# Performance Assessment Profile: Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD)

## By Maya Kaul

*Three desks sit lined up facing the front of the classroom, where a projector quietly hums. Each desk is occupied by a panelist, among them a facilitator—a mathematics teacher at Blair High School in Pasadena Unified—and two other teachers from neighboring high schools in the district. The panelists discuss the previous portfolio defenses they have seen throughout the day amongst themselves before the facilitator steps outside to call in their next student, Peter,[1] who is practicing his defense outside.*

*Peter enters the classroom, bringing in a friend for support who has just successfully completed his own portfolio defense. Peter wears a suit and stands poised in front of the panelists, despite his nerves. He is here to give his senior defense, a culminating event of his high school education, and he takes the experience seriously.*

*Peter brings up his PowerPoint on the projector and waits for his cue from the facilitating teacher before beginning his presentation.*

*He begins by introducing himself: he is a senior International Baccalaureate (IB)[2] student at Blair High School and has a deep interest in "all things technology." In his free time, he explores his interests in aerial photography, programming, web development, cybersecurity, graphic design, and more. He is already able to apply these interests through his part-time work for an electro-optics company based in Los Angeles, where he has been able to get an early start on his future career.*

*After introducing himself, Peter presents his first artifact—a research essay from his junior year English class that he wrote in response to the prompt: "What alternatives to lethal force are available to reduce the fatalities by law enforcement?" He provides a detailed overview of the assignment, his work, his inspiration to pursue this project, and the key lessons he has taken away. He explains that, because he has had experience working with law enforcement, he was able to "get into the heads of police officers" and deeply engage with this project.*

*Peter then moves on to his second and final artifact—an oral presentation responding to the prompt: "Are protest songs still relevant today, and can they still be considered effective?," and an accompanying poem he wrote in protest of unlawful deportation. He walks the audience through his experience with the assignment, as he did with his presentation of his first artifact, and then reflects that this project has provided him with the platform to combine his creativity and research skills.*

*Peter concludes his presentation by reflecting more broadly on how he has benefited from going through the portfolio/defense process. He remarks that he has gained a "confidence in [his] opinion" and also learned that "an opinion is an opinion and should always be expected to be contested"—evidence of his deepened research and argumentation skills. He also pinpoints specific other areas in which he has grown, both academically and personally: his communication skills, his ability to emotionally relate to others, his research skills, his ability to sympathize with others, his creativity and implementation of vocabulary, and his endurance in mental processes.*

*After Peter concludes his presentation, the panelists launch into a question-and-answer session, during which Peter exhibits deep mastery of the content behind each of his artifacts. One of the panelists asks Peter, "[Based on] your research on alternatives to lethal force, why are there still deaths happening at the helm of law enforcement if there have been improvements?"*

*Pressed to think critically about his research paper on alternatives to lethal force, Peter uses his extensive knowledge of the Los Angeles Police Department's current rules of operation to provide context-specific examples of what such policies might look like in practice. When one of the panelists asks, "Are the officers being trained to the point they can subdue a subject without having to use lethal force?," Peter responds by identifying the six phases of response LAPD officers are expected to employ before resorting to the use of lethal force, according to their official protocol.*

*After the panelists run through their questions for Peter, they ask him to step outside while they make their deliberation. First, they each consider the rubric and decide which areas of proficiency Peter has met, and then they talk through each of the domains of the rubric, line by line, to determine whether or not he will pass. The panelists then discuss his "Wow" areas (i.e., strengths): his clear mastery of the content and personal connection to his topics. They proceed by identifying several "Wonder" areas (i.e., opportunities for growth): adding more images to his PowerPoint to break up the text and making better eye contact with the panelists.*

*Despite these minor areas for growth, the panelists decide Peter has clearly exhibited proficiency and will pass his senior defense. They invite him in to pass along the good news and share their "Wows and Wonders" with him. Peter smiles, relieved and proud to have successfully completed the defense process.*[3]

Peter's defense presentation reveals the sort of college- and career-ready graduate that Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD) aims to prepare through its districtwide performance assessment system: he has a strong command over content knowledge, the ability to critically reflect on this knowledge and his personal growth, and the tools to apply his education beyond high school. Performance assessments such as the portfolio/defense model place an emphasis on assessing higher order thinking skills, driving high-quality instruction, and aiding in the development of deep content knowledge in order to support 21st century learning outcomes. With the understanding that such assessments can drive both improved instructional practices and student learning, PUSD has committed to having all graduating high school students, starting with the class of 2019, go through the portfolio/defense process. In doing so, they have made the commitment to ensuring equitable access to high-quality instruction for all students within the district.

## Background on Pasadena Unified

Bringing together students from the cities of Pasadena, Altadena, and Sierra Madre, PUSD enrolls over 18,000 students across its 28 schools and programs. Of these schools, two are combined middle and high schools, two are high schools, and one is a continuation high school (Figure 1).[4] Fifty-eight percent of the students within PUSD are Latinx, and the remainder of the student population is composed primarily of African American, White, Asian, Filipinx, and Pacific Islander students. Fifteen percent of the students enrolled in the district are English learners (ELs)—slightly lower than the statewide percentage (20%).

**Figure 1: Pasadena Unified at a Glance (2017–18)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Student Enrollment | 18,164 |
| Schools | 28 |
| Race/Ethnicity[i] | 58.3% Latinx |
| | 12.5% African American |
| | 18.1% White |
| | 7.1 % Asian, Filipinx, or Pacific Islander |
| | 4% Other |
| Students From Low-Income Families[ii] | 59.3% |
| English Learners[iii] | 15.2% |

[i]  Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding.
[ii]  Percentage of students who qualified for free and reduced-price lunch in 2016–17.
[iii]  Does not include former English learners who have been reclassified as "fluent English proficient."

Source: California Department of Education DataQuest

These demographics of students within PUSD are not, however, aligned with the demographics of the Pasadena community at large—a dynamic that accounts for "a real disconnect between the community and the school district," in the words of one PUSD school board member.[5] In the wake of the district's court-ordered desegregation efforts decades ago, "White families, the predominant group making up the higher socioeconomic demographic, left the district for private schools."[6] As a result, PUSD schools serve a disproportionately high concentration of Latinx and African American students relative to the overall demographics of the city. Additionally, while less than 16% of residents of Pasadena earn below the poverty line,[7] 59% of the students in PUSD come from low-income families (Figure 1). These dynamics have reportedly resulted in a "historically strained relationship between the school district and the community" and in "low expectations, community disengagement from the school district, and an initial 'us versus them' culture."[8] These dynamics matter in the context of the district's performance assessment system insofar as they contribute to the overall political climate of the district.

## Historical Context of Performance Assessments in Pasadena Unified

PUSD is notable for passing a districtwide requirement that all graduating 12th grade students successfully compile a portfolio of their work and complete a defense of their learning, starting with the graduating class of 2019. To understand the administrative work and community input that has driven this policy change, it is first necessary to situate PUSD's performance assessment system within the broader historical policy landscape of the district.

PUSD's existing performance assessment system is grounded in the district's long-standing commitment to advancing career and technical education at the secondary level. One of the earliest signals of this priority was the district's implementation of California Partnership Academies (CPAs) in the 1980s.[9] CPAs were introduced as a statewide pilot program by the California State Assembly in 1984 to provide a selective, "school-within-a-school" learning experience to students who meet at least three of six "at-risk" criteria.[10] CPAs were introduced in select districts across the state as a means of improving student outcomes by connecting academics with career and technical education, with each academy built

around one of the [15 industry fields].[11] In the 1989–90 school year, the Health Careers Academy at Blair High School was the first CPA to be introduced to PUSD.[12] By 2009, the district housed seven CPAs and served 27% of PUSD's high school population.[13]

During the 2007–08 school year, when John Muir High School in PUSD experienced a significant drop in academic performance on state testing, the district recognized that it would need to make some major changes at that school site in order to avoid state intervention. Working together with "parents, staff, local businesses, and other community members," the district developed a plan to reconstitute John Muir High School that centered "small, caring, relevant, rigorous, and personalizing learning communities" as a guiding principle.[14] Because of its strong alignment with the district's reconstitution plan, PUSD adopted the **Linked Learning "multiple pathways" framework** for reforming John Muir High School. The Linked Learning approach—developed by the James Irvine Foundation—is designed to prepare college- and career-ready high school graduates through a high-quality program of study that integrates college preparatory curriculum, a rigorous career technical education sequence, and work-based learning opportunities.[15]

Since the introduction of the Linked Learning approach to John Muir High School, the district effectively helped the school recover, bringing the schoolwide dropout rate down from 9% in the 2007–08 school year to 2% in 2016–17.[16] Seeing the Linked Learning approach transform Muir inspired the district to scale up Linked Learning as "the primary reform strategy for secondary education" across the entire district.[17] As such, PUSD was awarded an initial $125,000 planning grant, and then a subsequent $1.2 million implementation grant from ConnectEd to scale the Linked Learning model across the district—largely within the existing CPA structure.[18]

Today, PUSD's **College & Career Academies** represent a blend of the CPA model and the Linked Learning approach. The academies are all housed in one of four district secondary schools:

1. Health Careers Academy (Blair High School)
2. Arts, Entertainment, & Media (John Muir High School)
3. Business & Entrepreneurship (John Muir High School)
4. Engineering & Environmental Science Academy (John Muir High School)
5. Academy for Creative Industries (Marshall Fundamental School)
6. App Academy (Pasadena High School)
7. Creative Arts, Media, and Design (Pasadena High School)
8. Law and Public Service (Pasadena High School)

These academies build off of the legacy of CPAs and Linked Learning and function analogously to the Linked Learning programs of study—i.e., **pathways**—that are the hallmark of other Linked Learning districts throughout the state.

The College & Career Academies maintain a focus on college preparation and career and technical education, which helps students across the district meet the PUSD Graduate Profile (Figure 2). The graduate profile of the district today is the result of a complete overhaul of the previous profile nearly a decade ago. In 2010, the district recognized that its profile included value statements, rather than specific outcomes, so policymakers convened more than 800 stakeholders to establish an updated profile. Using the technical assistance provider Envision Learning Partners' Graduate Profile Quality Criteria Check, the

updated graduate profile unpacks the concept of "college and career ready" and defines measurable goals for students to achieve. The current profile was approved by the PUSD School Board in May 2014 as part of the district's strategic plan.[19]
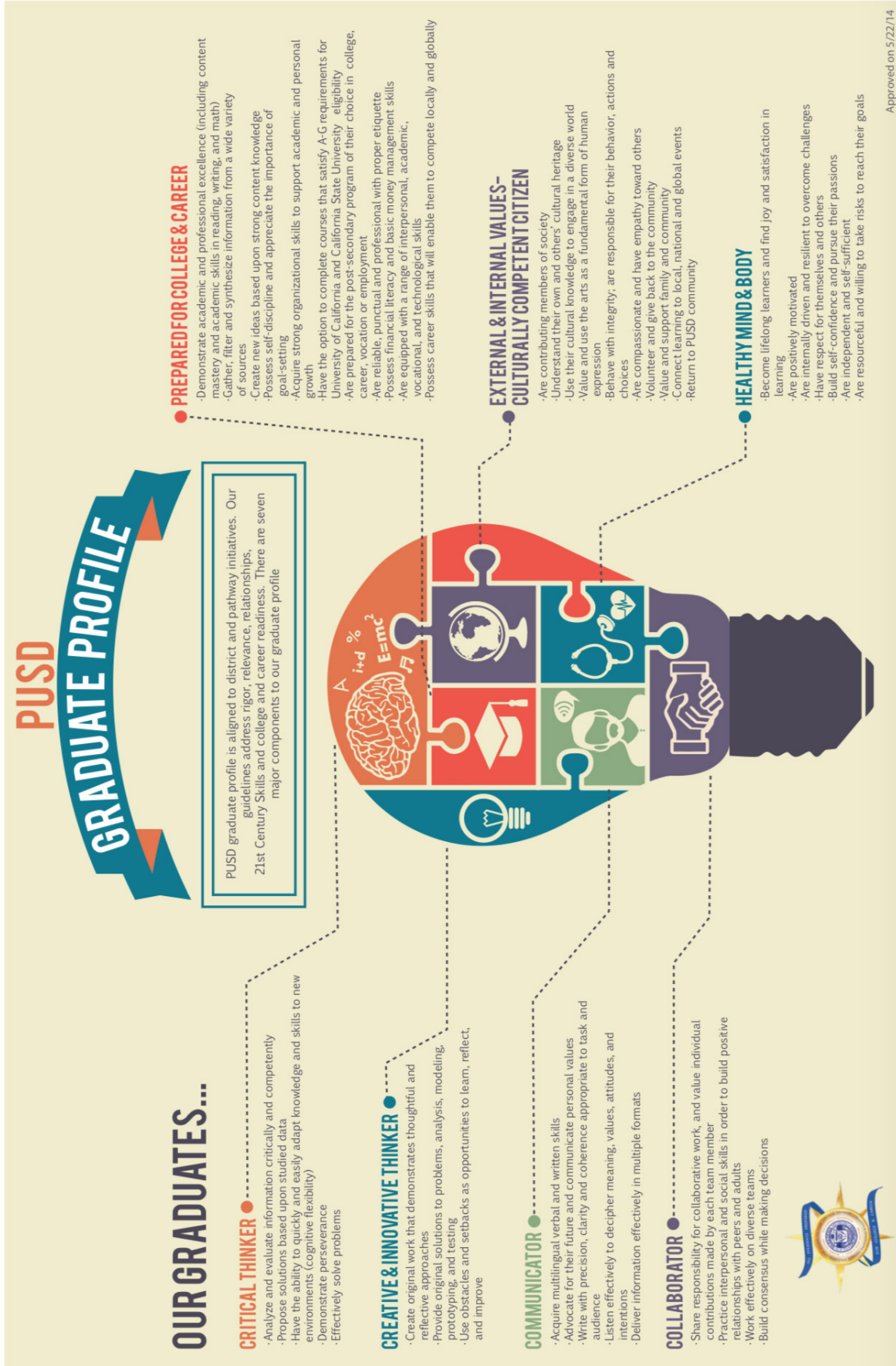
Once the new graduate profile was introduced, stakeholders across the district recognized that three key competencies—research skills, creativity, and written communication—were still not being effectively taught or measured. This was due, in part, to the fact that these competencies were not a focal point of the existing curriculum.[20] Though seniors in academies had the option to earn graduation distinction (i.e., a merit medallion) by completing a portfolio/defense, this amounted to "only 40 percent of seniors [having] the opportunity to do a research-based portfolio at the end of their senior year."[21] The district administration recognized that they could make small curricular changes to help students meet these competencies—such as requiring a research paper in 11th grade history or a presentation in 12th grade science, for example; however, they wanted such curricular shifts to be systemic, and aligned throughout secondary education, rather than isolated in a few courses.

Accordingly, in November 2014, the PUSD Board of Education moved to adopt the portfolio/defense as a districtwide graduation requirement, starting with the graduating class of 2019. Alongside this requirement, students are required to complete at least 40 work-based learning hours (composed of job shadows, internships, and/or community service) and must earn 220 academic credits.[22] In adopting this policy, the district signaled its commitment to improving access to high-quality instruction for all students in the district.[23]

The College and Career Pathways district staff have been key champions in leading the implementation of this district policy. In the 4-year interim between the school board resolution passing and the class of 2019 going through the portfolio/defense process, this team and PUSD district leadership have worked on fine-tuning their system and generating community buy-in for their policy. To achieve these ends, the district hosted four town hall meetings at PUSD schools between February and March of 2018 to inform families of the graduation requirement and field any questions about the process. During these sessions, the assistant superintendent of instructional services discussed the reasons that the district adopted the portfolio/defense as district policy and highlighted the ways in which such a model might help the district better meet the desired outcomes of its graduate profile. During one of these sessions, the PUSD assistant superintendent of instructional services noted, "Graduate requirements are the floor. They're not the ceiling"—further revealing the district's commitment to a high caliber of instruction and student learning.[24]

The districtwide portfolio/defense policy, therefore, aims to ensure that all PUSD students have equitable access to the high-quality curricula and teaching practices necessary to meet the district's desired graduation profile. The theory of change for this policy is that, by establishing high expectations through consistent implementation of the performance assessment system across the district, teachers, staff, and administrators at the school level will have both the structures and the knowledge to support students' 21st century learning. As with any major districtwide policy shift, it will take time to fully reach these ends; however, the policy is a commitment to ensuring equitable access to high-quality learning for all students.

## Figure 2: PUSD Graduate Profile

PUSD

GRADUATE PROFILE

PUSD graduate profile is aligned to district and pathway initiatives. Our guidelines address rigor, relevance, relationships, 21st Century Skills and college and career readiness. There are seven major components to our graduate profile

Approved on 5/22/14

### OUR GRADUATES...

**CRITICAL THINKER**
- Analyze and evaluate information critically and competently
- Propose solutions based upon studied data
- Have the ability to quickly and easily adapt knowledge and skills to new environments (cognitive flexibility)
- Demonstrate perseverance
- Effectively solve problems

**CREATIVE & INNOVATIVE THINKER**
- Create original work that demonstrates thoughtful and reflective approaches
- Provide original solutions to problems, analysis, modeling, prototyping, and testing
- Use obstacles and setbacks as opportunities to learn, reflect, and improve

**COMMUNICATOR**
- Acquire multilingual verbal and written skills
- Advocate for their future and communicate personal values
- Write with precision, clarity and coherence appropriate to task and audience
- Listen effectively to decipher meaning, values, attitudes, and intentions
- Deliver information effectively in multiple formats

**COLLABORATOR**
- Share responsibility for collaborative work, and value individual contributions made by each team member
- Practice interpersonal and social skills in order to build positive relationships with peers and adults
- Work effectively on diverse teams
- Build consensus while making decisions

**PREPARED FOR COLLEGE & CAREER**
- Demonstrate academic and professional excellence (including content mastery and academic skills in reading, writing, and math)
- Gather, filter and synthesize information from a wide variety of sources
- Create new ideas based upon strong content knowledge
- Possess self-discipline and appreciate the importance of goal-setting
- Acquire strong organizational skills to support academic and personal growth
- Have the option to complete courses that satisfy A-G requirements for University of California and California State University eligibility
- Are prepared for the post-secondary program of their choice in college, career, vocation or employment
- Are reliable, punctual and professional with proper etiquette
- Possess financial literacy and basic money management skills
- Are equipped with a range of interpersonal, academic, vocational, and technological skills
- Possess career skills that will enable them to compete locally and globally

**EXTERNAL & INTERNAL VALUES– CULTURALLY COMPETENT CITIZEN**
- Are contributing members of society
- Understand their own and others' cultural heritage
- Use their cultural knowledge to engage in a diverse world
- Value and use the arts as a fundamental form of human expression
- Behave with integrity; are responsible for their behavior, actions and choices
- Are compassionate and have empathy toward others
- Volunteer and give back to the community
- Value and support family and community
- Connect learning to local, national and global events
- Return to PUSD community

**HEALTHY MIND & BODY**
- Become lifelong learners and find joy and satisfaction in learning
- Are positively motivated
- Are internally driven and resilient to overcome challenges
- Have respect for themselves and others
- Build self-confidence and pursue their passions
- Are independent and self-sufficient
- Are resourceful and willing to take risks to reach their goals

# How the Portfolio and Defense System Works

Building off the district graduate profile (Figure 2), the district has identified four specific areas it seeks for all of its graduates to develop competency within:

1. Research
2. Creativity and Innovation
3. Written Communication/Reflection
4. Oral Communication/Presentation

The district's portfolio/defense model is grounded in these competencies, such that the portfolio is designed as a space for students to provide evidence that they have satisfied the requirements for the first three areas, and the defense is an opportunity for them to demonstrate their oral communication proficiency.[25]

## The Portfolio

The PUSD portfolio/defense process culminates for students in 12th grade as seniors select two to four graded artifacts of their best work across different disciplines to include in their portfolio. These artifacts can be pulled from core courses, electives, CTE coursework, etc., so long as they are aligned to the first three district competencies—research, creativity and innovation, and written communication—and represent their highest quality work.[26]

1. **Research**, *as evidenced via research paper (6–8 pages)*—evidence of student's critical-thinking skills, use of evidence to support claims, and critical-reading ability.
2. **Creativity,** *as evidenced via various student work*—student work that showcases creative/innovative solutions, processes, and/or actual product.
3. **Written Communication,** *via reflection paper (3–5 pages)*—evidence of student's written communication skills, ability to reflect and assess growth, and progress on items 1 and 2. This paper will also serve as the script for the oral presentation.[27]

Throughout a student's high school experience, they are prompted to store examples of their best work from across their classes in a digital portfolio housed on Naviance, ePortfolio, or another digital platform.[28] During their senior year, students have the option to select their best work from these assignments meeting the critical competencies, or they can decide to generate new work to include in their portfolio during their senior year.[29] They then complete a written reflection that will guide their defense presentation. This essay requires students to examine what they have learned throughout their high school process more broadly, reflect on the specific skills and content they have learned, and articulate their postsecondary plans.

For each of these artifacts, the district encourages content-area teachers to use the district rubrics (Appendixes A–D) to assess student work so that any artifacts in a student's final portfolio have been graded using the common rubrics. These rubrics include a space for panelists to take notes to record evidence of each area of proficiency a student has met. In order to support schools in keeping track of how the rubrics are used, the district suggests that school sites employ an implementation matrix (Figure 3). The district introduced this matrix to all middle and high school sites as part of one of the first professional development sessions following the passage of the portfolio/defense district requirement in 2014.[30] This matrix provides school sites with a high-level view of how widely the common rubrics

are being used across their classes and also helps to ensure that there are sufficient opportunities for students to compose their portfolio of artifacts from a variety of different content areas.

## Figure 3: PUSD Implementation Matrix

| | Rubric #1: Research | Rubric #2: Creativity and Innovation | Rubric #3: Communication | Rubric #4: Communication/ Presentation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Middle School** | | | | |
| English 7 | | | X | |
| Math (7th Grade) | | | | |
| Science 7 | | | | |
| History 7 | | | | |
| English 8 | | | | |
| Math (8th Grade) | | | | |
| Science 8 | | | | |
| History 8 | | | | |
| **High School** | | | | |
| English 9 | | | | |
| English 10 | | | | |
| English 11 | | | | |
| English 12 | | | | |
| Math I | | | | |
| Math II | | | | |
| World History | | | | |
| U.S. History | | | | |
| Government | | | | |
| Economics | | | | |
| Biology | | | | |
| Chemistry | | | | |
| Physics | | | | |
| World Language 1 | | | | |
| World Language 2 | | | | |
| Art Elective | | | | |
| CTE | | | | |
| PE | | | | |

Source: Sarian, M., & Valadez-Paez, S. (2017). PUSD graduate portfolio & defense [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from http://www.linkedlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/PUSD-Graduate-Portfolio-Defense.pdf.

## The Defense

After a student has finished assembling their portfolio, they are expected to prepare to orally defend their learning to a panel composed of teachers, staff, and/or community members. The defense of learning is built around the four following components:

1. **Sharing of Portfolio**—share 2–4 graded portfolio documents with a panel of judges
2. **Individual Presentation** *(8–10 minutes)*—in front of a panel of judges
3. **Use of Technology**—well-produced audiovisual aids or media
4. **Question-and-Answer Session** *(5 minutes)*—as demonstration of growth, reflection, and self-evaluation[31]

Each student defense is designed to take roughly 15 minutes. After a student has completed their presentation and gone through the question-and-answer session with their panelists, they leave the room while the panelists deliberate on their score to determine whether or not the student will pass.

## Scoring and Feedback

The use of common rubrics across performance assessment systems is understood in the research field as a method for increasing the reliability and consistency of such assessments.[32] In light of this research, PUSD has introduced four districtwide rubrics, each of which is aligned to one of the district's key competency areas:

1. **Research Rubric** (Appendix A)
2. **Creativity/Innovation Rubric** (Appendix B)
3. **Written Communication/Reflection Rubric** (Appendix C)
4. **Oral Communication/Presentation Rubric** (Appendix D)

Accordingly, the district encourages teachers to score student portfolio work using the designated Research, Creativity/Innovation, and Written Communication/Reflection rubrics. Panelists scoring the defense use the Oral Communication/Presentation rubric. All of these rubrics are grounded in research and pull from existing, vetted rubrics developed by Envision Learning Partners, EdLeader21, and the Buck Institute for Education. PUSD's rubrics were modified by the district administrators, in consultation with Envision Learning Partners, to be more directly aligned with the PUSD district graduate profile.[33] Envision Learning Partners is currently providing ongoing support to the district to further refine these rubrics to be reliable measures of student learning.

The defense rubrics are designed for panelists to take notes on students' defense presentations, so that they can provide specific evidence regarding which indicators and domains that the student has met. During the question-and-answer session after each student's defense presentation, panelists are expected to ask clarifying questions on any of the indicators for which they have not marked the student as proficient. After all of the panelists have independently scored the defense rubric, the district advises that the panelists discuss their scores with each other by reviewing the rubric domain by domain. Panelists should provide evidence not only for points of disagreement between their rubric scoring, but also for the areas on which they agree, to ensure that their scoring is fully calibrated. As of the 2018–19 academic year, district policy dictates that students can *pass* if they demonstrate 50% proficiency in the Oral Communication/Presentation rubric, and they can *pass with distinction* if they demonstrate 100%

proficiency. This proficiency is determined based on the collective score that the full panel agrees on.[34] Moving forward, students will be expected to demonstrate 75% proficiency to pass in 2019–20 and will be required to demonstrate 100% proficiency starting in the 2020–21 academic year.[35]

Students who do not pass their defense are expected to resubmit (i.e., re-present) their senior defense. When panelists decide that a student has not passed their defense, they fill out a Re-Submit Form (Appendix E) to provide the student with actionable areas for improvement and next steps. This specific and individualized feedback helps make the process of resubmission an opportunity for growth. The following section outlines the systems of support the district has in place for students who are asked to resubmit their defense, as well as general supports that benefit all students in the portfolio/defense process.

## Systems of Support

In order to effectively scale the performance assessment system across the district, it is critical both that teachers and staff have the support they need in order to guide student learning, and that all students are prepared to succeed. PUSD has a number of such systems of support in place already and is actively working to deepen them in the years to come.

### Teacher Supports

To ensure that students across PUSD are well and equitably prepared to meet the demands of the districtwide graduation requirement, the secondary teachers and staff responsible for supporting students through their portfolio/defense process must receive effective training. The district has identified site coordinators on each secondary campus as critical players in achieving this goal. As such, district leadership created a year-by-year plan from the 2016–17 school year through the 2018–19 school year to guide the duties and responsibilities of site coordinators and ensure that adequate structures of support are in place for the students in the class of 2019 to complete the portfolio/defense process (Figure 4). These site coordinators include librarians, teachers, and assistant principals. All site coordinators receive extra training and compensation for taking on these additional duties. Though this funding originally took the form of stipends (as reflected in Figure 4), site coordinators are now compensated hourly for their time.[36]

## Figure 4: PUSD Site Coordinator Duties & Responsibilities

| 2016/2017 | 2017/2018 | 2018/2019 |
|---|---|---|
| • Attend 2 hour meeting after school once a month | • Attend 2 hour meeting after school once a month | • Attend 2 hour meeting after school once a month |
| • Communicate expectations and outcomes with 9th ELA and 10th World History | • Communicate expectations and outcomes with 9th ELA and 10th World History | • Communicate expectations and outcomes with 9th ELA and 10th World History |
| • Become the expert on Graduate Portfolio and defense requirements (including: uploading evidence to Naviance, ePortfolio, or another digital platform) | • Become the expert on Graduate Portfolio and defense requirements (including: uploading evidence to Naviance, ePortfolio, or another digital platform) | • Become the expert on Graduate Portfolio and defense requirements (including: uploading evidence to Naviance, ePortfolio, or another digital platform) |
| • Assist assistant principal to coordinate calibration of scoring with rubrics | • Assist assistant principal to coordinate calibration of scoring with rubrics | • Assist assistant principal to coordinate calibration of scoring with rubrics |
| • Communicate with teachers regarding the Matrix (Including assignments that need to be scored with portfolio rubrics | • Communicate with teachers regarding the Matrix (Including assignments that need to be scored with portfolio rubrics | • Communicate with teachers regarding the Matrix (Including assignments that need to be scored with portfolio rubrics |
| • Work with department chairs to create implementation guide for using Senior Defense rubrics | • Work with department chairs to create implementation guide for using Senior Defense rubrics | • Work with department chairs to create implementation guide for using Senior Defense rubrics |
| | • Review uploaded materials from Naviance, ePortfolio, or another digital platform with assistant Principal and department chairs | • Schedule Senior Presentations |
| | • During extra prep period(s), schedule meetings with ALL 11th graders to review portfolios (and create plan of action by the end of 1st semester) | • Organize Panel of Judges |
| | • Meet with 11th grade students who were short at the end of 1st semester | |
| Comprehensive High Schools | Comprehensive High Schools | Comprehensive High Schools |
| • $2,000 stipend per semester | • $1,000 stipend per semester | • $2,000 stipend per semester PLUS |
| | • ONE release period per 200 students in the 12th grade | • ONE release period per 200 students in the 12th grade |
| • Accommodations will be made to meet the needs of Alternative Ed | • Accommodations will be made to meet the needs of Alternative Ed | • Accommodations will be made to meet the needs of Alternative Ed |

Source: Sarian, M., & Valadez-Paez, S. (2017). PUSD graduate portfolio & defense [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from http://www.linkedlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/PUSD-Graduate-Portfolio-Defense.pdf; Personal phone conversation with Marisa Sarian, PUSD Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, and Kristina Turley-Payne, PUSD College and Career Pathways Coordinator (2018, November 30).

Providing a professional development space for PUSD teachers and staff to collectively score student work is necessary to ensure the assessments are both consistent and aligned with curriculum.[37] Since the passage of the districtwide graduation requirement, PUSD has held a number of professional development sessions for teachers and staff. For example, all 9th grade English teachers had a full-day professional development session focused on how to teach students to evaluate various sources and determine the strength of a given source. Because all 9th grade English teachers took part in this professional development, all 9th grade students had a teacher who had engaged in this portfolio/ defense-specific professional development. The district also hosted a professional development day for 10th grade history teachers, focused on engaging with the Research Rubric (Appendix A). In addition to this content-specific professional development, all high school teachers have participated in two professional development days in which they were introduced to the portfolio/defense process and then worked through the corresponding district rubrics and graduate profile.[38]

The district has also partnered with Envision Learning Partners to calibrate teachers and staff around its common district rubrics. With this technical assistance, the district kicked off its calibration efforts in mid-October of the 2018–19 academic year with a districtwide high school professional development day. The event brought together teachers from all six high schools on two campuses in the district for the purpose of "calibrat[ing] graduate defense presentations in order to drive quality at PUSD."[39] This professional development session included calibration around the Oral Communication/Presentation rubric for the defense as well as the Research and Creativity/Innovation rubrics for the portfolio. All teachers completed a calibration exercise for the Oral Communication/Presentation rubric, and teachers were assigned to calibration breakout sessions for the Research rubric or Creativity/Innovation rubric, based upon their teaching content area. As the year moves forward, the district leadership will continue working on the ground on school campuses across the district to address more targeted, site-specific teacher needs.

## What Is a Scoring Calibration Training Like for Teachers and Staff?

Teachers and staff from across the Pasadena Unified School District have come together on two campuses—Blair High School and Marshall Fundamental School—for a daylong, districtwide calibration day. In October 2018, this event kicks off the district's inaugural year of implementing the districtwide portfolio/defense graduation requirement, starting with the graduating class of 2019.

On the Blair campus, the morning begins with an introduction from the district Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, Marisa Sarian, who frames calibration as a means of working as a "community of learners" to standardize practices districtwide. Given the personality and specialties of each campus, she emphasizes the importance of calibration as a driver of quality throughout the portfolio/defense process.

Abby Benedetto, a technical assistance provider from Envision Learning Partners, then frames the importance of calibration with a video before the teachers and staff are asked to engage in a pair-share, and then full-group share-out, responding to the question "What is the

purpose and benefits of calibration?" Benedetto encourages everyone to approach the process with an "inquiry mind" as they practice scoring student portfolio/defenses. She then walks the room through the defense presentation rubric, highlighting its alignment to the district's graduate profile and taking questions from the teachers and staff in the room.

Then comes the time to learn by doing: the teachers view a live defense and observe a panel score the defense. The observing teachers and staff are encouraged to pretend they are on the panel and work through the note-taking guide in their participant packets. After a student from the district presents her defense, she leaves the room and Benedetto guides the room through the scoring process—highlighting the need to go through the note-taker scoring sheet domain by domain and discuss areas of both agreement and disagreement with the other panelists before determining a student's final score. The teacher and staff participants then observe the panelists' deliberation process, as they model the best practices Benedetto has been describing.

Source: Site visit to districtwide development day at Blair High School

## Student Supports

In addition to the supports offered to staff and teachers engaged with the districtwide performance assessment system, the district also recognizes the need to provide supports to students who are completing the portfolio/defense process. Given the early stages of the district's performance assessment system, PUSD is still in the process of standardizing structures of support for students going through the portfolio/defense process. There are, however, emerging best practices for providing student supports.

Because PUSD is implementing portfolio/defenses districtwide, the district is working toward greater curricular alignment in the 6th to 12th grade educational experiences of its students. For example, district leadership is currently discussing with principals across the district to the possibility of introducing "mini-defenses" in the 5th, 8th, and 10th grades.[40] Additionally, the district hosted a series of "mock defenses" in April and May of 2018 to prepare students in the graduating class of 2019 who volunteered to present as juniors, in preparation for their senior defenses.[41]

Providing these spaces for practice allows students—particularly those who struggle with oral presentations—to become comfortable with the academic and social-emotional demands of the defense presentation. This practice might also drive greater curricular alignment toward the senior portfolio defense by more intentionally involving teachers from the 5th through 10th grade in the defense process.

After these practice defenses, all students are given multiple opportunities to pass their official defenses. If and when a student does not pass their defense on their first take, they work closely with a teacher at their school to receive ongoing feedback on how to improve their defense for their next attempt. The district provided students with the first opportunity to defend their learning in mid-October of the 2018–19 school year, so students would have adequate time to work through feedback, should they need to re-present. Students who do not pass before graduation day are allowed to walk at their graduation ceremony and receive additional support through the summer until they are able to pass.

Beyond these districtwide efforts, schools in the district are also working toward creating systems to accommodate groups of students, such as students receiving special education services and English learners, who might require additional scaffolding to successfully engage in the portfolio/defense process. For example, the district has advised school sites to require students receiving special education services to submit fewer artifacts into their portfolio and have modified conditions for their defense presentation (i.e., shorter presentations, teacher-only panels), depending on their Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 support plan. The district also advises that school sites make similar accommodations for English learners, such as allowing students to partially defend or answer questions in their native tongue.[42] Making these accommodations more consistent across schools is one of the primary priorities for the district as its performance assessment system continues to mature.

## Funding/Technical Assistance

PUSD has used general funds from the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) to fund full-day professional development sessions focused on the portfolio/defense model and stipends for site coordinators. This general fund support aligns with the district's Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) goal to develop students' grade level knowledge in core subjects and prepare students to achieve the competencies outlined in the district graduate profile.[43]

Additionally, PUSD is engaged in a project with Los Angeles Unified, Oakland Unified, Envision Learning Partners, ConnectEd, and the Learning Policy Institute through a grant from the Assessment for Learning Project (ALP). This grant is co-funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and aims to support the development of each participating district's performance assessment system. Through the grant, PUSD is receiving additional technical assistance from Envision Learning Partners and ConnectEd, as well as funding that supports the district's professional development around performance assessments.

# Next Steps

PUSD is at a critical time with its portfolio/defense districtwide graduation requirement in its first year, and the district administration understands that the district's performance assessment system is in a growth period. The district completed its first round of student defenses for the 2018–19 academic year in October 2018, and the student surveys completed after this session provide some preliminary findings on the strengths and potential areas for growth of the system moving forward.[44]

Of the 82 students who completed the survey, over 70% responded that the senior defense process strengthened their research skills, 70% responded that the process strengthened their writing skills, and nearly 85% responded that the process helped strengthen their presentation skills. When asked what they enjoyed about the experience, the students spoke to the value of the process in helping them grow both personally and academically. One student noted that the highlight of the process was "presenting in front of a seemingly distinguished group of panelists and receiving mostly positive feedback from those panelists." Another student reflected that the whole process gave them "a better understanding of what life after high school is [going to] be like"—underscoring the potential of the portfolio/defense to prepare college- and career-ready graduates.

Students also identified a few key areas for growth as implementation of the system moves forward, such as providing more time for students to prepare for their defense presentations, offering more guidance and support to students through the process, better managing the logistics of the senior defense presentation schedule, and improving the feedback students receive throughout the process. The district is working to address these areas and focusing its efforts on a few other key issues.

For one, PUSD administrators are still working to develop a stronger districtwide strategy for providing accommodations for special education students with IEPs and 504 support plans. Presently, individual school sites make determinations about how to best support these students through the portfolio/defense process, and the district has provided some recommendations on potential best strategies. District administrators are working with other district leaders and technical assistance providers across California to develop a more systemic approach to providing these accommodations.

As with any new performance assessment system, the district is engaged in ongoing efforts to ensure that all secondary teachers and staff involved with the portfolio/defense process are well-versed in the process and prepared to serve as consistently calibrated scorers on defense panels. To address this goal throughout the remainder of this school year, district leadership is working with technical assistance providers to provide targeted on-site coaching and assistance to schools.

Finally, the district is working to further develop the rigor and content focus of student portfolios. The long-term vision of a performance assessment system such as PUSD's is that the assessment will drive more meaningful and high-quality instruction. Pasadena's assistant superintendent of instructional service has reflected: "Creating a separate requirement has really elevated the need to make these instructional shifts and create a different kind of high school experience."[45] Making these shifts in instructional practice does not happen overnight, however, but rather is part of a broader shift in instructional culture within a school or a district. As such, PUSD administrators will continue to support consistently rigorous and high-quality instruction for secondary students across the district.

As PUSD's performance assessment system continues to develop, administrators will continue to be centrally focused on ensuring equitable access to a high-quality, 21st century education for all students in the district.

# Appendix

## Appendix A

### PUSD Research Note Taking Rubric

| Scoring Domain | Indicator | Evidence *must have evidence here to check box to the left* |
|---|---|---|
| Argument | Makes a clear, well developed, and convincing argument that demonstrates original critical thinking | |
| | Makes relevant and significant claims that support the argument | |
| | Acknowledges and response counter-claims | |
| | Thoroughly explains background and context of topic/issue | |
| | Makes insightful connections, draws meaningful conclusions | |
| Cite Sources | Refers to extensive and comprehensive evidence (print/digital) relevant to argument | |
| | Weighs and evaluates inconsistent information and differences among authors on the same topic (when appropriate) | |
| Evidence | Synthesizes and critiques evidence from multiple sources related to the argument | |
| | Assesses the strengths and limitations of most important sources to support or refute the argument or claims (when appropriate) | |
| Organization | Argument is presented clearly and consistently | |
| | Ideas are fully developed and logically sequenced to present a coherent whole | |
| | Transitions guide the reader through the | |
| | development and reasoning of the claim | |
| Language | Has an effective fluent style with variety in syntax, precise word choice | |
| | Is free from errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics | |

## PUSD Creativity and Innovation Note Taking Rubric

| Scoring Domain | Indicator | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| Point of View | The product presents a specific point of view<br><br>The student can clearly articulate the intent of the work orally or in written form | |
| Originality | The product is new, unique, surprising; shows a personal touch<br><br>The product may successfully break rules and conventions, or use common materials or ideas in new, clever and surprising ways | |
| Value | The product is seen as useful and valuable; it solves the defined problem or meets the identified need<br><br>The product is practical and feasible | |
| Style | The product is well-crafted, striking, designed with a distinct style but still appropriate for the purpose<br><br>The product combines different elements into a coherent whole | |
| Reflection | The student uses appropriate vocabulary and principles to describe the work and the process of developing and creating the work or product<br><br>The student evaluates the work using emotional response as well as cultural information and art practice conventions | |

## Written Communication/Reflection Note Taking Rubric

| Scoring Domain | Indicator | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| Metacognition/ Growth | Explains the learning processes and degree of effectiveness that he/she utilized | |
| | Recognizes and discusses his/her growth, accomplishments, and successes | |
| | Honestly acknowledges areas where future growth and/or cognitive growth and development are needed and discusses a concrete plan/strategy to manage their needs | |
| Connections | Clearly connects and applies learning from one area of study or point of view to another | |
| | Thoroughly demonstrates evidence of the use and application of at least one of the Graduate Profile skills | |
| | Explains how learning from this project/assignment/ artifact helps him/her to understand the world in a new way | |
| Analysis | Explains how the learning experience has developed that ability for him/her to think like an expert in specific discipline (like a scientist, a researcher, an artist, etc.) | |
| | Provides appropriate and consistent evidence to support an argument/thesis about him/herself as a learner | |
| Organization | Ideas are developed and logically sequenced so that the audience can follow the thread throughout the entire defense | |
| | Transitions connect ideas | |
| Language Use | Demonstrates varied syntax and effective word choice | |
| | Language and tone are appropriate to the purpose and audience | |
| | Is generally free of distracting errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics | |

## PUSD Oral Communication/Presentation Note Taking Rubric

| Scoring Domain | Indicator | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| Explanation of Ideas & Information (Through a Reflective Lens) | Presents information, findings, arguments and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically; audience can follow the line of reasoning<br><br>Selects information, develops ideas and uses a style appropriate to the purpose, task, and audience<br><br>***Addresses alternative or opposing perspectives (IF APPLICABLE)*** | |
| Organization | Meets all requirements** for what should be included in the presentation<br><br>• Research<br><br>• Creativity and Innovation<br><br>• Reflection<br><br>Has a clear introduction and conclusion<br><br>Organizes time well; no part of the presentation is too short or too long | |
| Eyes & Body | Keeps eye contact with audience most of the time; only glances at notes or slides<br><br>Looks poised and confident<br><br>Wears clothing appropriate for the occasion | |
| Voice | Speaks clearly; not too quickly or slowly<br><br>Speaks loudly enough for everyone to hear; changes tone and pace to maintain interest<br><br>Rarely uses filler words ("uh, um, so, and, like, etc.")<br><br>Demonstrates command of formal English | |
| Presentation Aids | Uses audio/visual aids or media to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence, and to add interest<br><br>Seamlessly includes audio/visual aids or media into the presentation | |
| Response to Audience Questions | Answers audience questions clearly<br><br>Seeks clarification, admits "I don't know" or explains how the answer might be found when unable to answer a question. | |

## PUSD Re-Submit Form

Student has not met criteria described in the PUSD Oral Communication/Presentation Rubric and will need to re-present.

WOWs from the panel:

<div style="border:1px solid #000; height:400px;"></div>

Wonders from the panel:

<div style="border:1px solid #000; height:400px;"></div>

Specific Feedback:

<div style="border:1px solid #000; height:300px;"></div>

Next Steps: (What will the student need to do in order to be ready to re-present? What steps should the student take between now and then?)

**PLEASE READ TO STUDENT:**

*As a panel we believe we have not seen your best work yet. Please resubmit with the following things in mind:*

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

# Endnotes

1.  Name changed to respect the confidentiality of the student.

2.  International Baccalaureate—or "IB"—is a rigorous program of study hosted in schools across the world, including Blair High School in Pasadena Unified. For a school to have an official IB program, it must be authorized by IB for sufficiently meeting the requirements of an IB program, such as requiring students to complete an extended essay and complete coursework related to the "theory of knowledge."

3.  Site visit at Blair High School (2018, October 12).

4.  Pasadena Unified School District. (n.d.). General district information. https://www.pusd.us/Page/299 (accessed 11/26/18).

5.  Rice, E., & Rutherford-Quach, S. (2012). *Linked Learning in Pasadena: Creating a collaborative culture for sustainable district reform*. Linked Learning Case Study Series. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

6.  Rice, E., & Rutherford-Quach, S. (2012). *Linked Learning in Pasadena: Creating a collaborative culture for sustainable district reform*. Linked Learning Case Study Series. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

7.  United States Census Bureau. (2017). QuickFacts Pasadena city, California. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/pasadenacitycalifornia.

8.  Linked Learning. (n.d.). Linked Learning case study: Pasadena Unified School District. http://www.linkedlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Linked_Learning_Pasadena_USD_Case_Study.pdf.

9.  California Department of Education. (2013, May 7). California Partnership Academies. (Excel worksheet). Sacramento, CA: Author. https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/documents/cpadirectory.xls.

10. EdSource. (2009). *Multiple pathways in California: An emerging option for high school reform*. Mountain View, CA: Author.

11. California Department of Education. (2011, October). Profile of the California Partnership Academies. https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/cpareport09.asp.

12. California Department of Education. (2013, May 7). California Partnership Academies. (Excel worksheet). https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/documents/cpadirectory.xls.

13. Personal phone conversation with Marisa Sarian, PUSD Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, and Kristina Turley-Payne, PUSD College and Career Pathways Coordinator (2018, November 30).

14. Rice, E., & Rutherford-Quach, S. (2012). *Linked Learning in Pasadena: Creating a collaborative culture for sustainable district reform*. Linked Learning Case Study Series. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

15. Los Angeles Unified School District. (n.d.) What is Linked Learning? https://achieve.lausd.net/linkedlearning.

16. DataQuest reports, 2007–08 and 2017–18, from California Department of Education.

17. McKenna, B. (2012, May 15). A tale of two districts: How Linked Learning is helping two school districts improve student learning. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/news/articles/597; DataQuest reports, 2017–18, from California Department of Education; Rice, E., & Rutherford-Quach, S. (2012). *Linked Learning in Pasadena: Creating a collaborative culture for sustainable district reform*. Linked Learning Case Study Series. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

18. Rice, E., & Rutherford-Quach, S. (2012). *Linked Learning in Pasadena: Creating a collaborative culture for sustainable district reform*. Linked Learning Case Study Series. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

19. Personal phone conversation with Marisa Sarian, PUSD Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services (2017, January 31); *Pasadena News Now.* (2018, February 16). Pasadena Unified hosts town hall meetings on graduation requirements. *Pasadena News Now.* http://www.pasadenanow.com/main/pasadena-unified-hosts-town-hall-meetings-on-graduation-requirements/#.W_xkUS2ZMWp.

20. Personal phone conversation with Marisa Sarian, PUSD Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services (2017, January 31).

21. Hopkinson, A. (2017, April 12). High schools turning to student portfolios to assess academic progress [Blog post]. Retrieved from EdSource. https://edsource.org/2017/high-schools-turning-to-student-portfolios-to-assess-academic-progress/580147.

22. Sarian, M., & Valadez-Paez, S. (2017). PUSD graduate portfolio & defense [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from http://www.linkedlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/PUSD-Graduate-Portfolio-Defense.pdf.

23. Pasadena Unified School District Board of Education. (2014, November 20). Board meeting notes. http://pusd.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=15&clip_id=522&meta_id=82574.

24. KLRN Pasadena. PUSD Graduation Requirements Town Hall. (Video). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHnzegGrk8U.

25. Site visit at Blair High School (2018, October 12).

26. Personal phone conversation with Marisa Sarian, PUSD Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, and Kristina Turley-Payne, PUSD College and Career Pathways Coordinator (2018, November 30).

27. Pasadena Unified School District. (2018). *Orientation to High School Handbook 2018–2019*. Pasadena, CA: Author.

28. Personal phone conversation with Marisa Sarian, PUSD Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, and Kristina Turley-Payne, PUSD College and Career Pathways Coordinator (2018, November 30).

29. Sarian, M., & Valadez-Paez, S. (2017). PUSD graduate portfolio & defense [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from http://www.linkedlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/PUSD-Graduate-Portfolio-Defense.pdf.

30. Personal phone conversation with Marisa Sarian, PUSD Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, and Kristina Turley-Payne, PUSD College and Career Pathways Coordinator (2018, November 30).

31. Pasadena Unified School District. (2018). *Orientation to High School Handbook 2018–2019*. Pasadena, CA: Author.

32. Darling-Hammond, L. (2014). *Next Generation Assessment: Moving Beyond the Bubble Test to Support 21st Century Learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

33. Personal phone conversation with Marisa Sarian, PUSD Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services (2017, January 31).

34. Site visit at Blair High School (2018, October 12).

35. Personal phone conversation with Marisa Sarian, PUSD Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, and Kristina Turley-Payne, PUSD College and Career Pathways Coordinator (2018, November 30).

36. Personal phone conversation with Marisa Sarian, PUSD Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, and Kristina Turley-Payne, College and Career Pathways Coordinator (2018, November 30).

37. Center for Collaborative Education. (2012). *Quality performance assessment: A guide for schools and districts*. Boston, MA: Author.

38. Personal phone conversation with Marisa Sarian, PUSD Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, and Kristina Turley-Payne, PUSD College and Career Pathways Coordinator (2018, November 30).

39. Site visit at Blair High School (2018, October 12).

40. Site visit at Blair High School (2018, October 12).

41. Learning Policy Institute. (November 2017). *California Performance Assessment Collaborative CPAC newsletter*. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/CPAC_Newsletter_Nov2017_v2.pdf.

42. Site visit at Blair High School (2018, October 12).

43. Personal phone conversation with Marisa Sarian, PUSD Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, and Kristina Turley-Payne, PUSD College and Career Pathways Coordinator (2018, November 30); Pasadena Unified School District. (2017). *Local Control Accountability Plan and Annual Update (LCAP) template*. https://www.pusd.us/cms/lib/CA01901115/Centricity/domain/1277/lcap-lcff%20files/PUSD%20LCAP%202017-18%20FINAL%206.30.17.pdf.

44. All 141 students who completed their defense presentations in October 2018 were asked to complete a survey about their experience. A total of 82 students completed the survey, for a response rate of 58%. The students in this sample came from three high schools in the district (Blair High School, Marshall Fundamental High School, and Pasadena High School). The majority of the survey respondents (65%) were students at Blair High School, where the pass rate for the student defense was the highest in October 2018. Thus, these findings may be slightly biased in that students who were more prepared for the defense process may have been more likely to choose to defend early in the year, and therefore may have more positive feelings about the experience. Accordingly, the survey responses are presented as preliminary, but inconclusive, findings about student experiences with PUSD's portfolio/defense model in 2018–19. More conclusive findings can be made after the remainder of the 12th graders in the district have completed their defense presentations and taken the survey.

45. Personal phone conversation with Marisa Sarian, PUSD Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services (2017, January 31).

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