change.** This highlights the importance of nurturing and maintaining relationships and trust within the district and with families and the civic community, as well as building a strong pipeline of school and district leaders steeped in the district improvement culture.

This case study documents how each of the two new initiatives—Effective Instruction and MTSS—have progressed thus far in Sanger USD. Each initiative illustrates how the change leadership principles work in action. We discuss findings in five sections organized by the district's core principles for leading change:

1. Taking a Developmental Approach: Effective Instruction
2. Taking a Developmental Approach: MTSS
3. Adapting Resources and Supports to District Context
4. Using Evidence to Guide Decisions
5. Building Leadership and Trust to Sustain Change

In a concluding section we draw lessons from this period of Sanger's continuous improvement journey for other districts and for state education authorities.

Taking a Developmental Approach: Effective Instruction

> We came from EDI [Explicit Direct Instruction], which was very structured, step-by-step all the way through. With Common Core you can't do step-by-step. You need different strategies, and teachers need to let go and help kids to support each other.
>
> —Elementary teacher

With the arrival of CCSS, Sanger leaders faced the challenge of how to leverage and support needed shifts in teaching: from lesson to unit objectives, from teacher talk to student talk, from paper and pencil to online assessments, and from quantitative measures of achievement to rubric-based performance measures. In keeping with Sanger's principle of taking a developmental approach to change, district leaders homed in on the question of how to build bridges from the district's prior Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI) approach to the teaching and learning demands of the new state standards. They had invested years in helping teachers master the teacher-centered direct instruction practices that paid off in annual increasing test scores for all students, especially English learners (ELs). The new CCSS and assessments were a different story. To be successful would require a major shift from instruction focused on mastery of basic skills with simple checks for understanding to more student-centered teaching geared to complex learning and assessment tasks.

District leaders began by crafting language that emphasized continuity as they carefully sequenced an array of professional development opportunities, starting small and responding to evidence of needs. Over time, Sanger leaders created a range of school-based supports to help strengthen each school's capacity to meet the new standards. Teachers' efforts to develop units and shift instruction were bolstered by district choices of selected instructional frameworks. Frameworks such as Balanced Literacy[11] and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)[12] provide both deeper understanding and a structure for shifting instruction from a focus on skills to deeper learning. They provide a mix of underlying concepts and concrete instructional approaches.

Sending Clear, Consistent Messages About the New Instructional Demands

Sanger leaders believed that it was critical to honor what teachers had been doing while introducing a very different way of thinking about instruction and student learning. They honed language that emphasized continuity with past efforts, not a break from the past. They highlighted common elements between direct instruction and student-centered instruction: Both are driven by learning standards, make learning objectives explicit, and entail checks for understanding. And both presume that teachers develop units and lessons rather than implement a published curriculum. But CCSS goes further: deeper learning, student-centered instruction, and more active student engagement, that is, "less teacher talk, more student talk."

The new demands were complex and had implications for all that teachers do. Grade-level and subject-area PLCs faced the ongoing challenge of creating and refining lessons and common formative assessments that embrace broader and deeper learning objectives.[13] Language that relieved pressure and encouraged risk-taking was appreciated by teachers and viewed by district staff as part of their job.

As noted earlier, Sanger USD had not adopted districtwide curricula since 2004 and therefore did not begin the transition to CCSS with a review of aligned programs, as many districts did. Rather, as described below, district leaders focused on developing school leaders' deep understanding of CCSS and supporting teacher PLCs' learning to design lessons and assessments to support their students' learning to grade-level and course standards.

Starting Small, Moving Deliberately

District leaders knew that everyone—from district staff to principals to teachers—had much to learn to make the shift to CCSS. Through various networks and documents, district leaders understood that the shift for most principals and teachers would be seismic. The challenge was how to sequence different strands of professional development so that everyone could move from initially dipping in a toe to incorporating what they were learning into their teaching.

Sanger's well-established teacher PLCs worked to its advantage, as did its history of preparing principals to be leaders of teacher learning. In addition, Sanger has a tradition of "testing" new ideas with a small number of teachers or in pilot schools.

District leaders hewed to this history in launching CCSS ideas in 2012–13. They started small, with strands of professional development in ELA and math that primarily involved PLC lead teachers, CSPs, and principals. The strands included:

- Cohort training for grades k–2, 3–5, and 6–12 focused on shifts in ELA and math learning standards, thinking tools, academic discourse, and mathematical practices (3 half-day sessions for ELA and 3 half days for math). Leaders were expected to share new practices with PLCs at their school sites.
- Math Lesson Study for 21 math teachers in grades 2–8, for teacher leaders, and for selected CSPs focused on the new content standards, progression of math fraction instruction, and lesson design (3 days). Leaders began the process of analyzing math progressions in order to plan and design lessons.
- Math/ELA pilots focused on implementing CCSS standards for grades k–1 in four high-poverty elementary schools (two focused on ELA, two focused on math). Leaders worked summers and released days to revise report cards and district periodic assessments for these grades and to advise district leaders on strategies to provide information for district learning.
- Book study for principals and district leadership focused on learning the CCSS Leadership and Learning Series (monthly sessions).
- Literacy standards for secondary-level content instruction involving a cohort of science and social studies teachers in grades 7–12 (2 days). Participants were expected to share practices learned with other PLC members.
- Math design collaborative for 7th- and 8th-grade math teachers and algebra teachers focused on developing formative assessments in mathematics. Participants were expected to develop formative assessment lessons.
- CCSS shifts in ELA/math standards for all k–12 teachers. A 1-day session created an awareness of the shifts in standards for student learning and implications for instruction, as well as an understanding of the structure of CCSS.

These initial strands of professional development were supported, in part, through grants from the S.H. Cowell Foundation (math Lesson Study[14] and the Math Design Collaborative) and the Central Valley Foundation (cohort training). In the following years, Sanger received continued support from these foundations for expanded teacher professional development in ELA and math, as well as additional support from the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation for math teacher learning for CCSS instruction and from the Stuart Foundation to support the involvement of teachers from all grade levels in the development of new, CCSS-aligned district periodic assessments of student learning.

In 2013, Sanger became one of 10 districts to participate in the Bechtel Foundation's statewide Math in Common initiative, which continues through 2020.[15] Building on their work in Lesson Study, 21 Sanger teachers and selected CSPs in grades 2–8 joined this professional network. This group had more intensive exposure to the math content standards, to math fraction progressions through the grades, and to lesson design. Their work led to formalizing math Lesson Study across the district, with each school determining its own focus and trajectory.

Matching Supports to Instructional Shifts

Across subjects and grade levels, both district and school staff sought various ways to scaffold needed shifts in teaching: from lesson to unit objectives, from teacher talk to student talk, from paper and pencil to online assessments, and from quantitative measures to rubric-based performance measures. Support for these shifts in instruction expanded each year as both district and school leaders saw the need to sustain, differentiate, and decentralize professional learning and supports. The district increased PLC meeting time and professional development, along with site-based support for implementation.

The first step was to increase the time allotted to PLC meetings from 2 hours every other week to 2 hours weekly. In keeping with the teachers union contract, this was accomplished through a weekly minimum day at the elementary schools and a weekly late start day at the secondary schools. This decision underscored the centrality of teachers working together. As one elementary CSP said: "We come from a strong PLC district and so depend more on PLCs to help figure it out."

At the time of our study, the district planned to send teams of teachers and principals to a PLC Institute in summer 2018. Although most teachers and administrators went at least once to a PLC Institute sponsored by the Riverside County Office of Education several years ago, some new principals and teachers had not had that experience and others said they would value a refresher. This is consistent with the district mantra "repainting the Golden Gate Bridge," pointing to the need for repeated exposure to ideas.

Expanded district professional development

Sanger initially followed the strategy of introducing new CCSS instructional expectations to leadership teams of PLC leads, CSPs, and administrators from each school. These sessions introduced the big ideas and associated language. For example, PLC leaders got training on high-leverage practices to carry back to their PLCs. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3
Example of a High-Leverage Team Action Plan Aligned to the Four Critical Questions of a Professional Learning Community

High-Leverage Team Actions	1. What do we want all students to know and be able to do?	2. How will we know if they know it?	3. How will we respond if they don't know it?	4. How will we respond if they do know it?
Before-the-Unit Team Actions				
HLTA 1. Making sense of the agreed-on essential learning standards (content and practices) and pacing	■			
HLTA 2. Identifying higher-level-cognitive-demand mathematical tasks	■	◧		
HLTA 3. Developing common assessment instruments	◧	■		
HLTA 4. Developing scoring rubrics and proficiency expectations for the common assessment instruments		◧		
HLTA 5. Planning and using common homework assignments	◧	■	◧	◧
During-the-Unit Team Actions				
HLTA 6. Using higher-level-cognitive-demand mathematical tasks effectively	◧	■		
HLTA 7. Using in-class formative assessment processes effectively	◧		■	■
HLTA 8. Using a lesson-design process for lesson planning and collective team inquiry	■	■	■	■
After-the-Unit Team Actions				
HLTA 9. Ensuring evidence-based student goal setting and action for the next unit of study			■	■
HLTA 10. Ensuring evidence-based adult goal setting and action for the next unit of study			■	■

■ = Fully addressed with high-leverage team action

◧ = Partially addressed with high-leverage team action

Source: Dixon, J. K., Adams, T. L., Nolan, E. C. (2015). *Beyond the Common Core: A Handbook for Mathematics in a PLC at Work, Grades K–5*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Sanger leaders learned from this early experience that PLC leads did not feel prepared to bring their colleagues up to speed. This led to a new model for professional development: training all teachers by grade level across elementary schools and by subject area across middle and high schools. PLC leads continued to get more specialized training, while every teacher got firsthand exposure to new ideas with their grade-level or subject-area peers. This pattern repeated as the district introduced new ideas and deepened topics already introduced—in keeping with the district mantra of "repainting the Golden Gate Bridge," which serves as a reminder that a one-time effort will fade over time. In addition, targeted professional development sessions were provided for all new teachers each year.

Sanger USD curriculum leaders carefully chose professional development providers. Through formal and informal networks, they sought providers and workshops that matched their needs and had strong reputations. They observed providers in several Central Valley county offices before choosing their programs, looking closely at the extent to which offerings could be customized to Sanger's needs.

New instructional frameworks to support shifts

In response to CCSS, Sanger updated textbook adoptions in English language arts and math. The most significant shift was to Integrated Mathematics at the high school, signaling a reorganization of math content across years.[16] However, textbooks did not drive the enacted curriculum in Sanger. Instead, teachers drew on their textbooks as needed in ways that fit specific learning goals while incorporating instructional frameworks recommended by the district.

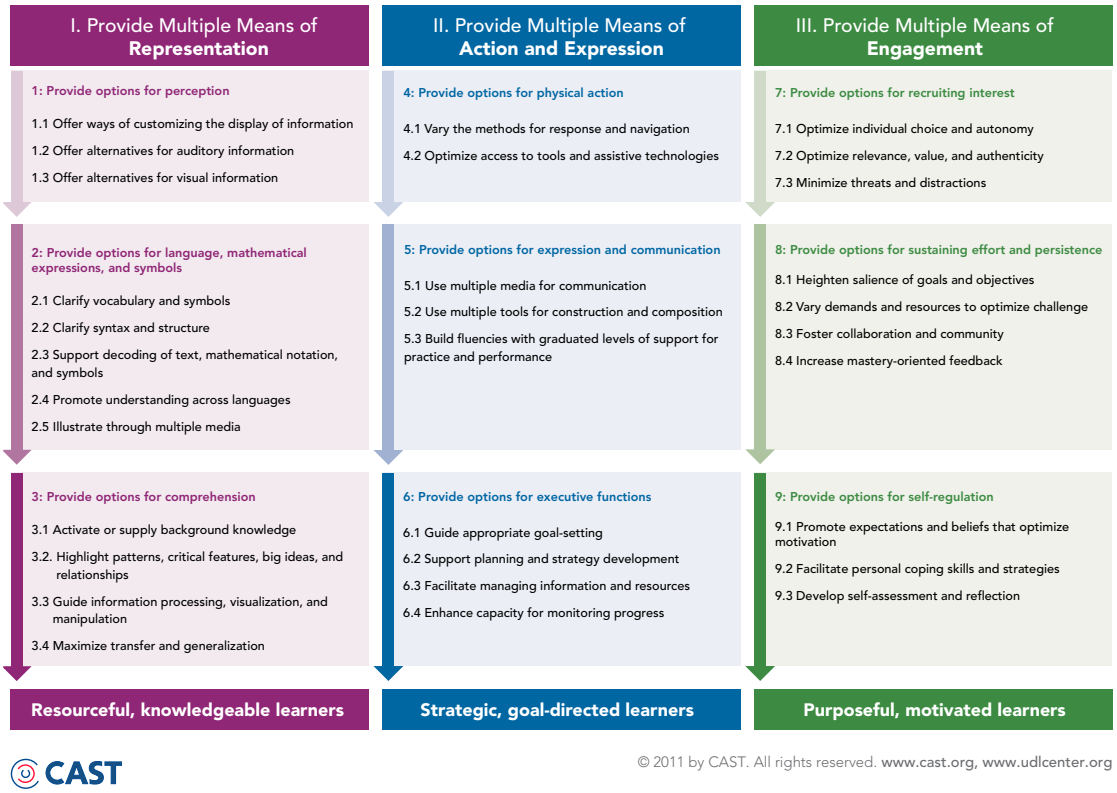
Specifically, with district support, teachers worked together in their PLCs to develop and share lessons as they had done under their prior direct instruction regime. Early on, teachers discovered the need to plan in terms of units rather than individual lessons, given the complexity of the new standards. District professional development in building units supported teachers' ongoing efforts. The units were shared and enhanced within and across schools through PLCs and districtwide grade-level professional development sessions. They are readily available to all on SangerLearns.com, where they are linked to locally developed scope and sequence by subject and grade level.

Teachers' efforts to develop units and shift instruction were bolstered by district choices of selected instructional frameworks. Frameworks such as Balanced Literacy, Academic Discourse for ELs, and UDL provide both deeper understanding and a structure for shifting instruction from a focus on skills to deeper learning. They provide a mix of underlying concepts and concrete instructional approaches.

Central to Sanger's instructional improvement efforts was the UDL framework, typically associated with special education and supports for struggling students. As discussed later in terms of the district's multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) initiative, UDL is conceived by district leaders as a fundamental bridge between deepening student learning under CCSS and expanding student opportunity and equity. UDL introduces teachers to multiple ways of engaging all students and supporting their expressions of learning. (See Figure 4.)

UDL is a fundamental bridge between deepening student learning under CCSS and expanding student opportunity and equity.

Figure 4
Universal Design for Learning Guidelines



Source: CAST. (2011). *Universal Design for Learning guidelines*, version 2.0. Wakefield, MA: Author.

The district carried out UDL pilots with teacher volunteers. Initially, in 2016–17, the pilots involved 13 preschool teachers and aides at nine sites, all 3rd-grade teachers in one elementary school, and 23 teachers in five secondary school PLCs (ELA and math in the middle school; physics, psychology, and engineering in the high school). These pilots aimed to develop teacher leaders' understanding of how UDL principles can be put into practice and how to hone their supports, and by the second year they involved 80 teachers in 25 PLCs across district schools. Each PLC decided on a particular focus and two problems of practice as a starting place; all used a district-refined UDL rubric and data to assess their progress.

As of 2017–18, each school had a site UDL implementation leadership team tasked to model use, support implementation, and understand the potential to support CCSS. An elementary principal noted:

> Now every grade level has taken on student engagement and [the goal of] giving kids multiple options to show learning. [We have] a Tournament of Champions where we give students DOK [Depth of Knowledge] level 4 problems that they need to solve as a group. They have roles like a facilitator, a presenter. And then they present. [It's] an amazing thing to see—to see the leadership skills come out in the

> kids and see the teachers become real facilitators and provide formative feedback. It includes a lot of integrated ELD [English Language Development] and speaking with a purpose.

A middle school teacher noted that the UDL framework allowed her to create "a collaborative culture within [her] classroom by adding more whiteboards on the wall so students could work together standing up—more engaging for them."

District leaders sought frameworks that would help teachers develop practices to improve academic conversations. This built on several years of professional development in Balanced Literacy academic discourse, Lesson Study, and follow-up refreshers, as well as supports and strategies designed specifically for ELs.

The district had a long history of providing supports for ELs, which it continued to expand. In the years immediately prior to CCSS, Sanger paid particular attention to monitoring the progress of long-term ELs and to developing individualized plans to address the specific needs of ELs at risk of becoming long-term ELs. With the advent of CCSS and its emphasis on academic vocabulary, efforts to support ELs intensified. Each school had its own comprehensive English Language Development (ELD) program that showed how they balanced integrated ELD (which occurred in the regular classroom) and designated ELD (which involved specialized instruction at a scheduled time) and how these programs overlapped.

In math, Lesson Study—launched by a Cowell Foundation grant and sustained through the Bechtel Foundation grant described above—was the district's vehicle of choice to help k–8 teachers both learn more mathematics and translate their knowledge into powerful lessons for students. Teachers met several times a year in groups of four schools by grade level to do a full day of math Lesson Study with the district math specialist and a district instructional specialist. They continued to build their capacity to select and implement tasks with higher cognitive demand and to increase academic discourse around the tasks.

Intensified site-based support

Sanger invested heavily in providing support to teachers at each school site. Acknowledging the complexity of translating CCSS into units and lessons, the district intensified the on-site support provided by content specialists. Schools have traditionally had full-time CSPs—typically exceptional classroom teachers—whose job is to coach and support classroom teachers, with one CSP in each elementary school and one per subject area in secondary schools. They meet together to plan and problem solve and are often the pool from which school administrative positions are filled. In addition to CSPs, every elementary school traditionally has had a literacy specialist teacher who works with k–3 teachers to advance the district's focus on early literacy. Initially, the literacy specialist teachers were full time in schools with the lowest reading levels and were shared by two schools with higher reading levels. With the advent of CCSS, every elementary school was assigned a full-time literacy specialist teacher. In addition, the district has named five district instructional specialists who work across schools and subjects.

The district also used its Local Control Funding Formula concentration funds to provide iPads for students in grades 4–12 in all schools to support their learning to take online assessments. The district viewed this as essential to preparing students, many of whom were without technology at home, to succeed on computer-based assessments. At the same time, this became one more responsibility. As one elementary school support teacher said:

> There's always tension between learning something new versus refining something you are doing.... Technology is a struggle too. Learning it takes away from instruction. We give kids a test on paper and pencil and the same one on computer, and kids do better on paper. How much time should we spend on that?

At each level of the district system, educators described their full attention to making sense of and enacting the new state standards. Teachers pointed to how much they have learned and expressed surprise at what they see their students doing. Two elementary teachers commented, respectively:

> At the beginning it was hard, because I wanted to jump in, but realized that I needed to figure out questions to guide them. What can I ask if they get stuck? It's challenging.

> My partner and I have been implementing SLCs [student learning communities] where they [students] teach each other. They find their mistakes and need to figure it out. Teachers are seeing that the kids are excited to do it on their own. Even after 19 years I'm learning new ideas.

The associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction summarized: "We say the art of teaching has returned: Know, understand, and be able to do."

Taking a Developmental Approach: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

> We're on a journey to make some shifts. Sanger's success comes from maintaining a focus on raising all students' achievement, closing gaps, and creating a safe environment. That's not changed.
>
> —Elementary principal

Sanger's initiative to broaden and strengthen supports for struggling students has deep roots in its culture. "Every Child, Every Day, Whatever It Takes" has been a district mantra and moral imperative for over the past decade. At a time when educators and parents worried that their students would struggle and be stressed out with the high demands of CCSS and assessments, Sanger USD was working on strategies to increase and better integrate student supports.

The multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) framework aims to align academic, behavioral, and social-emotional learning in a fully integrated system of support for the benefit of all students. This framework is being promoted by the California Department of Education as a way to address equity issues arising from the new standards for academic performance. As with all policies and programs that Sanger administrators review, they considered its merits in terms of their local context and are making it their own.

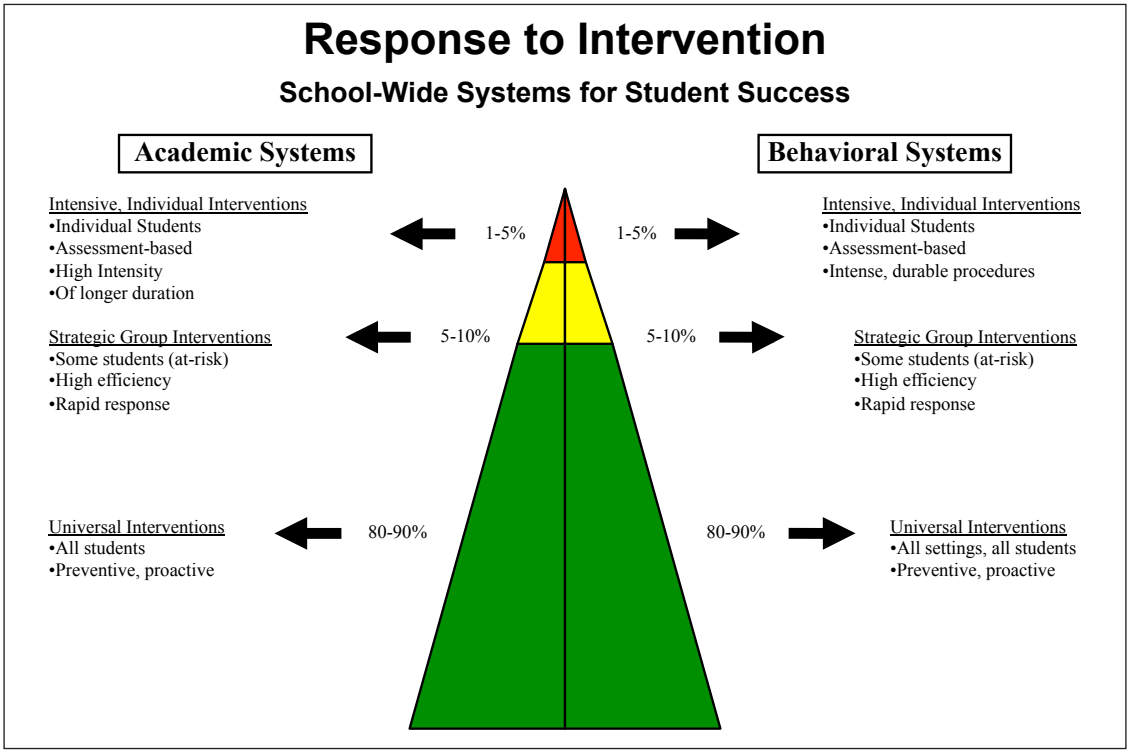
As noted in the introduction, Sanger USD had already developed a strong foundation in academic and behavioral supports for students. District leaders saw the MTSS framework as impetus for integrating and deepening the Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) practices already established in Sanger schools, as well as bringing in social-emotional supports. Both RTI and PBIS specify a pyramid of interventions, ranging in intensity. Tier 1 includes the majority of interventions that take place within the classroom, while Tiers 2 and 3 entail more intensive, out-of-classroom interventions. Figure 5 shows the academic and behavioral systems of support side by side.

In rolling out the district's MTSS initiative, district leaders began by making sure the community and teachers saw the initiative as their own, rather than as a state mandate. They moved forward gradually to establish and refine systems to support the initiative, and they consistently communicated coherence with prior and current improvement efforts. They assisted principals and teachers in creating tiers of support for struggling students in their own school.

Owning the Initiative

The district's 2012–13 Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) included MTSS in its action plans to reduce suspension rates and support progress in ELA and math, especially among ELs, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities. Through a process of recruitment and application, with help from community leaders and a consultant from Stanford University, the district brought together a diverse committee of 25 members representing socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, ELs, and foster and homeless students, along with leaders of the teachers union and classified staff. Through an elaborate process of vetting and voting on potential goals, the committee agreed on priorities for enhancing the district's social-emotional and behavioral supports for students.

Figure 5
Pyramid of Academic and Behavioral Supports at Sanger Unified School District



Note: The Pyramid of Interventions represents three levels, or tiers, of instructional and behavioral intervention. These interventions were designed with the expectation that at least 80% of students will have their needs met in Tier 1. The broadest tier, or the base of the pyramid (Tier 1), represents instruction for all students, including classroom instruction and interventions to which students are deployed during the school day. The interventions are targeted to students' particular level of need, ranging from work on particular skills to enrichment activities. The middle tier (Tier 2) represents instruction targeted to small groups of students during classroom time to provide just-in-time instruction to those needing additional help. The top tier (Tier 3) represents more intense individual interventions for those whose needs are not met by Tier 1 or Tier 2 interventions. The figure above illustrates the pyramid and its application both to academics and behavior.

Source: Sanger Unified School District.

As with all programs and strategies the district has embraced over the past 10 years, Sanger leaders launched the MTSS initiative with the intention of customizing it to fit the district and individual schools and refining it through pilots and feedback from school leaders and teachers. This strategy aimed to increase buy-in from educators, create demand for effective implementation practices at all system levels, and intensify use of evidence to keep improving and adapting practices in each school.

Establishing and Refining Systems

A special education grant from the state provided initial funding for the district's MTSS initiative. Sanger USD used the resources to support initial planning and to create a new position (Coordinator of Inclusive Practices) and a district MTSS team. Subsequent grants support pilots in specific grade levels and schools.

The district asked each school to create an MTSS team to review data for students with academic and/or behavioral challenges and design appropriate Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. The teams included the principal, a CSP, a resource specialist program teacher, teachers, a psychologist or counselor, and the literacy support specialist in elementary schools. Each school team was accountable for developing its own structures and routines for integrating the three MTSS tiers of support within and beyond the classroom. The principal and CSP were members of both the MTSS team and the school leadership PLC; the latter involved PLC lead teachers and focused mainly on Tier 1 instruction, while the MTSS team involved specialists and focused mainly on interventions for high-need students.

Sanger USD also undertook the challenge of integrating its data systems to provide information to schools and teachers on students' academic status and behavior status (including attendance, referrals, and suspensions). District leaders knew that it would be crucial for schools to see the coincidence of these measures in order to design effective interventions. Sanger USD's investment in this enhanced data system, its capacity, and routines for its use in an MTSS Cycle of Improvement are described in the section "Using Evidence to Guide Decisions."

Communicating Coherence

Sanger USD's Goals and Coherence Map established MTSS as a core district initiative, placing it alongside the Effective Instruction and professional learning community initiatives. In communicating to teachers, school leaders, and parents, district leaders consistently convey a vision of "weaving" this initiative into their ongoing work rather than "stacking" on something new. They explicitly define bridges to teachers' established routines for RTI and PBIS and to CCSS instruction.

In communicating to teachers, school leaders, and parents, district leaders consistently convey a vision of "weaving" the MTSS initiative into their ongoing work rather than "stacking" on something new.

District administrators and staff introduced MTSS to principals and teachers as a marriage of familiar RTI and PBIS routines. For nearly a decade, Sanger teacher PLCs had been using the DuFour model, which includes RTI. The model asks four questions:

1. What do we want students to know and be able to do?
2. How will we know if they know it?
3. How will we respond if they don't know it?
4. How will we respond if they do know it?

The third of the four questions calls for a Tier 1 or Tier 2 response, and the appropriate interventions (RTIs) are determined in teacher PLCs through reteaching the standard in their class or deploying struggling students to another classroom or intervention. For example, several EL students might be pulled out to receive targeted help with vocabulary from an EL specialist. Also, for several years before CCSS, Sanger teachers used the PBIS system to set behavior standards and expectations and to respond to particular kinds of student behavior problems within the classroom and in Tier 2 interventions.

As CCSS rolled out, Sanger leaders emphasized a bridge between the equity goal of the UDL framework to increase access for all students to academic learning and the MTSS goal of addressing needs of struggling students. Educators have come to see UDL as the Tier 1 instructional vehicle for implementing MTSS—in the context of CCSS for teaching and learning. The goal for UDL is inclusiveness—not just as typically applied to special education or differentiation of individual instruction, but to encourage a broader range of student diversity in learning. Teachers are prompted to expand opportunities for students to engage in specific content by organizing multiple pathways and modalities for learning (e.g., auditory, visual, kinesthetic), to express their interests, and to demonstrate their learning. With this scaffolding of coherent approaches to improving student achievement and MTSS leadership in place, Sanger created learning opportunities for school leaders and teachers to understand and respond to the initiative.

Engaging Principals and Teachers in Creating Tiers of Support

Professional development for MTSS evolved from initial orientation sessions for district and school leaders to pilots and explorations to test out and refine specific kinds of support for struggling students. Simultaneously, the district MTSS team led the development of rating scales for measuring implementation in classrooms and providing feedback and support. This team includes all specialists who address student behavioral and emotional needs, as well as central office administrators who participate in other district PLCs.

In keeping with established district practice, school teams were expected to develop Tier 2 and Tier 3 responses for RTI and PBIS and integrate them according to student needs. Teachers' work on Tier 1 responses to students who might struggle academically was integral to UDL, and examples were shared through the SangerLearns.com UDL blog. As of 2017, the blog, which is open to the public, included posts from about a dozen district teachers at different schools and grade levels.

During 2016–17, the district initiated a pilot of Second Step, a program for tiered social-emotional supports in the elementary grades. The program includes a curriculum to develop children's social-emotional skills—mindfulness, bullying prevention, empathy, self-regulation, community—to reduce both academic and behavioral problems. Initially it was piloted by 1st-grade teachers in all k–8 schools. Gradually, it spread to other grade levels, as teachers heard about the benefits and wanted to participate. Soon, all district elementary school teachers were including one lesson per week in their classrooms, with support from the district office on request. This developmental trajectory is a good example of how the district seeds and learns from a promising instructional resource: The pilot supported 1st-grade teachers' learning, created demand from other teachers impressed by its results, and informed school and district leaders of ways to adapt and support this strand of MTSS work.

As with the move to CCSS instruction, teachers varied widely in their readiness to integrate social-emotional teaching and learning into their classroom instruction. Sanger leaders were thus supporting teachers' progress on the MTSS initiative by customizing their feedback and supports. For example, a district administrator visiting the classroom of a second-year 3rd-grade teacher modeled how social-emotional learning could be integrated into a narrative writing assignment. She used a poster showing a playground dispute and writing prompts: "What is happening? What would you do in response?" By illustrating how easy it can be to weave social-emotional learning opportunities into regular academic instruction, the administrator reduced this new teacher's anxiety over meeting expectations of the MTSS initiative.

At the secondary level, Sanger High School teachers were experimenting with various ways of meeting the academic needs of struggling students in the classroom by:

- Designing and evaluating various interventions for students with D's and F's during their early years of high school and approaches to credit recovery for students in later grades.
- Using UDL guidelines in PLCs to design unit lessons that increase student engagement in content areas—and sharing what they learn with their colleagues.
- Mainstreaming long-term ELs (ELs who have not been reclassified due to poor academic performance) by eliminating specially designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE) classes[17] (science department) or by expanding the number of SDAIE classes and including English-only students in them (English department). In both experiments underway in 2017–18, the aim is to engage ELs in more rigorous content instruction.

The high school and the middle school were also working on ways to support students beyond the classroom (Tier 2 interventions in the MTSS pyramid):

- Sanger High School created eight student-parent advocate positions, classified and staffed by college graduates working toward their teaching credentials, to work with students (and their families) who struggled academically before entering high school.
- Sanger High School is piloting a suicide prevention program to address a disturbing surge in mental health crises during the school day.
- Sanger High school and Washington Academic Middle School are using restorative justice approaches to reduce suspensions, or the time a student spends out of school, devoting personnel time to address the considerable staff demands of this model.
- Washington Academic Middle School created a team of four vice principals, two full-time psychologists, and one Student Assistant Program counselor that meets with students in groups on anger management and grief counseling and determines interventions for troubled students based on the nature and pattern of their violations.

The success of Sanger's MTSS initiative hinges on the professional learning that it promotes through such experimentation and on how well effective practices are harvested within and across PLCs in a school, between schools, and between schools and the district leaders who support the work. This is the developmental trajectory that Sanger's continuous improvement has always followed.

Its success also depends upon the support that school leaders get from the district. Leaders said Sanger USD's low professional-to-student caseloads for students with special needs was a key factor in schools' success in achieving early intervention and prevention. Caseloads for psychologists were nearly one per elementary school and two per secondary school; resource specialist program teachers served between eight and 20 students (down from 25–28 students in 2004). By 2015 Sanger USD's special education identification rate was down to 6.5%, compared to the district's 10% rate in 2004 and the state's rate of 9.8% in 2012–13.[18]

Adapting Resources and Supports to District Context

Sanger USD's Effective Instruction and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) initiatives were united by a common vision: to improve the options and opportunities for all Sanger students to demonstrate what they learn and to pursue their dreams. District leaders consistently conveyed this purpose for crafting instruction in terms of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and better integration of student supports through the MTSS framework. Decisions about resource allocation and partnerships for professional development followed these priorities and the vision of extending and enhancing all students' opportunities for success. Sanger USD leaders were strategic and discerning in both the focus and the quality of the resources they chose to advance district educators' learning.

State Funds and Resources

California's move to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) dovetailed with Sanger USD's established culture of internal versus external accountability as the engine for continuous improvement. The LCFF also increased the district's state funding through additional "concentration funds" that were made available to districts based on percentages of students with high needs, such as ELs, students from low-income families, homeless students, and students in foster care.

The process of developing an LCAP both deepened Sanger USD's relationships with parents and community leaders and forged a shared commitment to the vision for district improvement. Funding priorities to enhance extra-classroom supports for student success included:

- early literacy development through expansion of school-based preschool programs;
- student support through expansion of school-based after-school programs; and
- student readiness for online state assessments through purchase of iPads.

In addition, the California Department of Education's online resources to support instruction and assessments aligned with CCSS have become increasingly valuable to district educators. Sanger administrators and teachers were strategic in gleaning resources useful for informing instruction and reported that the state has steadily improved the web-based resources. Notably, the state's current system for Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Interim Comprehensive Assessments provided fine-grained data on student learning gaps that teacher PLCs used to focus their instruction.

County Offices of Education

For more than a decade, Sanger USD has strategically sought out and contracted with particular county offices of education that excel in providing specific kinds of professional development that fit their improvement agenda. As noted earlier, Sanger's PLC training with the DuFours was through the Riverside County Office of Education. From 2005 to 2008 Sanger created a calendar of administrators and teachers who traveled to Riverside to participate in PLC training, gradually transforming the district culture to one of collaboration and shared accountability. The district's recent PLC initiative was intended to revitalize teacher team collaboration with a focus on Effective Instruction and MTSS.

When faced with the challenge of preparing district administrators and teachers to meet CCSS, Sanger USD leaders sought out the best professional development resources that fit their priorities. Based on evidence of student achievement gaps, the district sought support for instruction in secondary math and early literacy and for addressing special needs of EL students, especially long-term ELs, at all grade levels. The criteria they used to judge "good fit" with district needs included (a) professional developers with top-quality content expertise and successful experience working with practitioners and (b) readiness to customize professional development to the district and on-site support to district schools. Over the past 5 years, Sanger USD has contracted with these county offices of education for targeted professional development:

- Tulare County for math, PBIS, EL, and Early Literacy/Writers' Workshop;
- Ventura County for EL and long-term EL instruction and interventions; and
- Orange County for development of the Learning Enrichment After-School Program and other after-school and family night programs.

Sanger's local Fresno County Office of Education provided district administrators with support in managing their LCFF and LCAP process.

Foundations and Networks

The S.H. Cowell Foundation has been a long-standing funder of place-based improvement efforts in Sanger, CA. For more than a decade, Ken Doane, the foundation's Executive Vice President and Chief Program Officer, has advised and supported Sanger USD on its improvement efforts. The foundation's multiyear support for district leadership development—in particular the School Academic Achievement Leadership Teams initiative and protocol for school walk-throughs—established the school improvement routines and pipeline of school leaders that are key to Sanger's success. Also, a 2011 Cowell Foundation grant funded a pilot of math Lesson Study, which has become a major district strategy for instructional improvement. At the same time, the S.H. Cowell Foundation program officers have been working with local community organizations that support students and their families. A major Cowell Foundation grantee is Comprehensive Youth Services, a nonprofit based in Fresno that operates a comprehensive Family Resource Center at a Sanger elementary school and partners with the district on programs of parent education and family engagement. The foundation also has been supporting several organizations that provide after-school and summer youth development programs in Sanger.

The S.H. Cowell Foundation also sponsored and funded the ELL Leadership Network, which was facilitated by Kenji Hakuta of Stanford University from 2010 until 2016, when it was folded into a broader network facilitated by California Education Partners. The initial network of eight districts focused on ELs and eventually carried out intensive analysis of the achievement gaps and challenges of each district's long-term ELs. Evidence from these analyses prompted Sanger to seek new training (through Ventura County) to address the special needs of these students.

The Central Valley Foundation funded strands of professional development for Sanger educators over the years, including cohort training on instructional shifts entailed in the move to CCSS for PLC lead teachers, CSPs, and principals, and training for all secondary teachers on integrating ELD into content instruction. The Central Valley Foundation also funded several years of a partnership between Sanger and the Firebaugh-Las Deltas Unified School District to support their collaboration on improvement efforts in both districts. Further, using the ELL Leadership Network as a model and

the Stanford team as facilitators, the Central Valley Foundation engaged both districts in a series of "Data Dialogues" with its other funded districts. Through their participation in this partnership and network, Sanger USD leaders shared and honed their effective improvement strategies and practices.

The Bechtel Foundation has been the key source of support for Sanger's initiative to improve mathematics education over the past 5 years. Its 2013–20 initiative Math in Common involves math leaders from Sanger USD and nine other California districts in a professional network designed to build each district's capacity to accelerate its students' math learning and to serve as leaders in the state. The initiative's cross-district community of practice has been a rich learning environment for Sanger math educators. In turn, Sanger's PLC culture has been fertile ground for developing new math education practices across district schools.

Also noteworthy is Sanger USD's participation in the California Collaborative on District Reform (CCDR), a statewide network funded by several foundations. The CCDR was launched in 2006 by the American Institutes for Research with initial funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. (Additional foundations supporting CCDR's work through the present include the S.H. Cowell Foundation; the Dirk and Charlene Kabcenell Foundation; the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation; the Silver Giving Foundation; and the Stuart Foundation.) The CCDR includes a mix of approximately 40 practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and funders who convene for 2 days on a quarterly basis. Most meetings are hosted by a district member, with prior readings and dialogue focused on a particular challenge or promising initiative in their district. District participation was limited initially to superintendents of the 10 largest California school districts, but soon Sanger was invited to join on the basis of its improvement record and the Cowell Foundation's urging. Sanger Superintendents who have participated in this network—Marc Johnson and Matt Navo, as well as new Superintendent Adela Jones, who participated in two meetings hosted by Sanger USD—have gained perspective and guidance from this network. It offers them a unique opportunity to learn from in-depth studies of specific problems of practice in large California districts and to have sustained dialogue and informal contact with big districts' superintendents, foundation officers, researchers, and support providers.

Using Evidence to Guide Decisions

> Sanger does well at trying new things and reevaluating and not being afraid to make changes if [something is] not working well. Always look at what's not working for kids. We "make it our own and make it fit"—we're not about adopting programs; rather, [we] adapt and fit them to our students.
>
> —High school curriculum support provider

Using evidence to refine policies and practices is integral to Sanger's culture of continuous improvement. Established routines for evidence use include teacher PLCs using common assessments to identify student learning gaps and target instruction, principals presenting school data at annual summits with district administrators to identify improvement priorities for their schools, and School Academic Achievement Leadership Teams of principals and a district leader conducting instructional rounds (classroom walk-throughs) to hone their support for teacher learning.

During CCSS and MTSS rollout, district leaders regularly examined student data to set priorities for improvement and evaluate policy decisions. They relied on both formal and informal feedback from district and school staff to assess the effectiveness of their supports to teachers and schools. And when launching a pilot intervention or particular focus such as long-term ELs, they systematically collected data to track what was going well and not so well in order to make midcourse corrections.

It was thus standard practice for Sanger USD to place priority on evidence use as a strategy for progressing on its initiatives to meet CCSS and enhance supports for struggling students. The district invested heavily in improving its infrastructure and capacity to provide educators access to a broad range of student data. District leaders refined routines for data use and added new ones—developing schedules and scaffolds for more intensive data use at all levels of the system. And the district launched new pilots for Effective Instruction and MTSS to help develop evidence-based best practices for Sanger schools.

Building a Comprehensive and Accessible Data System

Sanger USD grew its data department from one part-time person in 2012 to an information systems team headed by a former secondary school vice principal and staffed by two full-time data analysts and a database administrator. Each of the analysts oversees the development and use of a specific subsystem and strands of data.

The data team, in collaboration with district leaders, expanded and integrated existing systems. The resulting data systems merged Illuminate (which tracks academic performance data) and PowerSchool (which tracks behavior and outcome data required by the state). The merged system flags D's and F's, attendance, and benchmark academic data. The other subsystem is called Ellevation and tracks performance data for students classified as ELs (including long-term ELs) and those who have been categorized as Reclassified Fluent English Proficient. It also tracks data for students classified as Initial Fluent English Proficient and migrant students.

The team facilitates administrators' access to this enhanced data system by providing iDashboards reports on trends over time, with links to individual schools and classrooms (but not individual students). Principals use these data for their annual data summits (described below), which are attended by the two data managers who can query the data in real time as needed.

Teachers may submit requests for specific kinds of classroom data broken down by individual students. Teacher PLCs can then use these data to assess their students' progress across multiple assessments and behavior measures. They can also use Illuminate to access a databank of questions tied to the standards. In addition, k–5 teachers can link their gradebook and assignments to create standards-based report cards.

An important part of the story of Sanger's investment in a comprehensive data system is the collaboration that went into its development. The data experts who created the system described the process: "We had lots of back and forth with the district office folks about what they say they need and what goes into our supporting that need. So, it is well integrated." Because all district leaders were involved in this development process, the data system was designed to support and track Sanger's progress on the two initiatives launched in response to CCSS. The integration of students' academic performance and behavior measures provided capacity to follow each student's development on social, emotional, and academic dimensions.

Developing and Using Evidence to Improve Student Learning

Sanger's effective use of evidence to continuously improve professional practice and student success goes well beyond periodic reviews of standardized data. District progress is also supported by refined and new routines that enable teachers, schools, and the district office administrators to use evidence from observations and experience to evaluate and improve their practice.

Teacher PLCs' data-use routines have not changed with the new instructional and MTSS initiatives, though they have faced challenges in developing grade-level or course data useful for assessing CCSS teaching and learning. Beginning in 2015, the district doubled the allocation of time for PLC meetings through its early release/late start schedules, providing teachers with additional time to grapple with new forms of assessments and data.

Since the advent of CCSS, PLCs at all grade levels have refined the data they use to assess student learning to standards. District leaders gave teachers the option of administering California Interim Assessment Blocks to determine how, if at all, the online data reports were useful. (Initially they were not particularly useful because item-level data were not available). Sanger teachers we interviewed said that the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Interim Comprehensive Assessment is worthwhile because the online reports provide item data that are useful for identifying patterns in student performance and addressing gaps. During 2017–18 all Sanger teachers in grades 3–8 and 11 gave the Interim Comprehensive Assessments in January.

In addition, the district supported PLCs' efforts to develop common formative assessments (CFAs) that are useful for monitoring their students' progress toward CCSS standards and developing responses to performance gaps. Unlike the CFAs that teacher PLCs developed in the past to assess students' basic skills and address learning gaps, the new CFAs are using performance tasks and

scoring rubrics to assess student learning to higher-order standards. Starting in the 2017–18 school year, all teachers were involved in a professional development process, supported by Solution Tree (the umbrella organization for DuFour PLC training), for assessing the rigor and relevance of their PLC-developed CFAs. Teacher PLCs received a rubric and protocol to help them better align their assessments to CCSS. (See Figure 6.)

Figure 6
Rubric for Aligning Assessments to CCSS

Assessment Indicators	Description of Level 1	Requirements of the Indicator Are Not Present	Limited Requirements of This Indicator Are Present	Substantially Meets the Requirements of the Indicator	Fully Achieves the Requirements of the Indicator	Description of Level 4
Identification and emphasis on essential learning standards (specific feedback to students)	Learning standards are unclear and absent from the assessment instrument. Too much attention is given to one target.	1	2	3	4	Learning standards are clear, included on the assessment, and connected to the assessment questions.
Visual presentation	Assessment instrument is sloppy, disorganized, difficult to read, and offers no room for work.	1	2	3	4	Assessment is neat, organized, easy to read, and well-spaced, with room for teacher feedback.
Balance of higher- and lower-level-cognitive-demand tasks	Emphasis is on procedural knowledge with minimal higher-level-cognitive-demand tasks for demonstration of understanding.	1	2	3	4	Test is rigor balanced with higher-level and lower-level-cognitive-demand tasks present.
Clarity of directions	Directions are missing and unclear. Directions are confusing for students.	1	2	3	4	Directions are appropriate and clear.
Variety of assessment task formats	Assessment contains only one type of questioning strategy, and no multiple choice or evidence of the Mathematical Practices. Calculator usage not clear.	1	2	3	4	Assessment includes a blend of assessment types and assesses Mathematical Practices modeling or use of tools. Calculator expectations are clear.
Tasks and vocabulary (attending to precision)	Wording is vague or misleading. Vocabulary and precision of language are a struggle for student understanding and access.	1	2	3	4	Vocabulary is direct, fair, accessible, and clearly understood by students, and they are expected to attend to precision in response.
Time allotment	Few students can complete the assessment in the time allowed.	1	2	3	4	Test can be successfully completed in the time allowed.
Appropriate scoring rubric (points)	Scoring rubric is not evident or is inappropriate for the assessment tasks presented.	1	2	3	4	Scoring rubric is clearly stated and appropriate for each task or problem.
Integrated content at Grade Level	Content given is not at grade level standards.	1	2	3	4	Content given is at grade level and has evidence of intergration. Ex. If standard is for informational text, Science or Social Studies text is at grade level standards
Designated Supports and Universal Tools and Accomadations	Supports are not matched to student needs	1	2	3	4	Supports are seamlessly embedded allowing for student access.

Source: Adapted from: Kanold, T. D., & Larson, M. R. (2012). *Common Core Mathematics in a PLC at Work: Leader's Guide*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Student learning communities. Students also use data at Sanger. Schools were developing a model of student learning communities that use assessment data to evaluate and improve learning outcomes. As one elementary principal described:

> In the past we gave kids a test, scored it, and gave it back, and that was the end. Sometimes a retake. With the student learning community, they have a unit and test every 5 weeks. Students look at the results and look at their notes in small collaborative groups and look at the strategies and explain why they missed [a correct answer]. Then they retake and review and discuss.

The district is bringing students into both understanding and owning the standards for assessing their mastery in content areas and using evidence of their performance to focus their individual improvement efforts.

Principal summits. These summits have a long history in Sanger and have evolved considerably over the years, with the amount of time needed to locate data significantly reduced and data now readily accessible. The structure has changed, also. Whereas a principal used to present results publicly as a form of accountability, now three principals sit with district leaders, including top administrators and the data team, in a collaborative, problem-solving mode to produce an action plan for each school. The plan focuses district staff supports to the school site and is refined over time. Sanger's readily available system data has supported this refinement of summits to better home in on school improvement needs, as has the shift in emphasis from accountability to coaching and support.

School Academic Achievement Leadership Teams (SAALT). SAALT routines for school walk-throughs were well established before CCSS and were then refined to support principals' learning of the new standards and teachers' shifts in instruction. The basic routine involves a district administrator and principals from four to five schools visiting one of their schools each month, with a specific focus for classroom observations chosen by the host principal; then the principals meet together as a PLC to discuss their observations and help focus the host principal's next steps.

Since the adoption of CCSS, Sanger leaders honed the SAALT process through training in instructional rounds. Based on this work, their observations use purely descriptive notes on a specific focus decided by site leaders. Building on their knowledge of CCSS and instructional strategies, principals tend to focus on specific aspects of classroom instruction, such as academic discourse. Immediately after each walk-through, observers post their notes by classroom and then the group looks for patterns. For example, they might see 70% teacher talk or three fourths of students working collaboratively. As one district administrator noted:

> The idea now is not so much what we got from it but that school administrators get more comfortable with the process so they can train teachers to do this and draw conclusions themselves.

To scaffold routines for data use in SAALT teams and PLCs, the district developed templates that link data review to actionable next steps. In the case of SAALT/principal PLCs, the focus was on crafting responses to gaps between observed practice and CCSS practice standards for a school. The next step was using evidence to distill and share best practices, first in each SAALT team and then districtwide. In addition, SAALT teams were working to weave ELD into their school visit observations, based on training in integrated design for ELD from the Ventura County Office of Education.

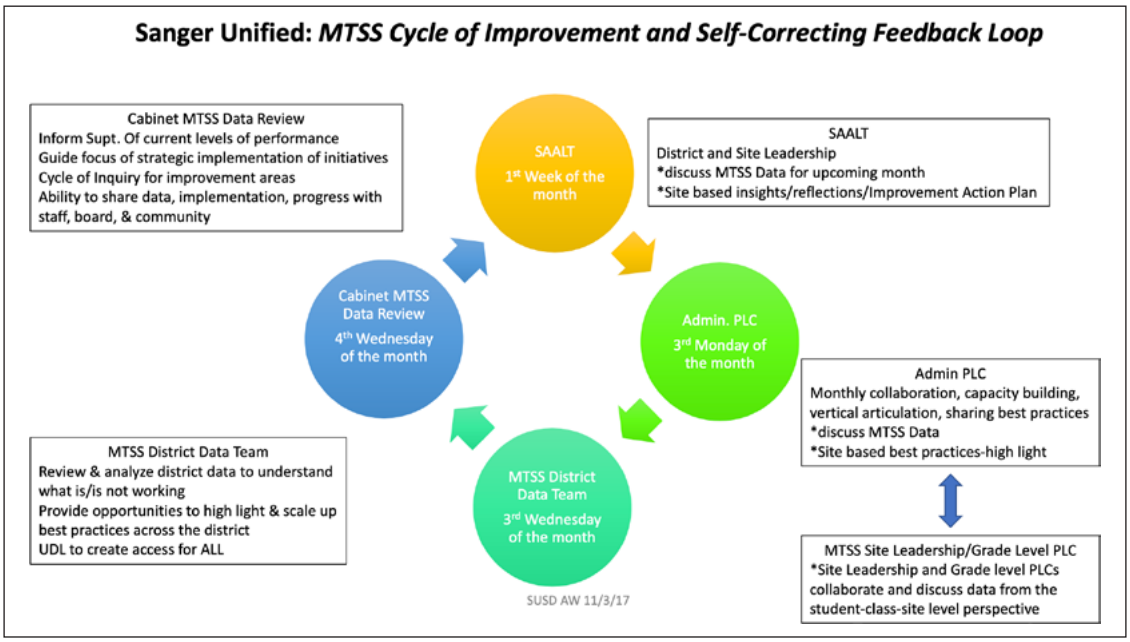
District Cycle of Improvement for MTSS. District administrators developed new evidence-use routines to support Sanger's MTSS. An MTSS Cycle of Improvement brings together district and site leaders to focus on reducing suspensions and failing grades, especially among ELs and students with behavioral and/or emotional disabilities. An associate superintendent commented:

> Now we start with the school [data], then up a level to SAALT team, then administrator PLC, then the whole team comes together as MTSS team so we can think at the system level.

Sanger leaders established a cycle for data meetings that is calendared throughout the year. At the school level, every 6 weeks the site's MTSS team looks at students' grades, EL benchmarks, RTI data, and other indicators of student well-being in order to home in on patterns or individual students for

intervention. SAALT teams followed the same calendar, each meeting focused on a particular data strand. The district administration PLC, including SAALT representatives, follow up with a cross-school analysis of the same data. This process was designed to ensure site-specific data use to focus interventions, cross-school sharing of issues and effective interventions, and district support of ongoing school improvement efforts that, ideally, integrate academic and behavioral interventions for struggling students. (See Figure 7.)

Figure 7
The MTSS Cycle of Improvement at Sanger Unified School District



Note: MTSS = multi-tiered systems of support; PCL = professional learning community; SAALT = School Academic Achievement Leadership Teams; UDL = Universal Design for Learning.

Source: Sanger Unified School District.

The district coordinator of Sanger's MTSS initiative described how the improvement process worked during 2016–17:

> We used an improvement cycle over the year. What trends do we see? What changes in action should we make? Our target groups are ELs, foster and homeless students. The district MTSS team shared back to principals, who leaned into their PLCs.... Based on the data, we create an action plan and try to engender best practices.

In addition to tracking and responding to student academic and behavior data, the school and district MTSS teams used a district-designed rubric to assess their progress on the initiative. They focus on leadership; ongoing evaluation and assessment systems; curriculum and instruction; culture, capacity, and sustainability; and funding. This self-assessment process helped school teams improve site-based practices and provided the district office with information to help target its support.

Learning From Teacher Feedback and Pilots

Sanger leaders regularly relied on teacher feedback and built pilots into district improvement efforts to both refine levers and supports for change and create demand among teachers who can see their pilot colleagues' efforts paying off. In their effort to better align PLC practices with current initiatives, district curriculum and instruction leaders worked with teachers to develop unit assessments that can serve as common formative assessments—the backbone of PLC evidence use. After teachers judged Illuminate's prebuilt unit assessments as too long and ill-suited to students' readiness for online assessments, the district chunked the unit benchmarks into shorter tests and teachers developed scoring rubrics in their PLCs. Almost every major initiative started small, allowing time for feedback to hone the best ways to proceed.

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District leaders got feedback about teachers' instructional struggles from CSPs and through SAALT team walk-throughs. In response, they were able to better focus and design their supports for teacher learning and change. For example, when CSPs reported that teachers felt the need for more embedded professional development, such as coaching and Lesson Study, district professional development shifted in this direction.

Several pilots supported the Effective Instruction and MTSS initiatives. For example, when district MTSS leaders launched UDL to support MTSS, they identified a small number of teachers in each school who were interested in trying out UDL in their classrooms. These pilot teachers provided information on their own successes and struggles, which helped district leaders determine what kind of professional development would be most useful as all teachers take on UDL.

Likewise, Sanger's 1st-grade pilot of Second Step, a program for social-emotional supports, was designed to generate examples of how teachers can weave social-emotional learning into their lessons. Observations in pilot teachers' classrooms made clear to district administrators and support staff that teacher support would need to be differentiated. In particular, beginning teachers struggled with the demands of CCSS and needed active guidance and modeling for ways to seamlessly bring in opportunities for students to develop social-emotional skills.

Informal "pilots" were also being carried out by teachers who are empowered and accountable to improve student success. For example, the Sanger High School science department's experiment to mainstream ELs in regular classes provided information about how to meet academic learning needs of struggling ELs at the secondary level. The science teachers were testing their hypothesis that the practice of assigning ELs to SDAIE classes with watered-down curricula limits their academic success. Evidence the teachers gathered suggested that long-term ELs were benefiting from greater exposure to academic language, while newcomers may require the more intensive ELD support that SDAIE classes provide.

Overall, Sanger has unusually complex data systems and intensive routines for collecting, analyzing, and using evidence, so much so that top leaders asked themselves: "Are we data rich and action poor? How can we look at the data and analyze and synthesize it to get to action efficiently?"

Building Leadership and Trust to Sustain Change

> People in the district office know your face and name. We're all in this together. Between our focus on PLCs and PBIS, we all care so much about the kids. [The district message is] "We're going to get you to where you need to be. Everyone can do it. You're all a part of that."
>
> —Elementary teacher

Over the years, Sanger leaders have taken seriously the need to actively build and maintain trust and positive relationships inside the system and with parents and the community. They recognize that bringing about change in professional practice is dramatically different from adopting a program. It depends not only on fostering ownership of the reform vision but also on building trusting relationships within and between levels of the system. This principle for leading change was pivotal to Sanger's turnaround in student achievement between 2004 and 2012.

Sanger leaders knew that achieving the shift from direct instruction to CCSS instruction and building a stronger safety net for students would entail nurturing the human and social infrastructure fundamental to real and lasting change. They would need to build new leadership teams in the central office and schools, sustain a culture of relationships in schools and trust between the district administrators and teachers, and engage parents and the community in learning about and supporting district improvement efforts.

Building on Prior Collaboration and Trust

Sanger's culture of collaboration developed over several years as district leaders worked to break down the silos that can isolate professionals in district offices and in classrooms. Sanger USD's PLC initiative was pivotal in defining collaboration to ensure all students' success as a moral imperative. The PLCs that grew at all system levels were cherished by district professionals. They especially valued dialogue and coordination between special education and general education departments and staff. The resulting collaboration and trust between special education and general education teachers in Sanger schools built important capacity for school progress on the district's MTSS initiative.

Key to the MTSS initiative was further breaking down silos that might inhibit integrating academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support for struggling students. To this end, the district MTSS team included professionals with specialized expertise and roles relevant to students who regularly need Tier 2 or Tier 3 behavioral support. The team brought the director of pupil services and the director of child welfare and attendance together with the associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction, the chief financial officer, the two area administrators, the coordinator of ELD, the coordinator of grants and program development, the information systems manager, a teacher, and the coordinator of inclusive practices. Relationships among team members were grounded in mutual respect and trust, and the MTSS initiative was forging new channels of communication and generating ideas for collaboration across specialized roles and responsibilities. Referring to Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports, the MTSS coordinator explained, "We're aligning what used to be separate systems of support. The pyramids are no longer separate, but more like a grid or matrix to address multiple needs of individual students."

Developing Leadership

For the rollout of CCSS, the district strategically brought two highly respected principals into the central office to head up the new initiatives. Each had a strong track record of leading teacher learning and supporting school improvement in high-poverty district schools. These leaders put a trusted, even revered, face on each of the district's key change initiatives. Other coordinators and specialists in the district office were also highly regarded educators.

Because Sanger had a long and deep pipeline for leadership development—from PLC leads to CSPs to vice principals to principals to district specialists and administrators—pulling great principals from schools and great teachers from school leadership positions and classrooms did not deplete the schools' capacity for continuous improvement. This may well be Sanger USD's greatest advantage relative to demographically similar districts. With a strong backbone of teacher leadership in schools, the district could bring in trusted superstars to mobilize, lead, and support the challenging, collaborative work it takes to improve student outcomes.

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Remembering to Work "Below the Green Line"

District and school administrators learned during Sanger's turnaround years that formal designs for improvement will never come to life without work "below the green line." This term, introduced by organization consultant Steve Zuieback, refers to a diagram that places informal conditions of relationships, identity, and trust below a green line that separates them from formal structures, policies, and plans. Over the years, when confronted with push-back from teachers on a district policy or practice (such as the short-lived iPad classroom observation tool), district and school leaders recognized the need to work below the green line. They have learned over and over again that taking seriously teachers' and school leaders' perspectives on how best to serve Sanger students is crucial for both refining district decisions and building change leadership.

When challenged to make major shifts in instruction and build new strategies to support struggling students, school leaders and teachers may feel pressure to move quickly. At risk is the time that it takes to nurture relationships and refocus educators' identity to include making and leading change, while perhaps sacrificing a sense of efficacy in the short run. Yet this is especially the time when work below the green line matters most. One principal captured the challenge of maintaining a school culture of relationships among adults and between adults and students:

> When I came into the school [last year] I saw that everyone was so busy, no "good mornings," everyone with blinders on. So, we're committing to creating a culture of relationships—not only to kids but to each other. [Now it] feels like a place of people, not a place of business. We have things for people struggling and for honors, but what about those in the middle? And are they making connections with adults? So, we are working hard at "building relationships with your kids."… We know the importance of having one caring adult.

In this view, schools' continuous improvement under new state standards and expectations depends fundamentally on adhering to Sanger's long-standing call to actively nurture relationships and trust. This principle applies to teachers' work with students, principals' work with teachers, and district administrators' and staffs' work with principals and teachers. District leaders acknowledge this crucial element of leading change in their repeated message to educators that they are "going slow and plowing deep."

Building Relationships With Parents and the Community

Sanger USD has had a solid track record of partnering with parents and the community to support student development and well-being. Over the years, each school worked to create an open, welcoming environment for parents. All elementary schools hosted family literacy nights at which parents or guardians of primary grade students could listen to readings with their child and receive books. Schools at all grade levels welcomed parents to visit and help out in classrooms and the school. As noted, Sanger used LCFF concentration funds to significantly expand both its preschool and after-school programs, bringing more parents into the schools on a daily basis.

In addition, the district created an educational program for Spanish-speaking parents that has engaged large numbers of parents in recent decades. Parent Institute for Quality Education is a national, certificate-granting program designed to help Spanish-speaking parents support their sons and daughters to achieve college readiness and success. Sanger's program annually graduates approximately 100 parents and is highly valued by parents in the community, according to annual participant surveys.

Also notable is the district's long involvement and leadership in a broad-based community partnership to support Sanger youth. Sanger's Community of Caring Task Force has been meeting—first monthly, and now biweekly—for more than a decade, with the mission to serve the needs of Sanger youth by sharing information and collaborating to address problems that surface. Chaired by local pastor Sam Estes, the meetings are well attended by leaders of local youth organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, civic leaders such as the head of the Chamber of Commerce and City Council members, police officers, a district representative, and pastors of all Sanger churches. The task force provides a web of youth support beyond the district.

These district-community partnerships helped Sanger get broad community backing for the new state standards. Initially, when word got out about California's new education standards, an element of the Sanger community began a campaign against the standards that included leafleting parking lots with flyers that labeled the new standards as "communist." Superintendent Navo asked his colleagues on the community task force to help dissipate parent fears, and they trusted his judgment that the standards would bring better outcomes for students. The respect and trust for district leaders established in this community forum meant that civic leaders confidently stepped up to back Sanger's instructional initiative. Also, the fact that the superintendent's children attend district schools made his claim to parents that CCSS are "good for our kids" trustworthy.

Sanger's LCAP process further deepened and expanded its partnership with parents and community members. Through a process of recruitment and application, with help from Pastor Sam, the district brought together a diverse committee of 25 members representing socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, ELs, and foster and homeless students, along with leaders of the

teachers union and classified staff. Through a process of vetting and voting on potential goals, the committee agreed on priorities for enhancing the district's social-emotional and behavioral supports for students. One challenge Sanger USD faces is reaching parents or guardians of students most in need, especially foster and homeless youth. This is a frontier for district and school improvement efforts, being led by the new district coordinator of EL practices and parent engagement.

Sanger also faces challenges on the horizon as enrollment increases. The district must build a second high school and adapt to an influx of higher-income families as Fresno's suburbs grow into Sanger USD's catchment area. The district's success is likely no small part of its growing attraction to young families.

Conclusions

Our earlier study of Sanger USD's dramatic turnaround in student achievement—under the federal No Child Left Behind law and the California State Test of Basic Skills—concluded that the district's success was rooted in its culture of continuous improvement and core principles for leading change. That research ended in 2012, when district leaders were turning their attention to challenges posed by the new state standards. Our report concluded with a question we and other observers were asking: "Is this simply a story of reaching low-level state standards, and will the district be able to stay the course after the more demanding CCSS assessments are implemented?"[19]

This study—based primarily upon data collected during fall 2017 and focused on Sanger's response to California's CCSS—reaches pretty much the same conclusions as our earlier study. A school district can attain significant improvement in student achievement to the extent that its culture embeds learning in the daily lives of educators. And this requires leaders at all system levels who know how to nurture and sustain a culture of continuous improvement. Sanger USD's deep leadership pipeline and its board's stability and consistent support of district administrators ensure continuity of leadership for learning and ongoing improvement.

District Culture as Context for Change

Our recent interviews and observations attest to the robustness of Sanger's culture of continuous improvement. We continue to find:

- collaboration within and between levels of the district system;
- leadership of teacher learning and a deep pipeline of educators ready to step into higher positions; and
- shared accountability for all students' success within schools and between each school and district administration and staff.

We also find that Sanger's principles for leading change are deeply ingrained in its administrative culture. Remarkably, though not surprising in light of the leadership pipeline, this leadership culture has deepened with superintendent succession and shifts in district administrators and with the addition of staff over the past 5–6 years. Sanger USD leaders "get" and act on the principles of:

- taking a developmental approach to leading change;
- adapting resources and supports to fit district and school contexts;
- using evidence to guide decisions; and
- building leadership and trust to sustain change.

These principles positioned Sanger well for a transition to CCSS. They translate directly into these key strategies for leading change: (a) take time to communicate pathways to change; (b) build on strengths of teachers' mindsets and skills; (c) monitor how schools and teachers are responding and make course corrections when needed; (d) be transparent and maintain trust and working relationships as fundamental to getting the information and feedback needed to calibrate district action.

Sanger was strategic in focusing on two key new initiatives as engines for moving the system to achieve student success under the new state standards. Superintendent Navo consistently conveyed the vision that unites the two initiatives: that all students will have options and opportunities to demonstrate what they learn and pursue their dreams. The mottos "Dream Big, Work Hard, Believe!" and "Every Child, Every Day, Whatever It Takes!" focused Sanger educators on the vision and moral imperative grounding district improvement efforts. Sanger USD's Effective Instruction initiative defines a bridge between the district's earlier direct instruction regime and CCSS's more demanding instructional goals for deeper student learning. Its MTSS initiative supports the integration of existing tiers of academic and behavioral support with new tiers of support for students' social-emotional development.

The body of this report documents how Sanger's leadership principles ground and guide the district's progress on its new initiatives that were designed to support progress toward CCSS. The district has leveraged and supported Sanger students' strong performance on Smarter Balanced Assessments relative to their peers for 3 years in a row. Here we offer some guidance for districts gleaned from Sanger. Then we consider how state policies and resources might be strengthened to support districts' progress toward meeting CCSS.

Takeaways From Sanger's Success

Lessons from Sanger's success in moving teaching and learning toward the new, more demanding state standards pertain to both the what and the how of the district's change efforts. The question of what Sanger leaders did to bring about effective change hinged on district leaders' sense of "fit" with the district. As Superintendent Navo put it: "It may be hard for other districts to understand, but our decisions are always about 'what fits Sanger Unified.'" The importance of building on district strengths and history can get lost when attention is focused on what works in general, rather than on specific strengths of a particular context.

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A key lesson from Sanger regarding what districts should invest in to support educators' progress toward CCSS is to focus on initiatives and supports that fit the mindset and skills that schools and teachers bring to the challenges for change.

Capacities that Sanger USD had developed over the previous decade fundamentally framed district leaders' decisions about initiatives, frameworks, partnerships, professional development models, and in-house innovations to invest in during the early years of the district's transition to CCSS. These conditions and building blocks included:

- continuity of district and school administrators and missions;
- shared equity values and commitment to ensuring all students' success;
- a stable, well-prepared teaching force and broad teacher leadership;

- teacher grade-level and course PLCs experienced in using student learning standards to design curriculum, instruction, and assessments;
- systems and practices for addressing student academic and behavioral needs through tiers or levels of support;
- stability of Sanger USD's board of trustees and its consistent support of district administrators' strategic decisions;
- collaborative district-community and school-parent relationships; and
- established relationships with several foundations and a track record of successful grants to improve student achievement.

District leaders' decisions about what to invest in initially to move educators forward on CCSS built on these capacities strategically:

- The two new initiatives—Effective Instruction and MTSS—were introduced in ways that explicitly linked them to district prior instructional and behavioral systems.
- New positions to lead the initiatives were staffed by strong, trusted leaders with deep histories in the district.
- Professional development in grade-level and course content standards was geared to developing the deep understandings that teacher PLCs need in order to align their curriculum, instruction, and formative assessments with the new standards.
- CCSS-aligned instructional resources—including Math in Common, Integrated Math, and Balanced Literacy—supported teacher PLCs' work on instruction to deepen student learning (in lieu of textbook adoption).
- Universal Design for Learning served as a vehicle for integrating and weaving together the new academic and social-emotional support initiatives—with the goal of extending students' access to and expression of learning.
- Early literacy development was integrated into expanded preschool and after-school programs that were already established in schools serving students of color from low-income families.
- CCSS leadership development was supported through a renewed grant from the S.H. Cowell Foundation, a long-term partner in developing district leadership.

How Sanger leaders have gone about leading these initiatives is as important as their strategic decisions about what to invest in. Sanger's experience offers a model of how to avoid top-down district mandates and compliance mentalities that sabotage real change.

- **Build on where you are versus a sudden change in direction.** Sanger leaders focused on what was good about their long-term investment in direct instruction as a segue to a very different CCSS pedagogy, using familiar language to describe new expected practices. They sought links between past and present demands both to underscore the value of prior work and to smooth transitions, and they honed pressure and supports to match schools' and teachers' readiness.
- **Give educators the chance to opt in versus requiring implementation of specific curricula.** Provide opportunities for individual schools and/or teachers to try out new ideas or resources and share their experiences for district learning and decisions about next steps.

- **Make ongoing adjustments based on feedback versus pressing for fidelity.** If an improvement effort is not working well, make early adjustments based on feedback from teachers. Having systems in place for feedback is key to refining, as well as building ownership of, a specific approach to improving student outcomes.
- **Establish routines at every level for evidence use versus relying on top-down monitoring of annual test scores.** Sanger benefits from weekly and monthly routines for gathering a range of evidence of student learning at all system levels (e.g., SAALT teams, PLCs), which are both learning opportunities for participants and informative to district leaders.
- **Create data reports targeted to educators' questions versus collecting and reporting more data than can be digested.** Focus on reporting data that is actionable for educators. Even with Sanger's culture of evidence use, district and school leaders struggle to translate data into action when presented with complex, comprehensive data reports.
- **Weave in new ideas and learning expectations versus stacking them.** When introducing something new, show how it fits in with current practice rather than adding onto everything else. This works only when there is communication and collaboration across district departments: The more a district office operates in silos, the more likely that schools and teachers will experience disconnected expectations.
- **Invest in growing leaders within the district versus hiring from outside.** Sanger is blessed with a long history of stable and consistent district administration and board governance, making its leadership pipeline extremely effective in producing strong leaders immersed in district culture. This ensures continuity of principles and practices to sustain continuous improvement.
- **Vet professional development providers carefully versus relying on "usual suspects."** Sanger, through networking and observing providers in county offices around the Central Valley, carefully selects providers, programs, and workshops that are high quality and match district needs. The key is whether or not a provider will be a good partner in customizing and adapting its practice to district schools and teachers.
- **Focus on the district's vision to expand student opportunities for success versus focusing on what is "blinking red" on the dashboard.** The superintendent and other district leaders actively avoid the "fear game," emphasizing that Sanger Unified aims for more than test scores and green dashboard ratings. They publicly express the belief that if educators keep progressing on the district's coherent initiatives to enhance students' learning opportunities, then the scores will gradually improve.

These lessons and guidelines for district strategy and practice apply regardless of the level of capacities developed to date. Recall that Sanger USD was a low-performing California district back in 2004 when it began a process of continuous improvement, guided by these leadership principles and reform strategies. The process is still underway. Building and sustaining leadership at all levels of the system for this approach to continuous learning is the challenge districts face in bringing their students up to new standards that require in-depth learning.

Appendix A: Sanger USD's Achievement and Climate Data

Table A1
CAASPP Test Results

Demographic	Residual	Proficient and Above in District (%)	Proficient and Above in California (%)
2014–15			
Math All Students	**0.195**	**35**	**34**
Math Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	29	21
Math African American	N/A	26	16
Math Latino/a	0.205	28	21
Math White	0.236	54	49
ELA All Students	**0.149**	**44**	**44**
ELA Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	39	31
ELA African American	N/A	36	28
ELA Latino/a	0.158	38	32
ELA White	0.170	63	61
2015–16			
Math All Students	**0.237**	**37**	**37**
Math Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	30	23
Math African American	N/A	24	18
Math Latino/a	0.249	30	24
Math White	0.307	58	53
ELA All Students	**0.208**	**47**	**49**
ELA Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	41	35
ELA African American	N/A	39	31
ELA Latino/a	0.222	41	37
ELA White	0.222	66	64
2016–17			
Math All Students	**0.220**	**40**	**38**
Math Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	34	25
Math African American	N/A	34	19
Math Latino/a	0.227	33	25
Math White	0.220	58	53
ELA All Students	**0.166**	**48**	**49**
ELA Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	42	36
ELA African American	N/A	44	31
ELA Latino/a	0.176	43	37
ELA White	0.155	65	64

Notes: "Residual" represents the difference, measured in standard deviations, between the actual average performance of a district's students in a given racial/ethnic group and the predicted performance of the district's students in the given group based on the socioeconomic status of each group's families in the district. The residual for economically disadvantaged students was not calculated. "Proficient and Above" represents the percentage of students in a given group who met or exceeded the grade and subject standards on CAASPP, averaged across grades.

Source: LPI analysis of data from California Department of Education. (n.d.). California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) results. https://caaspp.cde.ca.gov/ (accessed 08/24/18).

Table A2
Four-Year Graduation Rates, 2017

Demographic	Rate in Sanger USD	Rate in California
African American	100%	73%
Latino/a	88%	80%
White	91%	87%
All Students	89%	83%

Data source: California Department of Education. (n.d.). DataQuest. https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/.

Table A3
Suspension Rates, 2016–17

Demographic	Rate in Sanger USD	Rate in California
African American	5.0%	9.8%
Latino/a	3.8%	3.7%
White	3.1%	3.2%
All Students	3.4%	3.6%

Data source: California Department of Education. (n.d.). DataQuest. https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/.

Appendix B: Methods

This individual case study of Sanger Unified School District is part of a larger, three-part, mixed-methods study that includes a quantitative analysis of district performance in California,[20] six additional individual case studies of positive outlier districts conducted from fall 2017 through winter 2018,[21] and a cross-case study that synthesizes findings from all seven individual cases.[22]

Site Selection

Results from a multivariate, quantitative study of positive outlier districts in California identified districts eligible for the individual case studies. As described more fully in a separate report,[23] the quantitative study used a statistical regression model for predicting and measuring student achievement to identify positive outlier districts in which scores on CAASPP were greater than predicted for African American, Latino/a, and White student groups from 2015 to 2017. For each racial/ethnic group, the model accounted for indicators of family socioeconomic status, including household income, parent education, family structure, and parent employment, all of which are factors that are beyond the district's control and that typically influence student performance. We used the size of the residual scores (the difference between the predicted and actual scores for each group) as the measure of performance for each district. This analysis both identified positive outlier districts and examined predictors of achievement at the district level.

In the second part of the project, we selected a demographically and geographically diverse set of seven districts from among the positive outliers in which we conducted individual case studies to examine the factors associated with their strong outcomes. To select districts for these individual case studies, we began with the group of districts that we had identified by our quantitative study in which African American, Latino/a, and White students consistently achieved at higher-than-predicted rates from 2015 to 2017 in both English language arts and mathematics. This reduced the sample to districts in which there were at least 200 African American and/or Latino/a students and at least 200 White students, to ensure adequate sample sizes and stability of the predictor variables.[24] Then we considered additional criteria—graduation rates, suspension rates, and relative rank on English language arts and mathematics test score residuals from the regression analyses both overall and for African American, Latino/a, and White groups individually. These criteria helped ensure that we selected districts that had positive outcomes on additional measures. We also intentionally selected districts that offered different levels of urbanicity, were from different geographic regions, and were of different sizes.

Data Collection Methods

The overarching research question for this case study was:

> **In Sanger Unified School District, what factors may account for the success of all students in the district and for that of students of color in particular?**

We used a case study approach to address this question. Case studies allow researchers to investigate real-life phenomena in context, generating understandings of a phenomenon and its interplay with its environment.[25] A two-person research team was assigned to the district. We used

a multi-method research design, with data from a range of sources, including documents, district data, and interviews with a range of personnel at the district and school levels. We examined the following aspects of district and school operations:

- approaches to instruction and instructional improvement;
- approaches to curriculum and assessment;
- strategies for hiring, developing, and retaining staff;
- supports for school climate or social and emotional learning;
- supports for students with additional learning or out-of-school needs;
- provision of wraparound services;
- outreach to families and communities; and
- approaches to continuous improvement, including uses of data to focus efforts.

The research team conducted a screening phone call with senior district leaders to gain an initial understanding of factors that districts identified as relevant to their success in supporting student achievement, to learn important background information, and to generate an initial list of potential sites and interviewees.

We also reviewed data and documents prior to on-site field research. Our document review process included analysis of resources on the district website: the LCAP for 2017–19, calendars of professional development and testing, communications to parents and the community, announcements of rewards and special pilots underway at individual schools, and a wide range of resources available on the SangerLearns.com open portal. Resources on the portal include subject and grade-level scope and sequence documents, along with shared teacher-developed units, lessons, and formative assessments. The portal also hosts a blog for the district's Universal Design for Learning, with posts from individual teachers from most district schools describing an effective instructional lesson or practice.

We obtained additional documents from district administrators during our fall 2017 visit. Some of these are included in this report: Sanger Unified School District Goals and Coherence Map, High-Leverage Team Action Plan Aligned to the Four Critical Questions of a PLC, and the district's Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) Cycle of Improvement. Documents selected for this report met the criteria of being (a) on prominent display or in use within the district or (b) a key organizing tool for one or more of the key initiatives.

During a 2-day site visit in fall 2017, we conducted 30- to 60-minute interviews at the district central office and selected school sites with district leaders, principals, coaches, teachers, and other staff and community members. In consultation with the superintendent during our screening phone call, we identified interview participants who could speak to instructional strategies, change processes, and other factors supporting greater-than-predicted outcomes for African American, Latino/a, and White students in the district. We selected schools to represent all grade levels, and at the elementary grade level we chose two schools with the highest proportions of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. At the district and school levels, we interviewed staff about programs that have supported achievement and increased equity in the district.

We conducted interviews with individuals in the following central office positions:

- Superintendent;
- Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction;
- Area Administrator for Elementary Schools;
- Area Administrator for Secondary Schools;
- Coordinator of Grants and Program Development (including LCAP);
- Coordinator of Inclusive Practices (MTSS);
- Director of Curriculum and Professional Development;
- Coordinator of EL Services and Parent Engagement;
- Information Systems Manager;
- Student Data Specialist; and
- Coordinator of the Learning Enrichment After-School Program.

Interviews with district administrators and senior staff focused on strategies, steps, and tools they were using to shift instruction to the in-depth learning required under CCSS, to support teacher and administrator learning, to use data to monitor and support school progress, to meet student needs, to engage the community, and to allocate resources to support their improvement efforts. Interviewers also asked district leaders about challenges to this work and how they overcame these challenges. We tailored the interview protocol based on the role of the interviewee and their tenure in the district. This differentiation ensured that some questions could be explored in more depth with respondents who were most likely to hold relevant and reliable knowledge on the topic of discussion. Each interview was audio recorded for transcription purposes if the respondent gave consent.

We also interviewed some of the district's school-level staff members. As noted, schools were selected to represent all three school grade levels. We visited Sanger High School, Washington Academic Middle School, and two elementary schools serving primarily students of color from low-income families.

- Sanger High School is the district's only regular high school, and its student population has steadily grown, reaching 3,000 students in 2017–18, of whom 71% are Latino/a, 7% are ELs, and 73% qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. Its office is staffed by a principal, deputy principal, four assistant principals, two full-time psychologists, and three CSPs.
- Washington Academic Middle School is the district's single middle school, serving 1,800 students in grades 6–8, 250 of whom are classified as ELs. The school office is staffed by a principal, five vice principals, two full-time psychologists, one student assistance program counselor, and four CSPs who oversee the work of PLCs in math, English, social studies, and science.
- Del Rey Elementary School is a Title 1 school serving a low-income student population of 240 with 90% Latino/a and 50% ELs. It has a Family Literacy Center and an after-school program serving nearly 100 students.
- Lone Star Elementary School is a Title 1 school serving just over 400 students, one fourth of whom are ELs. Its on-site after-school program serves more than 100 students.

At each secondary school we interviewed the principal and other key administrators or support providers. At each elementary school we interviewed the principal, one instructional support person, and two teachers.

Interviews at each of the schools focused on how the school was working to shift instruction toward CCSS and to integrate tiers of support for students. Probes asked about resources and supports from the district and external providers that have made a difference for their progress.

Analysis

Case study analysis addressed themes identified from the literature and those that arose from the research data. These themes included human capital issues, resources, instruction, curriculum, professional learning, social and emotional learning, data and accountability, culture, parents and community, schedules, and organization. The research team triangulated findings across multiple data sources and sought both confirmatory and disconfirmatory evidence to develop illustrations of the key factors that emerged as well grounded from the evidence. Each case study draft was reviewed internally by two members of the research team, checked by a district leader for accuracy, and revised based on feedback by two expert peer reviewers.

Endnotes

1. Adela Jones became Sanger USD Superintendent in the summer of 2018, subsequent to our interviews.
2. David, J. L., & Talbert, J. E. (2013). *Turning around a high-poverty district: Learning from Sanger*. San Francisco, CA: S.H. Cowell Foundation. http://shcowell.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Learning-From-Sanger.pdf.
3. Podolsky, A., Darling-Hammond, L., Doss, C., & Reardon, S. F. (2019). *California's positive outliers: Districts beating the odds*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
4. Burns, D., Darling-Hammond, L., & Scott, C. (with Allbright, T., Carver-Thomas, D., Daramola, E. J., David, J. L., Hernández, L. E., Kennedy, K. E., Marsh, J. A., Moore, C. A., Podolsky, A., Shields, P. M., & Talbert, J. E.). (2019). *Closing the opportunity gap: How positive outlier districts in California are pursuing equitable access to deeper learning*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
5. David, J. L., & Talbert, J. E. (2013). *Turning around a high-poverty district: Learning from Sanger*. San Francisco, CA: S.H. Cowell Foundation. http://shcowell.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Learning-From-Sanger.pdf.
6. DuFour training sessions, currently conducted through Solution Tree LLC, are attended by teacher teams and typically last 1 or 2 full days. They frame a moral imperative for teachers to collaborate on the challenge of bringing all students to grade-level and subject standards. The PLC model focuses a teacher team on four questions that should precede and follow instruction: (1) What do we want students to learn? (standards), (2) How will we know if they learned? (assessment), (3) What do we do if they haven't (intervention), and (4) What do we do if they have (enrichment). See: DuFour, R. (2009). Professional learning communities: The key to improved teaching and learning. *AdvancED Source*. http://www.advanc-ed.org/source/professional-learning-communities-key-improved-teaching-and-learning.
7. In 2017–18 Sanger USD employed 16 psychologists to serve its 12,000 students. This ratio of 1:750 students per psychologist is near the 1:500–700 level recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists and well below the typical caseload of 1:2000. See: Weir, K. (2012). School psychologists feel the squeeze. *APA Monitor*, *43*(8), 34. https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/09/squeeze (accessed 04/03/19).
8. Sanger's SAALT initiative was launched with support from the S.H. Cowell Foundation in 2007–08 beginning with four schools; another six schools were added in 2008–09, and the remaining in 2009–10. Its model for leadership development persists.
9. David, J. L., & Talbert, J. E. (2013). *Turning around a high-poverty district: Learning from Sanger*. San Francisco, CA: S.H. Cowell Foundation. http://shcowell.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Learning-From-Sanger.pdf.
10. David, J. L., & Talbert, J. E. (2013). *Turning around a high-poverty district: Learning from Sanger*. San Francisco, CA: S.H. Cowell Foundation. http://shcowell.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Learning-From-Sanger.pdf.
11. Balanced Literacy is an approach that balances the many different aspects of reading instruction. See: Pressley, M., Roehrig, A., Bogner, K., Raphael, L. M., & Dolezal, S. (2002). Balanced literacy instruction. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, *34*(5), 1.
12. Universal Design for Learning is a student-centered framework rooted in the learning sciences and aimed at creating instruction that reaches all students. See: Rose, D. H., & Meyer, A. (2002). *Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age: Universal Design for Learning*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
13. Common formative assessments are fundamental to PLC practice. Teachers together design an assessment to measure student learning following instruction focused on particular grade-level or course standards; each administers it with students in her or his class, and then brings the results to the next PLC meeting, where they work to determine (a) facets of their instruction that need improvement and (b) individual students who are struggling and need intervention. "Formative" refers to the ongoing use of assessments to inform instructional decisions, in contrast to "summative" assessments that are designed to measure students' ultimate learning outcomes.

14. Lesson Study is a form of professional learning through lesson development in which teachers reflect on their teaching practice through cycles of collaborative lesson planning, lesson observation, and examination of student learning. The polished lessons are then shared with others.

15. Math in Common is a 7-year initiative (2013–2020) that brings multiple districts together in a community of practice, providing the district math leaders with opportunities to learn from each other and from experts as they implement CCSS. Currently there are 10 participating districts.

16. Since 2014, Sanger has adopted new textbooks at all levels in math and at elementary and middle schools in reading/language arts. All text adoptions are Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and include texts and instructional materials. In 2014–15 Sanger High School adopted Integrated Math 1, 2 & 3. Elementary and middle schools adopted Go Math. In 2017–18, elementary schools adopted Reading Curriculum Journeys, and the middle school adopted Collections. Sanger High School also adopted new texts in economics and environmental social studies.

17. Specially designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE) is a teaching approach used in content areas, such as social studies, science, and literature, with students who are learning English as a second language. Unlike English Language Development (ELD), which focuses on language development, SDAIE aims to develop content-specific vocabulary and knowledge. Typically, in secondary schools serving high portions of English learners, each subject department has one or more SDAIE classes. The range of ELD among students in such classes can be quite wide, and the depth of content instruction can be sacrificed if many students struggle with basic language comprehension. The Sanger teachers were concerned that the rigor of content instruction in SDAIE classes often falls short of what ELs need to reach CCSS.

18. For more information on the SUSD case, see: Navo, M., Shalvey, S., Browne, M., Webster, R., Torrington, D., & Gomez, M. (2014–15). *Conceptual framework for Special Education Task Force successful educational evidenced based practices*, pp. 15–17. Sacramento, CA: Special Education Task Force Evidence-Based Practices Subcommittee. http://www.smcoe.org/assets/files/about-smcoe/superintendents-office/statewide-special-education-task-force/EBP%20-%20Final%203.2.15.pdf.

19. David, J. L., & Talbert, J. E. (2013). *Turning around a high-poverty district: Learning from Sanger*. San Francisco, CA: S.H. Cowell Foundation. http://shcowell.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Learning-From-Sanger.pdf.

20. Podolsky, A., Darling-Hammond, L., Doss, C., & Reardon, S. F. (2019). *California's positive outliers: Districts beating the odds*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

21. Available on the Learning Policy Institute website: learningpolicyinstitute.org.

22. Burns, D., Darling-Hammond, L., & Scott, C. (with Allbright, T., Carver-Thomas, D., Daramola, E. J., David, J. L., Hernández, L. E., Kennedy, K. E., Marsh, J. A., Moore, C. A., Podolsky, A., Shields, P. M., & Talbert, J. E.). (2019). *Closing the opportunity gap: How positive outlier districts in California are pursuing equitable access to deeper learning*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

23. Podolsky, A., Darling-Hammond, L., Doss, C., & Reardon, S. F. (2019). *California's positive outliers: Districts beating the odds*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

24. Podolsky, A., Darling-Hammond, L., Doss, C., & Reardon, S. F. (2019). *California's positive outliers: Districts beating the odds*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

25. Yin, R. K. (2013). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

About the Authors

Joan E. Talbert, Senior Research Scholar Emerita in Stanford's Graduate School of Education, cofounded and directed the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching (CRC), which for 25 years documented conditions that shape k–12 education and strategies for improving student achievement. Her most recent books include *Turning Around a High-Poverty District: Learning From Sanger* with Jane L. David (S.H. Cowell Foundation, 2013) and *Strategic Inquiry: Starting Small to Get Big Results in Education* with Nell Scharff Panero (Harvard Education Press, 2013).

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