



POSITIVE OUTLIERS SERIES

Clovis Unified School District

Positive Outliers Case Study

Joan E. Talbert and Dion Burns

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Executive Summary

Clovis Unified School District (USD) serves about 43,000 students in a city just northeast of Fresno. The district is diverse, serving sizeable groups of Latino/a and Hmong students, and 40% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The district's proportion of English learners is below the state average, but students are linguistically diverse, coming from families who speak Spanish, Hmong, Punjabi, or Arabic at home.

Clovis USD is one of seven districts studied by researchers at the Learning Policy Institute in a mixed-methods study that sought to learn from positive outlier districts in which African American, Latino/a, and White students all 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 complements the research series by describing the critical practices and policies within Clovis 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 an analysis of interview, documentary, and observational evidence, this case study describes the key factors that helped support student success in Clovis USD:

1. Clovis USD has a distinctive culture that operates based on a set of shared core principles.

The district's culture took root during the 30-year tenure of superintendent Dr. Floyd Buchanan (1960–91), known as Doc. Cultural themes and slogans are embodied in “Doc’s Charge,” a document he wrote at the time of his retirement that describes the core principles that shape how the district operates today. One of these principles is that friendly competition is the key to high standards, an idea that is embodied in Clovis USD’s design: the district is divided into five areas composed of a high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools. Each area identifies with the mascot of its high school, fostering both a “family” loyalty and competitive spirit among the areas. Other core principles include giving every child an equitable chance to learn, surrounding children with strong educators, and building teamwork and trust. During his tenure as superintendent, Doc Buchanan also established structures and opportunities for parents to become engaged in the district that continue to foster a culture of community involvement to this day.

2. Clovis USD’s thorough approach to hiring staff and its supportive school culture help it hire and retain a high-quality teaching workforce.

The district has an intense hiring process that takes place at the school, area, and district levels. Candidates typically interview with the school principal, a school-based panel, the area superintendent, and the district superintendent, and some come in and teach a lesson to a class so that their abilities as a teacher can be evaluated. In addition to teaching abilities, Clovis USD evaluates a teacher’s affinity for working with students, disposition and ability to work as part of a team, and commitment to addressing his or her students’ social and emotional learning needs. Clovis USD has been successful at retaining its teachers—it has a lower attrition rate than the state average and has not experienced the extent of teacher shortages that other districts have. School administrators and senior staff said that Clovis is regarded as an attractive place to teach, and open positions typically draw many applicants. Average teaching salaries in

neighboring districts are higher than those in Clovis, so salaries did not appear to be the primary driver. Instead, many attributed the high teacher retention to a supportive teaching culture and initiatives that nurture and recruit future teachers.

3. Clovis USD fashioned its own path to the creation of curricular resources, instructional strategies, and assessments to align with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

In part due to initial community resistance to the shift to CCSS, Clovis USD decided to develop its own CCSS-aligned materials. The district assembled teams of teachers that deconstructed the new state standards, identified essential standards, developed curricular units for teachers, and created benchmark assessments to match these curricular expectations. The process of curriculum piloting and adoption highlights the district's commitment to finding materials that both align with CCSS content and meet the expectations of all sectors of the community. The new standards and state tests led to a shift in instruction to a more student-centered pedagogy. They also impacted assessments—Clovis USD administers the statewide Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) assessments for tested grades in addition to its own assessments in untested grades and interim assessments during the school year. The district also uses its own comprehensive school evaluation system—the Clovis Assessment System for Sustained Improvement, or CLASSI—for both evaluative and diagnostic functions and to promote a culture of friendly competition that it believes has driven school improvement.

4. Building teachers' instructional capacity has been an important element in Clovis USD's adaptation to CCSS.

While the district required schools to adopt common CCSS-aligned math and language arts programs, it provided wide latitude to areas and schools to pursue their own professional learning initiatives. During the transition to CCSS, the district's Curriculum and Instruction Department supported schools and areas by undertaking research into learning needs, seeking out capable providers of professional learning, and providing that training to interested teachers and schools. At the school level, professional learning communities (PLCs) were a primary vehicle for teacher learning. Examples of district-led professional learning initiatives include Math Camp, a program that educators described as impactful in shifting instructional practice and improving equity in mathematics achievement, and Reading Apprenticeship training, a program that encourages literacy development by addressing multiple dimensions of reading. Professional learning initiatives have also been launched at the area level through meetings between principals and their area superintendents, and some schools have also initiated their own professional learning practices.

5. Clovis USD has a strong commitment to equity and supporting the social, emotional, and academic development of every child.

While shifting to the deeper learning involved in the new state standards, the district emphasized that the goal was success for every student, but it allowed the areas and schools autonomy to decide how to achieve that. During the early years of CCSS implementation, the district held each area and school accountable for meeting their students' needs and provided resources and supports based on each school's student population and eligibility for categorical funds and specific district programs. This is an example of how area autonomy coupled with accountability generated an allocation of resources based on the needs of particular student

populations. The district funded several district-coordinated programs and strategies for supporting students' academic and social-emotional development. Clovis USD has structures in place to support English learners and to identify students who are struggling and diagnose their needs. The district also tasked each school with creating its own tiered system of interventions for integrating academic, behavioral, and emotional supports for students.

6. Continuous improvement in Clovis USD is a balancing act between competition and collaboration and between autonomy and accountability.

The district's engine for continuous improvement is a synergy between *autonomy* of areas and schools to address local needs, *competition and collaboration* to support high standards and shared learning, and *accountability* to push continuous improvement at all district levels. Competition is seen as an engine for education improvement and an opportunity for collaboration among teachers and schools. The emphasis on autonomy could be a formula for highly uneven results across the district's areas and schools, but instead we found strong systemwide progress on meeting CCSS and other measures of student success. The productive balance between autonomy and accountability in Clovis USD is rooted in trust and mutual respect between system levels, as well as in regular communication. The district's continuous improvement has also been supported by a stable and loyal cadre of teachers and administrators who are committed to their students and community.

Understanding Clovis USD's extraordinary success on the new state assessments requires attention to both the district's unique culture and its specific approaches to supporting student learning, particularly among students of color. The district's core values demonstrate its commitment to high standards, to competition as a motivator of individual and team effort and driver of success, and to providing every student a fair chance to succeed.

Introduction

Over the past decade, Clovis Unified School District (USD) has shown substantial growth in student achievement,¹ and recent research shows that African American, Latino/a, and White students all did better than predicted based on state test scores from 2015 through 2017.² These results are particularly noteworthy because this medium-size district has a socioeconomically, ethnically, and linguistically diverse student population. Moreover, these students have performed at higher-than-predicted levels on state assessments at a time when the state switched to the challenging Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This is a significant achievement.

CCSS is intended to prepare students to thrive in a rapidly changing workforce and society. The standards call for a new approach to teaching, one that shifts the emphasis of learning from memorization and recall and the application of basic skills toward more advanced skills of collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and deeper content learning.

This case study describes the key policies and processes in Clovis USD that support teaching and learning and that address achievement gaps between student racial/ethnic groups. It is part of a larger quantitative study of district performance in California³ and part of a larger qualitative study that examines trends across seven case studies of districts, such as Clovis Unified, that are doing better than predicted on assessments aligned to CCSS.⁴ We call these districts “positive outliers.” For more information about the case study methods, see Appendix B.

We begin by describing the district’s structure and unique context, in particular the set of closely held values that frame decision-making. We then describe policies and practices that appear to underpin Clovis USD’s success helping all students—including students of color—meet the state’s standards. We focus on its approaches to developing a high-quality teaching force, shifting instruction toward CCSS, using assessments and data to inform decisions, supporting students at risk of falling behind, and leveraging continuous improvement.

District Characteristics

Clovis is located in California’s Fresno County, just northeast of the city of Fresno. Its population of approximately 100,000 has grown steadily in recent decades, spurred by new housing developments. Health care and education are the biggest sectors of employment, and unlike surrounding towns, agriculture is a negligible source of employment. The city’s median income is comparable to the state average but considerably higher than in Fresno and neighboring towns.⁵

Clovis USD is a midsize district of about 43,000 students. With the city’s population growth, district enrollment increased more than 55% from 1993–94 to 2016–17.⁶ Student demographics also shifted during that time: Non-Hispanic White students became a minority, decreasing from 67% to 41% of student enrollment, while the percentage of those identifying as Hispanic or Latino/a doubled, from 18% to 37%. There is also a sizeable Hmong student population (about 14% of district enrollment), primarily in the eastern part of the district.⁷ Between 2009–10 and 2016–17, the proportion of Clovis USD students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch increased from 35% to 40%.⁸ Over the span of a generation, Clovis USD shifted from being a majority White, middle-class school district to a majority non-White district with a higher poverty rate.

The district's proportion of English learners has been about 6%, which is below the state average. Yet these students are linguistically diverse, coming from families who speak Spanish, Hmong, Punjabi, or Arabic at home.

Although the district is diverse, its proportion of disadvantaged students was not high enough in 2016–17 to qualify for a concentration grant under the state Local Control Funding Formula.⁹ Clovis USD's 2017 unduplicated pupil count of English learners, foster youth, and students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch was 42% of its total enrollment, which is below the state's threshold of 55% to qualify for the concentration grant. Many other large districts in the county have higher percentages of disadvantaged students and do qualify for this grant, such as Fresno Unified (88%) and Central Unified (67%).

District Organization

Clovis USD is divided into five “areas,” each centered on one of the five main high schools in the district: Buchanan, Clovis East, Clovis High, Clovis North, and Clovis West. Each of the five high schools has an associated intermediate school (grades 7–8), and each of these has several “feeder” elementary schools serving grades k–6. Each area also has its own area superintendent, to whom principals report and who in turn reports to the district superintendent. Thus, the areas serve as smaller “mini-districts” within Clovis USD, each serving a particular residential area.

The district's high schools each have their own mascot (e.g., Clovis East Timberwolves, Clovis High Cougars), and students and staff alike identify as such (e.g., as members of the “wolf pack”). Likewise, students in the associated intermediate and elementary schools are encouraged to identify with the high school mascot; e.g., as “future Cougars.” As we elaborate in the subsequent pages, this has important consequences for the development of community, area, and school culture that fosters both a “family” loyalty and competitive spirit that drive educational improvement in the district. As Assistant Superintendent Debbie Parra commented:

If somebody's going to Clovis High School, they will have gone through Clark [Intermediate] and then one of the eight elementary schools that feeds our area. So, they grow up wanting to be a Cougar. In other areas they grow up wanting to be Timberwolves [or] Eagles or Broncos or Bears.... They start wearing their gear when they're young.

Demographic differences among the district's areas are shown in Table 1. The two areas in the north part of the city—Buchanan and Clovis North—are more affluent than the other three.¹⁰ This has implications for the way Clovis USD seeks to differentiate its support services across the district. We describe some of these efforts in later sections.

Table 1
Clovis High Schools' Demographics, 2016–17

School	Buchanan High	Clovis East High	Clovis High	Clovis North High	Clovis West High
Mascot	 Bears	 Timberwolves	 Cougars	 Broncos	 Eagles
Population	2,699	2,335	2,902	2,487	2,096
African American	2.6%	2.8%	2.2%	3.1%	5.2%
Asian	11.9%	26.0%	8.8%	15.5%	8.3%
Filipino	2.2%	3.7%	1.4%	3.6%	2.1%
Hispanic or Latino/a	27.3%	39.0%	37.2%	23.5%	40.9%
Native American/ Alaskan	0.7%	0.8%	1.1%	0.3%	0.7%
Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%	0.5%
Two or more races	2.9%	1.6%	2.7%	3.0%	2.7%
White	52.1%	26.0%	46.3%	50.8%	39.7%
English learners	1.6%	5.3%	1.8%	1.8%	2.2%
Free and reduced-price meals	27.2%	49.7%	42.9%	18.4%	39.4%

Source: California Department of Education. (2017). DataQuest: 2016–17 enrollment by ethnicity and grade. <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>; Education Data Partnership. (n.d.). Ed-Data district summary: Clovis Unified. <http://www.ed-data.org/district/Fresno/Clovis-Unified> (accessed 07/30/19).

Educational Outcomes

Despite the gradual increase in the proportion of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, Clovis USD has shown steady gains in student achievement on state assessments. Under the previous California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) assessment system, the district had growing proportions of students performing at proficient or advanced levels. From 2007 to 2013, percentages of proficient and advanced students grew from 62% to 74% in English language arts and from 60% to 69% in mathematics.¹¹

Clovis USD's steady improvement has continued since 2014, when California changed to the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), aligned to the new CCSS.¹² Clovis USD has seen substantial growth in the proportion of students meeting or exceeding state standards in both English language arts and mathematics. (See Appendix A.) That growth has been substantial for economically disadvantaged students and for each racial or ethnic group. Furthermore, although initial growth in achievement among the district's African American students was offset by slight declines for this group in 2017, their CAASPP scores significantly exceed the state average for African American students in both mathematics and English language arts each year.

Historical Context

Clovis USD has a distinctive culture that took root during the 30-year tenure of superintendent Dr. Floyd Buchanan (1960–91), known as Doc. Cultural themes and slogans are embodied in “Doc’s Charge,” a document he wrote at the time of his retirement to capture the messages he had used for decades when interviewing prospective district educators. (See Appendix C.) To this day, framed copies of the document hang in schools and office buildings, and district leaders and teachers refer to “Doc’s Charge” when talking about any one of the district’s core principles. In essence, “Doc’s Charge” describes the culture of the district and the core principles that shape how the district operates today.

Competition as the key to high standards

“Doc’s Charge” framed three levels of competition: (1) competing against oneself, (2) competing in a specialty area to build strengths, and (3) learning to work and compete in groups. His message, directed at potential new district hires, describes his philosophy for supporting student success. But educators in Clovis USD today have long applied those principles to their own work and view these principles of competition as key to continuous improvement in the district.

Clovis leaders explained how the five areas compete against standards for system performance in three domains: student achievement and equity; school effectiveness in management, parent involvement, and co-curricular activities; and self-review and district review of school practices. As described later, school and area scores are based on an elaborate scoring system: the Clovis Assessment System for Sustained Improvement (CLASSI).

Doc’s mantra to nurture “mind, body, and spirit” is embodied in these standards for assessing student and school success. Competition based on the standards and award ceremonies is part of school life in Clovis USD and is celebrated with the parent community.

A fair break for every kid

“Doc’s Charge” emphasizes providing “a fair break for every kid.” To Clovis USD educators, this has meant that every child should receive an equitable chance to learn. The district and individual schools have an extensive system of academic and social-emotional interventions to support struggling students. These interventions take place in the classroom, after school, and during the summer.

Surround children with winners

“Doc’s Charge” aims to ensure that teacher candidates share the district’s values and are motivated to do their very best for Clovis USD students. He said that he wanted to “surround children with winners” and searched for teachers who could serve as role models. Doc Buchanan established an intensive hiring process that continues and is aimed at ensuring that candidates are a good match for their schools and for the district culture.

Education revolves around teamwork and trust

This final message from “Doc’s Charge” conveyed that “education revolves around teamwork and trust,” and he told his new hires, “We want you on our team, and we want to know that you want to be there.” Analysis of interviews and documents from Clovis showed that Clovis educators value and support teacher teamwork. In particular, educators described the importance of their professional learning communities (PLCs), in which teachers discuss how to improve student learning. PLCs were created in every school more than a decade ago.

Clovis USD educators interpret “Doc’s Charge” as calling for collaboration, clear communication, and mutual respect at each level of the district system. Educators and leaders we interviewed said these values are ingrained in the district’s culture and are a major reason for its success. The district provides schools with autonomy to select programs and practices and manage their own budgets. School leaders found that when they fell short of meeting district standards, rather than face sanctions, they were able to collaborate with area or district administrators in deciding how to improve. Area leaders reported a similar experience in their interactions with district leaders.

All the administrators and educators we interviewed described a district culture that provides schools, areas, and teachers with professional autonomy and, at the same time, encourages friendly competition and collaboration between them. They also described how the central office and area offices effectively provide both accountability and support. In their view, all these factors, combined with a culture of trust and respect, result in extraordinary student achievement.

Clovis USD educators also said that “Doc’s Charge” established an autonomy–accountability balance that has persisted over the years. Each area serves a particular residential community and is charged with meeting the needs of its particular student population. Administrators and teachers have the authority and responsibility to create systems and practices that ensure their students’ success: They can invent and refine improvement efforts and are accountable for results. Their careers are, for the most part, anchored in one of the five areas, and each area is accountable to both the district office and its residential community for its schools’ results. Clovis educators said they believe this arrangement works to ensure equity and reduce achievement gaps across the district.

Community Engagement in Adopting Common Core State Standards

During his tenure as superintendent, Doc Buchanan established structures and opportunities for parents to become engaged in the district. By creating autonomous areas, each serving a segment of the ever-growing Clovis population, he ensured that parents would have a nearby “home” within the district. The geographic areas expanded from the original White, middle-class suburb of Fresno to include new professional enclaves and neighborhoods of immigrants speaking more than a dozen languages. With expansion, the district created new administrative areas to serve particular subcommunities. By design, community involvement and loyalty developed around each designated area high school and feeder system. With unique mascots and rivalry in sports, parents identified with their area and became part of the competition that drives engagement, innovation, and improvement in Clovis USD.

The district has a long history of encouraging parent involvement. For the past 40 years, parent surveys have contributed to the district’s school accountability system (see discussion of CLASSI in the section “Shifting Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment”). The district’s more recent efforts to involve parents came in response to two state initiatives launched during the 2010s. One, called

Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), involved parents and the community in the district's planning and budgeting process. The other was the adoption of CCSS. District leaders realized that, for students to succeed in reaching these challenging standards, parents would need to support their children's learning at home. The district would also need to overcome the opposition by some vocal parents to changes in the instructional program.

Clovis USD's shift to CCSS got off to a rocky start in 2010–11, with considerable pushback from some community members. District leaders organized several town hall meetings to educate the community about California's CCSS, and the meetings were highly contentious. One contingent called the standards "socialist" or "communist"—a response that other Central Valley districts also encountered. Another contingent formed around opposition to the mathematics standards. District leaders reported that these parents regularly quoted Dr. R. James Milgram of Stanford University from publications that opposed "reform math." The resistance quieted after a district administrator and mathematics director visited Milgram's home on Stanford's campus and obtained his written testimony that CCSS mathematics standards and instruction "would cause no damage to Clovis students." The parent community then had clear evidence that (a) district leaders had taken them seriously, and (b) the mathematics professor had given the district a green light to move ahead on CCSS.

The LCAP process for setting funding priorities under the state's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) extended and strengthened dialogue between district professionals and the public. As one district administrator commented, the LCAP meetings and the dinners with parents were, "in all my years in the district, ... one of the best things we've ever done," in part because they elicited feedback from the participants.

An LCAP dinner meeting that we observed, the district's seventh semiannual gathering intended to inform and to gain input from the community, was attended by more than 300 people. They included all five area administrators, principals and leaders from all 43 district schools, and parents who sat at tables organized by school. The meeting featured presentations about particular district initiatives as well as table discussions to identify school-specific needs, summarize supports for those needs, and elicit suggestions for improvement. One district administrator commented on the tremendous value to district improvement efforts afforded by the dinner meetings. In particular, district schools learned ways to better support students of color by asking their parents what was working and what else they would like to see in their schools.

In addition to events such as the LCAP dinner, Clovis USD engaged the community through parent advisory committees at the school and district levels. District leaders also said that the District Advisory Committee provided parent and community input to the district and that school and district Intercultural Diversity Advisory Councils assisted the district in developing cultural competencies. To address the needs of particular student groups, Clovis established school English Learner Advisory Committees and a District English Learner Advisory Council to inform and receive input from parents of English learners, a Title VII committee to support the district's Native American students, and a District Migrant Education Parent Advisory Committee. In addition, each school used its site council and other ways of bringing parents into the school community. District leaders said these many opportunities for parent involvement ensured that Clovis USD had regular dialogue with parents and, in particular, received parents' input on ways the district, areas, and schools could best serve the needs of all students.

Building Human Capital

Clovis USD’s focus on hiring and retaining a high-quality teaching workforce is a key factor in its success. The district has a unique and thorough approach to hiring staff, which stems from traditions and practices established by founding Superintendent Doc Buchanan and the principles embodied in “Doc’s Charge.” Despite lower average salaries than in neighboring districts, Clovis is able to maintain a steady supply of teachers through the creation of a positive school culture and programs that support teacher learning and success with their students.

An Intense Hiring Process

We’ve learned an interesting thing—if you really want to develop winners you’ve got to surround children with winners. And a lot of people think you are a winner or you wouldn’t be sitting here. Nobody gets this far without being recommended by a building administrator. And that administrator’s reputation is on the line because he or she has recommended you and hopes you reciprocate a little bit by trying to make his or her judgment look good.

—“Doc’s Charge”

The first of these traditions is that Superintendent Buchanan was reported to have interviewed and hired all teachers himself. During the time of this case study, the superintendent played a role in hiring teachers, but Doc Buchanan’s system had been modified to reflect the way the district had been divided into areas. The hiring process now takes place at the school, area, and district levels, with between four and seven interviews per candidate. A teacher candidate is first interviewed by the school principal and, typically, a school-based panel that includes teachers. Depending on the school, candidates may complete one to several interviews in the first round. An applicant recommended for hire is then accompanied by the principal to meet with the area superintendent for a subsequent screening. If the candidate is successful at this phase, the area superintendent in turn then takes the applicant for a final interview with the superintendent. If the candidate is successful here, the district superintendent will offer him or her a contract.

Principals with whom we spoke assured us that these higher-level interviews were more than a pro forma exercise, with several recalling instances in which candidates recommended at the school level were not accepted for hire by the area or district superintendent. Principals said that recommending a candidate for hire was regarded as vouching for his or her suitability for teaching, and doing so effectively put one’s own reputation on the line in the eyes of superiors. This served as a strong incentive for principals and area superintendents to be thorough and judicious in their hiring recommendations. As one school administrator noted:

We truly do take our time. They really do have that many interviews at Clovis.... It’s ingrained in us: The most important thing you do as an administrator is hire, because that is the person that’s on the front line with our kids.

The principal of Fancher Creek Elementary School in the Clovis East Area, the lowest socioeconomic part of town, described the importance of a rigorous hiring process to ensure that teachers not use the school as a “stepping stone” and create high staff turnover. Potential candidates’ resumes are

screened, with a small number selected for a school interview with a panel that includes current teachers. Panel members are encouraged not to discuss the interview immediately, but to write notes, including any questions, concerns, or hesitations. Secondary interviews are conducted with shortlisted candidates to impress upon them the specific context and culture of the school. Principal Erin Parker described how the school avoids the high teacher turnover typical of high-poverty schools:

And then I call them in ... and I really have an honest conversation with them and explain what it means to be a Fancher Creek Falcon. I explain what their role is and how they're critical. Our kids need people. They need role models. They need somebody that's going to be a constant in their life. And if you're just coming to get into the district, I need you to be honest with me now, and I'll help you find another way into the district, but that's not here.

Candidates are then scheduled to come in and teach a lesson to a class so that their abilities as a teacher can be evaluated. New teachers at Fancher Creek will have passed through five interview phases before being offered a contract.

Clovis educators described a second hiring principle—not just finding good teachers, but finding the right people. Principals and senior staff with whom we spoke indicated that a teacher's affinity for working with students and his or her disposition and ability to work as part of a team are important qualities. This also emanated from "Doc's Charge": "We're concerned about your appearance, your attitude, your teaching skills, your ability to work with students, but most of all we're concerned about your character and your values."

The school leaders we interviewed interpreted this to mean that all teachers must also be committed to addressing their students' social and emotional learning needs. Clovis High's principal credited this aspect of hiring with facilitating teachers' transition to CCSS and the more in-depth learning that involves greater student voice and discussion in class:

Part of the reason why kids are more willing to discuss is that we hire people that kids feel are approachable, people that are nurturing and create that risk-free environment. You could go through the hall and any classroom we have here, and you'll see those same characteristics among our staff, so I think just [the] nature of who we hire supports the work that they do.

Clovis USD's site-based leadership model places a premium on "entrepreneurial spirit" as a criterion for administrator recruitment and advancement. School and area administrators are expected to generate their own initiatives to promote student learning as well as to proactively seek out and emulate the practices of other areas that are experiencing success. A district administrator described the deep roots that entrepreneurship has in district culture:

Doc was an entrepreneur. He was somebody who really thought about education and about leadership and accountability very differently than [other administrators], at least here in the Central Valley. I think he hired people who sort of had that same gene, whether it was a coach, whether it was a site principal. So I do think when we go through a pretty extensive interview process—when we go and hire people—we're not looking for robots who can just simply stand and deliver curriculum or simply be a great manager at a school site. We're looking for people that really care about the kids.

But also realize that this is a tough job, educating students. It's a tough job, being a site leader, and we will do anything we can do to create a system where kids can be successful. That's the kind of people we interview [to become principals]. If they don't have that work ethic or entrepreneur spirit to them, it can be a challenge.

Attracting and Retaining Teachers

Despite rigorous hiring standards and a growing student population, Clovis USD has not experienced the extent of teacher shortages that other districts have. An exception, however, is special education, for which there is a substantial need for more teachers in the district and across the state. Out of the 284 full-time equivalent teachers hired in 2016–17, the number of temporary teaching credentials was 64, and nearly half of these were for special education.¹³

School administrators and senior staff said that Clovis is regarded as an attractive place to teach, and open positions typically draw many applicants. In 2017–18, salaries did not appear to be the primary driver, with average teaching salaries in neighboring districts higher than those in Clovis. (See Table 2.) Administrators cited differences in student population as a factor in salary differentials. Clovis USD did not receive concentration funds under LCFF in 2017–18,¹⁴ in contrast to neighboring districts.

Table 2
Average Teaching Salaries in Clovis and Neighboring Districts, 2017–18

Teacher Experience and Graduate Units	Clovis	Fresno	Percentage Difference	Central	Percentage Difference	Sanger	Percentage Difference
1 yr + 30 units	\$45,273	\$47,893	6%	\$47,182	4%	\$48,778	8%
6 yrs + 45 units	\$55,108	\$64,159	16%	\$58,366	6%	\$57,616	5%
10 yrs + 60 units	\$64,773	N/A	N/A	\$68,110	5%	\$66,932	3%
15 yrs + 75 units	\$78,753	\$86,859	10%	\$79,955	2%	\$79,683	1%

Note: The “Percentage Difference” columns calculate how much lower Clovis teacher salaries are relative to those in each of the comparison districts.

Data source: Negotiated teacher salary agreements as listed on district websites.

Several people we talked to ascribed the interest in teaching in Clovis to the systems in place that support teachers and the culture of high performance. Clovis High’s principal said:

People want a place to belong and a place to feel valued in the work that they’re doing. I feel like Clovis Unified very much does that: gives you a place to belong. They value their people, they value the resources that the community has to offer, and [they use] those.

Creating a supportive teaching culture

Teachers we interviewed reported a strong identification with their school and area and voiced a commitment to educational improvement for their students. A contributing factor is the substantial number of teachers who are from Clovis. District office staff estimated that about 40% to 50% of

teaching staff had themselves been students in Clovis schools. Speaking with teachers and administrators, we learned that many still identify with the area schools they had attended (e.g., “I’m a Timberwolf”).

Moreover, and almost without exception, school and district administrators have long careers in the district, rising through the ranks. School principals typically had been Clovis USD teachers; area superintendents had been principals; and senior district office administrators had been area superintendents. Administrators are thus steeped in the culture of the district and are highly regarded as educators by teachers.

Notably, Clovis USD teachers do not have a bargaining unit and negotiate with their area and district administrators through committee meetings. Each school has a “faculty senator,” a representative who attends Faculty Senate meetings at area and district levels, a mechanism through which policy issues are addressed. Several district administrators said that this creates an environment in which administrators listen to teachers. These administrators also said that these meetings are essential to keeping the district non-union.

Administrators told us that the Faculty Senate structure helped avoid an “us versus them” mentality between teachers and administrators. Reyburn Intermediate’s deputy principal described this as a factor encouraging dialogue and fostering a working relationship. District leaders were better able to understand problems that teachers were encountering with district policies or practices and to arrive at mutually agreeable solutions.

Teachers also said they felt supported by school and district systems in providing academic and social-emotional support to struggling students. With these supports in place, teachers said that they were more able to focus on teaching than on addressing students’ nonacademic needs. In the past 4 years, the district has invested significantly in creating transition teams to help high-need students adjust as they transition from elementary to intermediate school and from intermediate school to high school. There are also structures and supports for students dealing with emotional or behavioral issues. (See the section titled “Student Support: All Means ALL.”)

Fostering future teachers

Clovis USD has developed several initiatives to nurture and recruit future Clovis teachers. Among the Career Technical Education programs in the district, all five high schools offer an education pathway. For example, students from Clovis High School in the Careers with Children pathway are placed in internships in elementary schools and attend training sessions at the Clovis USD professional learning center.

The district also develops the teaching skills of instructional aides who work in its after-school program, Campus Club, and in its preschool. At the time of our observations, Campus Club employed about 300 people, and the preschool employed another 150. Most of these aides were college students, and according to district leaders about half were interested in becoming credentialed teachers in Clovis USD. District leaders said that providing training to these staff not only bolsters the academic side of the programs but also strengthens a cadre of classified staff who are potential teachers in the district.

Shifting Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

With the advent of CCSS in Clovis USD, district officials said they needed to rethink instruction. The standards required a new curriculum, instructional materials, significant change in teaching practices, and revised assessments. Owing in part to initial community resistance to CCSS, Clovis fashioned its own path to the creation of curricular resources, instructional strategies, and assessments. This process served as a form of professional development and as a way of spreading knowledge of CCSS among teachers and increasing their readiness to learn new instructional practices.

Developing CCSS-Aligned Curricula: The “Clovis Way”

Clovis USD’s transition to CCSS began with the development of the district’s own curriculum guides for teachers over the 2-year period from 2012 to 2014. As noted earlier, CCSS was unpopular with some vocal Clovis constituents, and their resistance slowed the process of adopting CCSS-aligned curriculum and textbooks.

After listening to community needs and perspectives, and undertaking its own research, the district decided to develop its own CCSS-aligned materials. As a senior district representative explained, listening to the community and “doing what’s right for our kids” is the “Clovis Way.”

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The process of developing these materials was important to building educators’ understanding of CCSS and customizing resources for the district’s diverse student population. District leaders first looked at the released questions from the state’s new assessment system to understand the expectations for students and realized that their present materials did not require the depth of thinking that the new standards expected. According to district administrators, they did not find a publisher with materials that both provided aligned content and addressed Clovis schools’ needs to design instruction that supports their own students’ transitions to CCSS.

The district assembled teams of 120 teachers in total, drawn from every area and school and for each tested grade level. Cross-school teams first deconstructed the new state standards, identifying a small number of essential, or what they called “mastery,” standards for teachers to prioritize. They then developed a series of curricular units for teachers at each grade level that identified the “essential questions,” “big ideas,” and key skills for the unit and the standards associated with each. Each unit also contained suggested activities and teaching resources and listed performance tasks and corresponding scoring rubrics.

The compiled curriculum guides for English language arts and mathematics serve as benchmarks for what every student in Clovis should know and be able to do. Over the subsequent 3 years, teams of teachers were also charged with the development of benchmark assessments to match these curricular expectations. For this work, the district earned a 2016 Golden Bell Award from the California School Boards Association, an award for outstanding programs and practices by schools, districts, and counties in California.¹⁵

Teachers' involvement in developing the district's own materials was a significant source of professional learning about CCSS in the district. Every school had teachers on the curriculum teams who gained deep firsthand knowledge of the standards, assessments, and expectations for students. Those teachers then served as a resource for their colleagues.

District representatives said that during the rollout of the curricula, teachers who participated in the creation of materials met weekly on Wednesday afternoons with their grade-level teams to explain the rationale for the documents and the purpose of the student performance tasks. In this way, the district embedded a "teachers teaching teachers" model of professional development into its rollouts.

Despite the considerable effort and expense of developing these curriculum guides, Clovis USD moved to the adoption of commercial materials a couple of years later, in 2016–17. The process of curriculum piloting and adoption likewise highlights the district's commitment to finding materials that both align with CCSS content and meet the expectations of all sectors of the community.

To adopt the new curricula materials, the district Curriculum and Instruction Department first researched the options. Once these had been reduced to two options, the competing curricula were then piloted at several schools and in several grades. As Fancher Creek's principal explained, district leaders considered feedback from both teachers and community members as they brought together findings from the pilot to make a final decision:

Pilot teachers go to a meeting and kind of hash out the pros and cons of each [curriculum]. And then they actually vote and put in their preference.... Then the district does some more vetting with a parent community group as well as the curriculum department. And they get their feedback. And then they take it to the board and do a workshop and explain the two [options and the feedback].

Through this piloting process, Clovis recently adopted several curricula that are aligned with CCSS. In English language arts, these include the MacMillan/McGraw-Hill Treasures reading series for grades 1–5, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt series for grades 6 and 9–12, and StudySync for grades 7–8. District Curriculum and Instruction staff said that, in selecting the texts, they used a mastery standards grid to align the texts with the standards identified as priorities for Clovis.

Teachers with whom we spoke said that they maintained a focus on the district's priority of identifying "mastery standards" to guide instruction. Further, while these teachers are proud of the work their colleagues put into developing the district's own curriculum guides, these now serve largely as a reference resource. As one teacher observed:

We definitely take our own liberties as a grade level on how we want to approach these mastery standards. But they're the driving force, and the provided resources they give us, like the academic vocabulary to use, and the examples, have been very helpful and are part of our instruction.

Importantly, teachers indicated that they had flexibility in how to teach to the mastery standards, whether with a textbook, with curricular guides, or by augmenting with additional resources. As one explained, "We are trusted as teachers to do what's best for our students and use whatever resources we see fit [with] our mastery standards [as] the driving force."

Teachers also indicated that this flexibility was balanced with careful planning of curricula prior to and during the school year. At each school, teachers reviewed data to identify areas for development, such as specific mastery standards in content areas with which students in their grade-level or secondary-level course group are struggling the most.

Instruction

The move to CCSS and adoption of the new curriculum stimulated changes in instruction in Clovis USD. With competition—against oneself, others, and a standard—as a key driver in the district, the move to new state standards gave schools new targets. The change also presented instructional challenges. One elementary administrator noted that, before CCSS:

It's fair to say that, in Clovis, we got really, really, really good, particularly in math, at teaching kids the math skills they needed to get multiple choice math questions right. We got really good at that over a very long time. But we also realized, immediately, that that wasn't going to get us very far in the new assessments.

As a Clovis East administrator elaborated, the new standards and state tests required students to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the content by justifying their answers in writing: “Now the Common Core Standards is really about mastery and understanding it. So, you have to cite evidence. You have to have supportive information.” This perspective was echoed by a Clovis High teacher, who said that teachers need to try new teaching strategies and develop as teachers.

Teachers we interviewed described how instruction has changed to meet the higher demands of CCSS. At Miramonte Elementary, staff indicated that for at least 6 years before CCSS, Explicit Direct Instruction had been the dominant strategy. In this instructional mode, each lesson typically followed a format in which the teacher connected the lesson to prior knowledge, modeled a new skill, and then gave first guided and then independent practice—a cycle sometimes referred to as “I do, we do, you do.”

A Miramonte resource teacher characterized Explicit Direct Instruction as “big T” (because it was very teacher directed) and “little s” (because students were expected to quietly follow directions). The teacher was on the stage (big T) doing most of the talking, and the student was in the audience, mostly listening (little s). She described how pedagogy changed at her school in response to CCSS:

Before the shift of Common Core, [instruction was] very teacher-directed. Ninety percent of the school day, teacher, teacher, teacher, teacher talking: direct instruction, kids just working. I look at Common Core now as a “big S, little t”: very student centered, student driven. Especially in math. And not just being very, “Step one, step two, step three.” ... Teachers have had to really shift the way they conduct their day. [They have to] be able to have chaos in a classroom, and I say that because students need to talk about what they're learning, and that's going to cause noise, and that's going to cause movement.... Research shows that that's how kids learn best, ... but it also takes a teacher not being such a micromanager and being ... more the facilitator now. And I feel like that's been a huge shift.

Getting to this kind of student-centered pedagogy required teachers to change their classroom norms and structures for student interactions. For example, Miramonte teachers said they use sentence frames to encourage students to articulate and justify their reasoning, such as “What

I hear you say is ...” to help elementary students structure their dialogue and develop their communication skills. As one teacher noted, these are skills that are not solely for English language learners, but for all students:

I think, from a primary perspective, it’s not just EL, because the little kids—1st grade, kindergarten—they’re learning how to build these conversations. The things that they’re saying in 1st grade are just unbelievable. It starts with sentence starters, but now they’re actually having conversations on how they got their answer and questioning one another ... and disagreeing sometimes: “I see what you’re saying, but...” You know, those types of conversations for a 6-year-old [are] huge.

Miramonte’s staff made a commitment to introduce such CCSS-aligned communication skills into their teaching, and the teachers we interviewed said that students had become progressively more comfortable justifying their answers. A resource teacher said that at that point the only resistance was coming from high-achieving students:

I feel like the resistance that I got from the beginning and even now is not so much from my struggling students, but more my high academic students. They don’t enjoy having to justify their answers. And they struggle, actually, to put it into words. “All of this just happened in my head, Mrs. [teacher name]. Can you just kind of leave me alone and let me show that I have the right answers?”... But a lot of my EL kids and my struggling students, given the sentence starters to bring down that stress level and get them started, they enjoy the process more, I think.

Clovis USD teachers told us that adopting CCSS in mathematics led them to place greater emphasis on conceptual understanding, problem-solving, and metacognitive strategies over mathematical procedures. For example, Clovis High mathematics teachers reported using active teaching methods, such as “vertical whiteboards,” a strategy in which several problems are placed on boards around the room, and students move in small groups working together, discussing possible solutions and their reasoning.

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One Clovis High mathematics teacher said that she has students talk more in class and explain what they know as a way to build their knowledge of academic language, such as mathematics vocabulary. To practice articulating their reasoning, she has them check each other’s work and take quizzes as a group.

I gave the whole class the quiz, and each group got one of the problems, but then I’m like, “This is going to be everyone’s grade, so you guys need to go around and check and make sure everything’s right,” because there were errors. And so then kids were like, “This isn’t right,” and discussing it and as a class coming up with, “Okay, this is it. We’re set. This is what we want you to grade.”

To build their reasoning skills and perseverance, she gives them performance tasks, such as an unfamiliar type of mathematical problem that they do not yet have a set of procedures to solve. That means that they are “struggling through math a little bit” and learning “a lot more critical thinking in applying what they know in order to figure things out.”

In the upper grades, Clovis High shifted its mathematics course offerings from the traditional algebra-geometry sequence to Integrated Math I, II, and III. This sequence better captured CCSS’s expectation that, over their high school years, students should deepen their understanding of math concepts in each subfield. With the shift to CCSS, the school also added a foundation-level class aimed at developing students’ mathematical reasoning to prepare them for instruction that relies on this kind of skill.

Teachers said that engaging with parents has been an important step in changing mathematics instruction to meet the demands of CCSS. At Miramonte, the shift away from a focus on procedures and algorithms to methods less familiar to parents means that teachers need to continuously provide information on the value of the new instructional methods. As one teacher explained:

I tell the parents in parent-teacher conferences. I tell them at Back-to-School Night, too: “This is a way we’re teaching math to get their understanding. I promise you they will learn how to stack numbers [use an algorithm] eventually. It’s not that they’re never going to learn it. My job as a 2nd-grade teacher is to get them prepared for math when they become an older student—in 4th, 5th, 6th grade. I want them to be successful not just in 2nd grade. I want them to be successful in math throughout their education career. So, teaching them to understand numbers now will benefit them in the long run.”

Since adopting the new standards, this school is assigning fewer worksheets for homework and instead asking parents to do more “mental math” with their children to support the instructional emphasis on mathematical thinking at school.

Assessments

We still collect data on almost everything, and we believe it’s what should drive our instruction. It’s what drives our policies, it’s what drives our funding, it’s what drives our staffing. But at the same time, it’s also what drives us to want to be better and to learn from other people.

—Associate superintendent

Site-based leadership is the norm for many functions, but for assessment data collection and analysis, the district plays a central role. Clovis USD’s district office has two main responsibilities with regard to assessment: (1) to collect data, which means the district creates and manages a calendar of student and school assessments; and (2) to provide data analysis, with the district office conducting analyses and providing information for district, area, and school use.

Clovis USD’s rollout of the new CCSS curricula and instruction built upon its established assessment system and culture. Its tradition of digging into data, established during Doc Buchanan’s superintendency, focused heavily on student learning as measured by state tests, but also on school quality measures. With the shift to CCSS, district assessments of student learning changed, but the system and metrics for measuring school quality remained in place.

Aligning student learning assessments to CCSS

Like all California districts, Clovis USD receives data from the English language arts and mathematics Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) assessments for tested grades and dashboards by school. The district also administers year-end SBAC-like assessments in untested grades, including grades 1 and 2. In addition, as described in relation to instruction, the district developed its own SBAC-aligned interim assessments—iCAL for literacy and iCAM for mathematics. The interim assessments are administered in late fall and early spring and include items linked to English language arts and mathematics mastery standards; they were designed by the 120 Clovis teachers who, working in teams, developed the district’s grade-level instructional frameworks. In addition, teacher professional learning communities (PLCs) develop unit assessments linked to their grade-level curriculum for formative purposes.

These assessments are common across schools, and principals told us that they consider the performance of other schools to find effective instructional strategies that can be replicated. A Clovis High mathematics teacher explained why considering the performance of other schools is useful:

That’s useful because if I could look at other high schools in our district and say, “Okay, they’re taking a slightly different approach, and boy, they’re showing a lot of success with that,” then we could as a team say, “Hmm, maybe this is something we need to look at, and how does that apply to our kids?” If something’s not working somewhere, it’s also helpful to analyze that and say, “Okay, how can we improve on that information?” And that’s where the common assessments districtwide are very valuable.

Holding areas and schools accountable for progress

Clovis USD leaders view their assessment system—the Clovis Assessment System for Sustained Improvement, or CLASSI—as a key to high student achievement in the district. For decades, the district has used the ratings in this system to promote a culture of friendly competition that district leaders believe has driven school improvement. Two assessment directors explained, respectively:

This is one thing that has never left. This has been just ... part of our fabric.... When people say that Clovis Unified has high achievement, this is why. In one form or another, we have been doing this since 1970.

What’s changed and evolved in this is obviously our measurement tool. I can actually tell you when this started. It’s old. 1970. So Doc retired in ’91. Through every change in administration, whether it be Doc Buchanan to Dr. Young, and our most recent superintendent, Dr. O’Farrell, CLASSI has been a fabric of our culture and our competition model.

CLASSI is a comprehensive school evaluation system, with three components intended to measure a school’s success in helping students reach their potential in “mind, body, and spirit”—in keeping with the district’s mission and Doc Buchanan’s legacy. Although it is intended to serve both evaluative and diagnostic functions, district schools and areas also regard it as a major annual summative assessment. A school’s score on each component is compiled, and the cumulative score determines whether or not it receives an award.

The three CLASSI components, and dimensions measured for each, are:

- **Component I: Pupil Achievement Goals, Multiple Assessments, Composite Index:** Academic achievement indicators aligned with California curricular standards and the California State University entrance requirements. Includes CAASPP results for all student groups and, from 2017–18, average growth per student above expected year-to-year growth.
- **Component II: School Management, Student/Parent Involvement, Co-curricular Program Ratings:** A “Clean Campus” score based on parent ratings over the year; community involvement measures of meeting attendance and diverse representation on school assessment and review team committees;¹⁶ co-curricular and performing arts performance measures; and Character Counts! parent survey ratings for elementary and intermediate schools.
- **Component III: Site Review, Self-Study, Self-Rating:**¹⁷ Schools’ processes and practices (as opposed to outcomes), focusing on cultural competency and self-assessment on an Intercultural and Diversity Advisory Council rubric. The review includes assessment of each school’s practices relative to multicultural education, hiring for diversity, cultural competence, and issues of racial and sexual harassment.¹⁸

Each component is measured on a rubric based on a variety of data sources. These data sources in the CLASSI rubrics have remained consistent over the years, noted an assessment director, who said, “The only change on the rubric was aligning it to CAASPP... I just changed some of the wording, and I took out the high school exit exam.”

This district data system was designed to support routines for data use, such as regular meetings between district leaders and both area and school leaders, as well as PLCs at all levels of the system. For example, an important annual event is what district leaders call the “Fall Charge.” This is an annual retreat, held before the school year starts, in which staff from the district Department of Assessment and Accountability work with all area and school administrators on how to use their CAASPP data for diagnostic and planning purposes. One staff member remarked: “We don’t call it a retreat. We never have an administrative retreat, because we’re never retreating; we’re charging ahead.”

In recent years, the Fall Charge has included training on how to use the district’s Data Analysis Tool (designed with technical assistance providers from the nonprofit organization WestEd) to evaluate year-end student assessment data and school improvement efforts and plan next steps. The template includes four columns, labeled research, recall, reflect, and respond. The research column prompts site administrators to use data to identify areas of concern and success (e.g., 5th-grade mathematics trends); recall focuses on facts of the previous year (e.g., all mathematics-related activities); reflect focuses on how the activities might have produced the observed assessment trends (e.g., specific teacher understandings and strategies); and respond prompts ideas for next steps (e.g., content or strategies to address observed gaps). (See Figure 1 for a complete example.)

Figure 1
Data Analysis Tool Process

TITLE ONE ELEMENTARY DISTRICT MATH EXAMPLE FROM 2016-2017

CUSD DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS TEMPLATE				
DATA SOURCE <small>Identify and use appropriate data sources.</small>	RESEARCH <small>Using the data sources available, report the facts. Look for trends or areas of concern. Look for areas of success. This is an objective data discovery.</small>	RECALL <small>Focusing on the prior school year(s), recall the realities of classroom, school, district programs, practices, and policies. What happened? Facts only – no conjecture.</small>	REFLECT <small>Connect performance with prior year practices, programs, and policies. Consider possible reasons. Be honest about what occurred last year and how that may have impacted the performance that you observe.</small>	RESPOND <small>What might be some possible ways to move forward? These responses should be directly to what was discovered in the reflection process.</small>
<p>Scale Scores (Reports Used?)</p> <p>Achievement Levels (Reports Used?) <i>Preliminary Smarter Balanced Performance Summary</i></p>	<p>CUSD 5th Grade Math:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 47% of students Met Achievement Standard • 52% of students did Not Meet Standard <p>SBAC Two Year Comparison:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 93.3% of Title One schools showed growth in the overall percent of students scoring at levels 3 or 4 • 41.2% of non-Title One schools showed growth in the overall percent of students scoring at levels 3 or 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAMP Grant training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Student Thinking Days ○ Lesson Study ○ 60 hours of Intensive PD • Curriculum Guides • Title 1 Math coaching with Mary Hogg • District Professional Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Claim 2, 3, 4 ○ MP Standards ○ Number Talks ○ Technology Integration • Promoting student conversation and learning of mathematics • Focus on conceptual understanding and representation • ICAM alignment to CAASPP • Used resources in addition to the textbook • Use CA Math Framework as a guide for instruction and understanding of standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deeper understanding of Standards • Teaching with student understanding of concepts in mind • New Instructional Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number Talks ○ CGI ○ Teaching through Problem Solving ○ 3-ACT Tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still need more focus on Claims 2, 3, and 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Utilize the CIA Dept for PD training ○ Give students opportunities to explore and learn through these claims • Adding higher level questions in class and on assessments • Be open to other teaching approaches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exploration before Instruction ○ Direct Instruction ○ Journaling ○ Students explaining their thought processes

Source: Clovis Unified School District.

The Data Analysis Tool process is supported by guiding questions for each of the four steps to help district, area, and school leaders work with their staff to interpret and respond to assessment results. A district leader explained:

Our goal has been not to just say, “Here’s the data,” but, “Now here are ways you can work through it with your teachers. What are the data telling you? How are your subgroups doing? How are you doing on formative assessments?” So, you’re just doing research as a principal. Then, you’re recalling, “What did you have in place? What did we do instructionally?”

For example, district analyses of mathematics data identified particular skill gaps and differences by race/ethnicity, which prompted a district-funded professional learning program. A Teacher on Special Assignment commented, “Our students were struggling with modeling with mathematics. We also saw an achievement gap ... especially between Hispanic students and White and Asian students.”

As principals work through the process with their staff in the fall, they often request additional data from the Department of Assessment and Accountability. For example, one school wanted to see how students participating in the district’s after-school program were doing compared to the general population, and the district office provided the breakdown.

Principals participate in another review of school data, known as Principal Grade Level Expectations (PGL, pronounced “piggle”). During these meetings, school administrators report on their school’s interim assessment data and their school management team’s analysis of the factors contributing to particular successes—a further mechanism by which good practices at one school can be adopted by other schools.

In addition to district-mandated interim assessments, schools and teachers also conduct their own assessments. For example, Miramonte Elementary School’s Single Plan for School Achievement lists 16 forms of assessments, including the Basic Skills Phonics Tests for early readers, the Developmental Reading Assessment 2 to gauge reading levels, formative assessments of reading fluency, writing portfolios, sample CCSS questions, and performance tasks. The mix of assessments can be selected by school grade-level teams or PLCs. As a Reyburn mathematics teacher explained, data are at the heart of PLC team discussions informing instruction:

Those weekly agendas are sent out to their team 48 hours ahead of time ... so that people are prepared to come to the meeting with things done. It’s not like you’re grading in front of people. You’re coming with your data, you’ve already analyzed it, you know which kids need intervention.

Professional Learning and Capacity Building

Building teachers' instructional capacity has been an important element in Clovis USD's adaptation to CCSS. While the district required schools to adopt common CCSS-aligned math and language arts programs, it provided wide latitude to areas and schools to pursue their own professional learning initiatives, with the district playing a supportive role. As Assistant Superintendent Debbie Parra explained:

We stopped trying to do forced marches around professional development because it doesn't work, right? What we try to do now is support the schools if they believe that's what they need.

During the transition to CCSS, the district's Curriculum and Instruction Department supported schools and areas with professional learning in several ways. The department often worked with a group of interested areas, schools, or individual teachers on district-led professional development initiatives aligned to CCSS. Clovis educators told us that when an initiative was well-received and successful in raising student achievement, it attracted more interest. The district's culture of friendly competition and learning from the success of others helped spread the word about effective professional learning initiatives. The Curriculum and Instruction Department also served as a kind of research and development office for professional learning, undertaking research into learning needs, seeking out capable providers of professional learning, and providing that training to interested teachers and schools.

At the school level, PLCs are a primary vehicle for teacher learning. The focus on developing teacher PLCs began around 2000 and became a significant Clovis USD initiative during the 2007–08 school year, when most district teachers participated in PLC workshops conducted by Richard and Rebecca DuFour.¹⁹ At the time of this case study, the districtwide early-release Wednesdays ensured time for weekly PLC meetings in all schools.

Clovis USD continued to strengthen its PLCs after the introduction of CCSS. For example, using research-based strategies to optimize PLCs for student success was listed as a key action in the district's 2016–19 Strategic Plan, and the district's LCAP included funding for school-based learning directors to coordinate PLCs. We observed specific efforts to improve the effectiveness of PLCs during our research. For example, mathematics teachers at Clovis High had added an extra hour of PLC time to their weekly schedule, given that most teachers were on more than one math course team. Administrators at Reyburn Intermediate and Clovis East High worked to reinvigorate the PLC process by using CAASPP data to focus their schools' PLCs' attention on connections between student performance gaps in middle school and gaps in high school. In each case, school administrators supported efforts of their teacher PLCs to collaborate on improving student achievement.

District-Led Initiatives

Among the district-led professional learning initiatives in Clovis USD, a program known as Math Camp was impactful in shifting instructional practice, according to district educators. The program began in summer 2015 with a federal grant through the California Math and Science Partnership to fund mathematics professional learning with Fresno State University and the Fresno County Office of Education. Math Camp initially involved 114 teachers from transitional kindergarten to grade

6 from among Clovis USD's 14 Title I schools (schools at which the proportion of students from low-income backgrounds was greater than 40%). The federal grant was terminated after 2 years, but in 2017–18 the program was sustained for a third year with district funds and was expanded to approximately 160 teachers.

Improving equity in mathematics achievement was a major driver and outcome of the program. District data showed significant gaps between White students and students of color in mathematics achievement, particularly on numbers and operations, fractions, and algebraic thinking.²⁰ Professional learning initially focused on teachers' mathematical content knowledge and problem-solving strategies, as well as on taking a student perspective to a problem, rather than on the teacher laying out the steps to the solution. Math Camp pedagogy was rooted in Cognitively Guided Instruction, which is intended to be student-centered, building on students' prior knowledge and encouraging them to use a range of strategies in problem-solving.

Teachers at Miramonte Elementary described Math Camp as having significantly changed mathematics instruction in the school. Key to the program's success, they said, was its adherence to principles of high-quality professional learning. Several teachers from Miramonte attended the professional learning and worked with teacher teams from other participating schools in grade-level cohorts. Teachers held follow-up sessions, including some in which teachers received training in lesson study²¹ and in ways of observing and providing feedback on colleagues' teaching, further supporting implementation in schools. A Miramonte 5th-grade teacher said that these professional learning sessions created a common discourse for mathematics pedagogy in the school and brought cohesion to their instructional approach.

Moreover, district office staff said that the success of Math Camp's approach to professional learning informed other district initiatives. Several Math Camp participants were also members of the district's curriculum guide writing teams and were able to incorporate the successful professional learning practices into their leadership in developing instruction for CCSS. One of these participants said:

After that first year, and seeing the success and hearing the feedback from the teachers, all of our professional development that we then offered the rest of the district was very "Math Camp-like," if you will. We infused a lot of the things that the teachers were learning.

A further example of the Curriculum and Instruction Department's role in leading initiatives with interested parties that continues today is the provision of Reading Apprenticeship training, a professional learning program developed by WestEd that encourages literacy development by addressing multiple dimensions of reading: personal, social, cognitive, and knowledge-building. The aim is to provide students with strategies that lead to independent reading, problem-solving, and collaborating with others. A goal of the district office has been to provide professional learning in this program to all high school and intermediate school teachers. As Assistant Superintendent Debbie Parra noted, although district administrators began working with just one high school, the program's effectiveness helped bring others aboard:

Buchanan had a grant and started Reading Apprenticeship, [and] their English language arts performance is amazing. Clovis North said, "Oh, we want Reading Apprenticeship," so they started it.

The subsequent adoption of Reading Apprenticeship in multiple Clovis schools highlights how competition and learning from the success of others takes place not only across schools but also within schools. As Reyburn Intermediate and Clovis East Principal Kevin Kearney described:

We trained, initially, 17 teachers and the two administrators, and it grew within [our school]. They started having their own PLC, and we developed this PLC lead for Reading Apprenticeship. Then more teachers beyond English [adopted it]. What's happened is as groups have learned more about it, and other departments learned more about it, they wanted to have that articulation across content areas.

The way in which Clovis East schools picked up Reading Apprenticeship illustrates how teachers and school leaders stay attuned to activities in neighboring areas. (See “Reading Apprenticeship at Reyburn Intermediate and Clovis East High.”)

Reading Apprenticeship at Reyburn Intermediate and Clovis East High

Principal Kevin Kearney of Reyburn Intermediate and Clovis East High had noted the strong English language arts scores at Buchanan High School on the other side of town. He heard from colleagues that Reading Apprenticeship, a professional learning program from WestEd, was a factor in Buchanan's success. The school decided to investigate further, he said, after one of his science teachers observed students from Buchanan High using strategies that aided their reading comprehension:

That summer, just by chance, [the science teacher] happened to notice that these Buchanan kids were doing things when they'd read passages that were different than everybody else. So she started prying [into] these kids a little bit.... She must have reached out to a couple different Buchanan [teachers]. Well, come to find out, it all came back to these Reading Apprenticeship strategies.... So then she says, “Hey, I've got to meet with you.”

The science teacher wanted to invite teachers from Buchanan to speak with the Clovis East faculty about Reading Apprenticeship. Hearing about the program from other teachers was an important factor in earning teacher support for the new approach. Kearney recalled:

Within the next ... month or so, we ended up bringing a Buchanan teacher over here to talk to our teachers. We felt that it was important that a teacher show them the benefits of it.... It wasn't some administrator saying, “You've got to do this.”

The Reading Apprenticeship approach also segued nicely with existing work at Reyburn and Clovis East High and helped teachers learn instructional strategies aligned with CCSS:

That shift of learning to the Common Core [was] difficult. [Reading Apprenticeship] aligned perfectly, ... and part of that first lesson in the RA training was on metacognitive thinking and how kids take control: “The first time you read this, give yourself a 1 to a 10.”

With buy-in from the teaching staff, Kearney's team was able to extend training in the second year to have 40 teachers trained across the two schools.

Area- and School-Level Initiatives

In Clovis USD, professional learning initiatives have also been launched at the area level through meetings between principals and their area superintendents. For example, before the district's Math Camp initiative, Clovis East schools were involved in Balanced Math training, a program focused on developing students' conceptual understanding of mathematics rather than simply teaching procedural steps to solve equations. The program combines shared and independent problem-solving that is supported by teacher modeling and guidance. Balanced Math provided the Clovis East teachers with CCSS-aligned teaching strategies such as Number Talk, in which teacher and students explore mathematics problem-solving strategies through short discussions.

Some area initiatives spread to other areas when they showed evidence of success that was then shared with administrators. A notable example is the Internal Coherence initiative, which began in the Clovis East Area and was adopted by Clovis High. The program involves schools in using "instructional rounds" to deepen teachers' and school leaders' understanding of the multidimensional interactions among students, teachers, and instructional content under CCSS. Learnings from instructional rounds and from analyses of student assessment data support the work of PLCs and have engendered schoolwide discourse for aligning student learning expectations vertically between grades.

School-level initiatives also are common within the five Clovis areas. For example, Miramonte Elementary undertook a professional learning program to support a "language acceleration block" initiative. Based on the work of Kevin Clark, the initiative sought to accelerate English language acquisition and CCSS-aligned writing strategies through a focus on grammar instruction. The program taught teachers to apply quarterly assessments, analyze data, and identify skills for improvement for both specific classes and grade levels. It also gave teachers strategies for addressing these focus areas.

Student Support: All Means ALL

Clovis USD's commitment to equity stretches back to Doc Buchanan's 30-year superintendency and his charge: "A fair break for every kid." The district's mission, core values, strategic plan, and Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) emphasize that the goal is success for every student. "All means ALL!" continues to be a district mantra.

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Long before California standards called for attention to students' social-emotional outcomes, Clovis USD aimed to educate the whole child. These deeply rooted commitments are prominent on the district website:²²

Our Mission: To be a quality educational system providing resources for all students to reach their potential in mind, body and spirit.

In Clovis Unified, we hold ourselves accountable to a set of core values that we consider non-negotiable. These values are expressed in the following key phrases and words:

- Educate the whole child in Mind, Body and Spirit.
- A fair break for every kid.
- Every child can learn and we can teach every child.
- Meet the educational needs of all students.
- Student-centered decision-making.

In keeping with the district's site-based management and philosophy of competition, the "how" of ensuring student success is mainly left up to each of the five areas and to the schools within them. During the early years of CCSS implementation, the district held each area and school accountable for meeting their students' needs, and it monitored outcomes. The central office provided resources and supports based on each school's student population and eligibility for categorical funds and specific district programs, such as after-school programs for target populations. Clovis USD's support for site-based budgeting included guidance on using a categorical scenario budgeting tool that allows schools to forecast their funding based on anticipated enrollment and the number of students with special needs. Additional funds and district staff support were provided in response to school plans and documented needs. For example, the Clovis East Area received additional district funds to hire a full-time psychologist after presenting evidence that student and family needs could not be met with its prior part-time counseling supports. This is an example of how area autonomy coupled with accountability generated an allocation of resources based on the needs of their particular student populations.

The district funded several district-coordinated programs and strategies for supporting students' academic and social-emotional development, a priority established in its LCAP, the process for setting funding priorities under California's Local Control Funding Formula. The educators and

administrators we spoke to shared how those programs and strategies played out in the four schools we visited. We also observed examples of site-grown approaches to supporting students. Key programs and strategies in Clovis USD include:

- expansion of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program;
- transition programs to support students in moving from elementary to intermediate schools and from intermediate to high schools in each of the five district areas;
- Summer Math Academy and after-school programs that extend learning time;
- structures for supporting struggling students and English learners;
- social-emotional supports through district and site initiatives; and
- parent education and support.

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)

The AVID program began in Clovis USD in Clovis West High School during the late 1990s in response to the school's changing demographics. With a growing population of Latino/a students and students from low-income families, Clovis West leaders sought a program with a strong track record in preparing nontraditional students to succeed in college. The AVID model was created in San Diego's Claremont High School in the 1980s and has since become a national program with a highly prescribed model and a teacher training and certification process.

AVID's mission is to close the opportunity gap between poor, underrepresented students and their traditional college-going peers. The program has had success in terms of its students applying to, being accepted by, and persisting in 4-year colleges.²⁵ AVID's instructional model and teacher preparation emphasize inquiry-based, student-centered instruction akin to CCSS instructional guidelines to promote deeper learning and students' agency in their own learning. As described on its website, AVID teacher training focuses on "turnkey" teaching techniques and classroom activities that educators can incorporate into their classrooms, rather than on a specified curriculum. It prepares teachers to move from delivering instruction at the front of the classroom to facilitating classroom activities and to design learning opportunities that challenge students to think critically, ask questions, and collaborate to create solutions. AVID explicitly teaches students to adopt a growth mindset—or the belief that they can learn and be successful with effort, challenging the assumption that successful students are just "smart." Further, the program helps students learn how to learn and teaches crucial skills such as note-taking, studying, and organizing assignments.

At its inception in 1999, Clovis USD's AVID director teamed with another teacher to create the first Clovis West program, involving about 15 students. Currently, that same director oversees 160 trained AVID teachers in all five high schools and in five Title I elementary schools. Its growth and success in the Clovis West Area made schools in other areas eager to adopt the program. "Anything at Clovis that works spreads. Other sites start asking you to 'tell us what's going on and how do we get at it,'" a district administrator said. The program was expensive for Clovis West to run on its own funds, so when several areas were ready to jump on board in the mid-2000s, the superintendent set up an AVID budget for each area. During the first year of central office funding, AVID trainers trained and certified 31 teachers. After the development of Clovis USD's LCAP, which allocated funds to support the program, the AVID staff expanded to 160 trained teachers.

The program's impact on teaching in Clovis USD reaches beyond the elective high school classes and elementary schools officially involved, as an AVID director noted:

We've ... really helped teach the teachers to believe that all kids can learn. Yes, maybe at a different rate, or [they] need more additional supports, but that it's possible with that kind of hard work and dedication.... What's distinctive about AVID is that it offers the kind of scaffolds and templates for giving kids those structures and strategies to be successful.

The AVID expansion increased high school student enrollment in the program by 44%, from 560 in 2015 to 807 in 2017. Because the AVID classes are elective, schools face the challenge of recruiting 7th- and 8th-grade students who might be tempted to sign up for other electives, such as robotics and theater. The AVID director said that Clovis educators also recruit students from groups that have traditionally been underserved by public schools:

We very intentionally look at those students that are in the middle academic band, that are our Hispanic, African American, and Hmong students, and our [socioeconomically disadvantaged students], and our foster youth. We really go after those kids to make sure they know about the program [and] what resources are available. We try to educate parents as well, because parents get it, parents want their kids in there. I had a parent call yesterday: "What can I do to help entice [my child] to sign up for AVID?" They get it. They see the value.

Transition Program

Another Clovis USD innovation to support students' school success was the creation of "transition teams." The program was initiated in 2014, the first year of CCSS, and emerged in response to public proposals as part of the LCAP process.

As the name suggests, transition teams were designed to provide academic and social-emotional support for students transitioning from the intermediate grades to high school. These supports were later expanded to support 6th- and 7th-graders during their transition from elementary to intermediate schools in the district.

One challenge for transitioning students is navigating a larger school campus. Clovis USD elementary schools each comprise about 500–800 students, intermediate schools average about 1,350 students, and high school enrollment ranges from about 2,000 to 3,000 each. In the Clovis East Area, where Reyburn Intermediate and Clovis East High share a single campus, students in 6th grade transition from a campus of several hundred students to one with over 3,500 students. Transition teams aim to ease this process for students most at risk of falling behind in their studies, as Miramonte Principal Laura Hart explained:

Sixth grade to 7th grade is very bumpy. Right? They hang in there with elementary because of all the support we can give them and how well we know them and know their families, and then they hit that 7th-grade year and suddenly they're just a number on a very large campus. We know that that transition year is rough, and we know that 8th grade to 9th grade is hard, too. We lose a lot of kids there, too. The whole intention was to make the transition from [grade] 6 to 7 and [grade] 8 to 9 smoother for these kiddos and to lose [fewer] of them between the cracks.

The district employs transition team coaches, known as student relations liaisons, and designates them to work in one of the five areas. Each is assigned a caseload of 12–15 students, although liaisons with whom we spoke said, because they want to support students, they typically handle up to 20 students each. At Clovis High, 392 students of the school’s 2,902 students (14%) were receiving some level of transition services from the team during the 2017–18 school year. In practice, the liaisons keep an eye out for additional students who might end up needing transition support in the future, as Fancher Creek’s Principal Parker explained:

So, they like us to stay within 12 6th-graders, because that’s the transition group that is officially on the caseload. But I would say, last year, we had a different liaison, and he touched base with about 50 kids, didn’t matter what grade level it was. And he was just constantly out there just touching base—even just a “Hi, how are ya? My eyes are on you.”

The transition program and its activities vary depending on each area’s student demographics and learning needs. In keeping with the district’s emphasis on “all means ALL,” several categories of students are typically assigned by default to receive transition support. These include migrant or homeless students, foster youth, English learners, and students from low-income families. Transition teams aim to serve as a bridge both between grades and between school and home, seeking to address students’ academic, emotional, and social needs.

Student relations liaisons are in communication with teachers about students’ academic needs and the specific competencies they need to improve. At Clovis High, the transition team had dedicated space to meet with students, tutor them, or simply allow them to sit and do homework during lunchtime or after school. The school also provided snacks for some activities and events at the space. The value of the space was articulated by one liaison:

Some students feel a little overwhelmed going to a tutor session or whatever. But they need somewhere outside of their home that’s a safe place for them to complete their work because sometimes the students that we work with are at risk, and home is not necessarily the most quiet or the most relaxing place to get work done. They know that people are here strictly to support them.

Liaisons are frequently available to support students’ academic learning, including formal or informal tutoring, either in or out of class.

The liaisons have been trained in the district’s Clovis Support and Intervention program to provide students with social-emotional support as well as academic support. In forming relationships with students, liaisons might create or lead a support or intervention group or recommend a student for an existing group to address specific issues, such as dealing with divorce, trauma, or grief. Liaisons with whom we spoke said they are in frequent contact with school psychologists about students’ emotional needs and refer them for counseling as needed. As the Clovis High head guidance counselor explained:

Our transition team works really closely with our counseling team, and we have a [grade] 7–12 counseling model. We actually have counselors down at 7th and 8th grade that we work with very closely, and our transition counselor, and our transition coaches. We’re all one big team. We meet with the transition coaches every 6 weeks and [discuss] all kids that are getting support in the transition program—how they’re doing on grades, what’s going on at home—because we feel like we as counselors know something about them, so we meet very often and really give those kids extra support.

The deputy principal elaborated, saying that despite formally being a 7–12 counseling model, in practice they serve students as early as 4th grade.

Supporting students' social integration is an important part of the transition teams' work. They help students become involved in the social life of the school and develop a sense of the school as a safe place for learning. Transition team members at Clovis High told us that they took 8th-grade students on field trips to the high school, introduced them to high school sporting events or rallies, connected them with high school clubs, and introduced them as "future Cougars" to help them develop an affinity for the school and see opportunities for extracurricular activities.

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For example, a Clovis High transition team coach, herself a former college athlete, became a track coach, leading several transition program students to join the team. Similarly, two of her colleagues helped a group of students form an Asian Club at the high school. Several of these students have since involved themselves more broadly in student life, some trying out for volleyball or football, and one becoming a member of the Stanford Hmong Outreach Program Promoting Education, a group that gives students a chance to visit Stanford University to experience college.

Transition teams also help students plan for their postsecondary transition. Student relations liaisons assist students in thinking about their future plans and registering for classes that would prepare them for college and careers. Transition coaches have taken students on field trips to colleges. A Clovis High coach who graduated from University of California, Berkeley, took students on a visit to his alma mater to give them a sense of college life, raising their awareness of future possibilities. Others said they had spoken with students about attending the Center for Advanced Research and Technology, a joint project between Clovis USD and other Fresno-area school districts that allows 11th- and 12th-grade students to prepare for and enroll in industry certification programs. In all instances, transition team staff aimed to ensure that every student considers a range of educational futures beyond high school.

Hiring the right people is a goal that district leaders see as crucial to the success of the program. Transition teams aim to hire people who are adept at connecting with students, who understand the community context, and who reflect the demographic and linguistic diversity of students served by the program. The Clovis High Area team has speakers of Spanish, Vietnamese, and Hmong. A Clovis High coach explained the value of creating such a bridge between school and home:

I think those of us who can speak and translate for parents when they can't communicate in English really value being able to build that bridge from parents to the school, because if you don't know the language and you need help with your student, how are you going to ask questions? We try to help with that, and at the end, when the parent feels "I'm understood," that weight just lifts off their shoulders and they feel connected. We take pride in that.

Consistent with Clovis USD’s “people, not programs” philosophy, student relations liaisons take a “no boundaries” approach to engaging with students. They adjust their approach and the frequency of engagement—ranging from daily to every 3 weeks—to each student’s needs. This can involve both pull-out and push-in mentoring and academic coaching, home visits, periodic check-ins, and formal or informal tutoring after school. As one liaison put it, “Every situation is different.... We get to know our students individually as well as we can and what their needs are.”

As further evidence of the transition teams’ dedication to meeting individual needs, the Clovis High Area transition team works with local businesses and nonprofit organizations to provide clothing and transportation for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds so they can participate in social events such as school prom.

The transition program’s overarching strategy is for liaisons to build trusting and supportive relationships with students and their families. At the time of this research, the program had yet to graduate its first seniors, but administrators and teachers were overwhelmingly positive about its effects. A Clovis High transition team member told us that early data show increases in student performance, noting that the proportion of transition program students achieving a GPA of 3.0 or better after the first semester had increased by 8 percentage points between 2016–17 and 2017–18, from 21% to 29%. He commented, “We’re always celebrating these kids. Every 6 weeks, we’ll host a GPA luncheon, promoting them to continue to come to after-school programs, the tutorial center, see their teachers during lunch labs or after-school labs. Always coaching these kids to do better.”

Summer Math Academy and After-School Programs That Extend Learning Time

As Clovis USD rolled out standards with higher academic expectations, the district’s Summer Math Academy also supported students’ transition from intermediate school to high school. Launched in 2016, the academy has strategically supported the learning needs of 8th-graders with D’s and F’s in mathematics to prepare them for success in 9th-grade math. Although the program is voluntary, the district encourages and actively recruits all eligible students for the summer academy. Enrollment in the summers of 2016 and 2017 was approximately 110 students each year. A math learning director described the program as addressing academic needs and promoting a growth mindset so that students do not see their ability at math as a fixed trait but instead realize that their skills can grow with their effort:

The academy focuses on deep conceptual understanding of the topics they might have missed, with specific emphasis on topics that are necessary for their success in the first semester of Math I, their 9th-grade year. We also spend a lot of time on changing mindset—a lot of growth mindset and self-efficacy moves [that] help them own their own learning and be able to be active participants in the process of learning. This is a huge shift for most of these kids.

There’re lots of reasons why they tap out of education in 7th and 8th grade, but re-engaging them and giving them strategies and the belief that they can take action to improve themselves as learners is really big. And then we set them up for success in 9th grade because we’ve reviewed all the material they need to be really successful in that first semester.

The Summer Math Academy also provided a health class for high school credit so that students could complete a requirement early. That provided space in their 9th-grade schedule for a math support class in addition to their Math I class. “They’re able to receive the extra support they need because we want them to be successful—we truly believe that success builds on success,” a math director said.

To provide continuity, four teachers from the Summer Math Academy also taught math support classes during the school year. They developed strategies and resources for those classes with support from the district math director, with whom they met several times a year.

Testimony from students who had been through the academy was overwhelmingly positive. Several Clovis USD graduates who had attended the Summer Math Academy described in a video how it helped them develop a “growth mindset.” They described how they felt before the program in these ways: “I believed that I would never be good at math and that math was just for smart people and I wouldn’t be able to do it”; “I felt like: I’m dumb; I’m stupid. I was hiding in a corner not wanting to ask a question because I’m afraid I’m going to get it wrong.” Their comments about how they felt after the program included: “It definitely changed my perspective on everything—anything that comes my way, I can overcome any struggle”; “I would never give up again because learning from mistakes is the best way to improve. I keep trying, and if I try, I can do anything. It doesn’t matter who you are, you can learn anything you put your mind to.”

Three academy teachers described the students’ transformation in these terms, respectively:

The most exciting thing about this academy is just seeing the transformation in these students. These kids make connections, and they are excited to be in here. These kids really see that if you work harder, and struggle, that you’re actually getting smarter.

These kids had been sitting and not working, or trying and really not believing in themselves, and after the second week they are actually gaining self-confidence and trusting themselves, and knowing that they can do this.

Their teachers would never pick up that they had been academy kids.... These kids were failing when they came in.

The Summer Math Academy’s success led the district to launch a similar program for elementary school students in 2017. The elementary program, called Demonstration Summer School, also functioned as professional development for elementary school teachers. Teachers learned strategies for teaching math concepts and problem-solving and for promoting growth mindsets. The district mathematics department created the program, which was held at one elementary school in the Clovis East Area. Summer school teachers received a week of training. Then elementary teachers from other district schools attended training, observed classrooms, and discussed their observations.

The district math director said:

The main message we have for those teachers is: We want to focus on changing kids’ mindsets and exposing them to problem-solving. If they come out with a different mindset, willing to persevere and problem-solve, the content will eventually come.

By teachers' accounts, Demonstration Summer School had been extremely valuable, and the district anticipated expanding it as other schools and areas heard, "It's a great thing."

Similar to Summer Math Academy, the district's After School Education and Safety program provided additional time for students to participate in Clovis USD's activities. It included after-school enrichment in fitness/physical activity, homework support, language learning, and STEM learning, as well as a healthy snack. The program served English learners, foster and homeless youth, and students from low-income families. It has grown over the years and now operates at all 14 of the district's Title I schools. Seven are funded by the state and two by the Fresno County Office of Education; five additional school programs are being funded through the district's LCAP allocation.

Structures for Supporting Struggling Students and English Learners

In addition to these student support programs, Clovis USD schools have structures in place to identify students who are struggling and to diagnose their needs. One such structure in some elementary schools is the Student Study Team. In one school we visited, there were two of these teams, one for grades k–3 and one for grades 4–6, each consisting of classroom teachers, parents, the school psychologist, a resource teacher, and special education teachers, depending on circumstance. They convened as needed to address the issues of students who were struggling academically and/or behaviorally and who might need professional support beyond the classroom. The team developed goals and a plan of action and then reconvened 8 weeks later to take stock. "It's just for those students who need a little bit extra than maybe what is offered to every student in class," an elementary school teacher said.

Another such structure is the Teacher Grade Level Expectations meetings, which were held twice a year in November and February. Teachers from each grade level in the school met for a half day and talked about their students. An elementary teacher noted that the meetings were called "red alerts." Teachers had the opportunity to ask, "Who are your kids that you're just dying to learn more about or you're struggling with, or you don't know what's going on?"

In addition, each district school used a particular program or strategy for deploying or regrouping students to differentiate instruction. One of the elementary schools we studied was using the Universal Access Program, supported by its Title I funds to pay for experienced literacy teachers to work with students 15–16 hours a week. They were providing support for guided reading and interventions for struggling students. The other elementary school was using a strategy called Reading Instruction Supports Everyone (RISE). This was a 1-hour block of time in which teachers regrouped students by reading level and had an instructional assistant to help with small groups.

Clovis USD also provides structures for supporting English learners in the classroom through the "differentiated playbook," a set of strategies and objectives in district curricular guides for differentiating instruction to support English learners. More targeted English Language Development (ELD) support is provided in the 19 district schools with significant English learner populations. Professional development to enhance ELD instruction has included:

- Academic Language with Jeff Zweig, which involved 16 teachers being prepared to use the English learner coaching model; and
- growth mindset, which focused on integration into ELD, writing, and social studies instruction.

Special learning academies to support English learners have expanded in recent years:

- The Accelerated EL Academy, founded 5 years ago, is site-based. It serves students in grades 1–5 who are at proficiency levels 2–5 on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT).²⁴ The academy served approximately 300 students in 2017–18. Instruction focuses on speaking, collaboration, and writing. It front-loads academic content and assesses background knowledge. Teachers involved in the academy receive rigorous professional development in the program.
- The EL Academic Academy serves students in grades 1–6 who are performing below grade level. It is for students who have already been identified for additional interventions.
- The Intermediate Leadership Academy serves English learners in grades 6–8 who are performing below grade level.
- Newcomers Academy is a summer program serving English learners in grades 1–12 who are recent immigrants to the United States. The students are taught in groups of four or five, with instruction focused on foundational literature, phonics and syntax, and writing.

Social-Emotional Supports

Although not a mandate, the state education department has urged California school districts to develop a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) to address students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs. In keeping with Clovis USD's decentralized system, district administrators asked each school to submit a proposed MTSS plan within 3 years (by the end of 2017–18). This would be each school's unique plan for integrating academic, behavioral, and emotional supports in a tiered system of interventions.

An example from Fancher Creek Elementary shows how one school approached implementation. Its system for addressing individual student academic and behavioral challenges is known as Collaborative Action for Students and Teachers (CAST). At the time of our site visit, a six-person school team consisting of administrators, teachers, a teacher coach, and a school psychologist met every 2 weeks, each person taking lead responsibility for a particular grade level. They discussed data for students who were considerably below grade level, some of whom may have been identified during Teacher Grade Level Expectations meetings. Discussion included a range of standards-based and foundational skills-based diagnostic data from the school's i-Ready computer system, collected three times per year. The CAST team established learning goals and used a CAST referral document to specify how staff members will work with a student to address each academic or behavioral issue. The team also monitored individual student progress through regular discussions known as CAST updates. The team might also recommend a Student Study Team or an Individual Education Plan if students were not progressing satisfactorily and needed more intensive support.

Clovis USD schools use a variety of intervention models, including Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, Time to Teach, and Character Counts, that provide systems for defining and rewarding pro-social behavior and addressing patterns and incidents of problem behavior in classrooms and on school grounds. At least one elementary school in the Clovis East Area was certified in Digital Citizenship, a program that helps teachers and parents address potential dark sides of social media, such as cyberbullying. The site was also using a practice called "Check In–Check Out" for mentoring students who need extra behavioral support.

Clovis Support and Intervention is another long-standing district program that leaders said improves students' social and emotional learning. Students are referred by teachers and staff, or self-referred, for a specific kind of support. Peer support groups of six to eight students with a common need meet for guided discussions, akin to a group therapy session. Groups are led by trained facilitators, participation is voluntary, and students may propose groups to address particular issues. One school, for example, was working with a group of students who tended to be labeled as “bullies” and with another group of girls experiencing self-esteem issues. In prior years, they had groups for students grieving a death or dealing with a parent divorce. A district psychologist ran each group at the school site during the afternoon. One elementary school psychologist described the benefits of Clovis Support and Intervention this way:

They're among kids that they might not be playing with all the time, that they're not friends with—and so they kind of create this community, this bond, with one thing that they might have in common. It's a safe place for them to express themselves and talk about things that they might not talk about with family members or their friends. And it gives you an insight that you might not necessarily get.

One elementary school we visited ran about three groups a quarter, working with about 50 students a year out of its 900-student population.

In 2017–18, the district established a Behavior Consultation Team to help schools address the needs of students with particularly challenging and classroom-disruptive behavior. The team included three psychologists and three instructional assistants who served all 33 district elementary schools. They collected data and met with parents or guardians to develop a plan for modifying behavior and strengthening children's social-emotional skills. Instructional assistants also worked with students in the classroom and advised teachers on strategies for behavioral support. The team was being funded under the LCAP and was part of the district's Comprehensive Wellness Program.

A 1st-grade teacher explained how the district supported her in dealing with a particularly challenging student:

We have an instructional assistant who's trained in behavioral support, and they come out and are here 4 days a week: 3 full days and 2 half days. And they're with that child, and we have put behavior supports in place: how we respond in certain situations, the steps that we follow, precise language. And then how we handle escalations. All of those things have been put in place by the Behavioral Consultation Team, which is three psychologists and three instructional assistants. I've seen all six of them in the last 9 days.

Peer counseling in intermediate schools and high schools is another significant social and emotional support. Students interested in becoming peer counselors can enroll in an elective class to learn what a teacher referred to as “soft counseling skills,” or how to help a peer “process their thinking and their emotions.”

A secondary learning director provided a powerful example of how Clovis East's peer counseling group has made a difference in its school and the district:

Last year, the peer counseling group put together a video on suicide preventions.... They entered their video into a contest and won. They put a PowerPoint presentation together and showed it in every class on where you can

go for help and how to reach out in a crisis or just struggling emotionally with anything. Who to go to and what supports you is right here on campus. They created posters that are in our classrooms. The kids were the ones who pushed that and got it going, and then the adults started jumping on the bandwagon behind them. It was cool to see that play out.

Family Education and Supports

Clovis USD has grown its family education programs in the years since the launch of CCSS. Several programs supported parents of students in the 14 Title I schools and provided services on-site. Although not directly impacting students, the district's investment in parent education has helped families learn ways to support their children's school success.

The district Parent Academy was established during the 2014–15 school year, with the mission of providing “strategies to support, advocate, and empower parents to engage fully in the educational lives of their children.”²⁵ The academy was open to all district parents and was held monthly at the district Professional Learning Center, with dinner and child care provided. The six modules during 2017–18 covered topics including effective strategies for family members to become involved in their children's education, support their social-emotional well-being, and prepare them for college and career. Four of the modules focused on social-emotional well-being and on dealing with difficult situations. For example, SafeTALK training helped family members learn how to recognize when someone may be thinking of suicide and how to link the person to a trained helper. To make the Parent Academy available to a wider number of families, modules at Clovis were taught in English, Spanish, and Hmong.

Clovis USD also opened site-based Parent Academies at seven elementary schools. Participating parents meet for 2 hours per week over a 4- to 6-week period. The modules are tailored to the school's community and emphasize the power of students developing a growth mindset. Approximately 130 parents graduate from the elementary school academies annually. At the time of this writing, four of the five high schools were running Parent Academies, serving an average of 35 parents.

Further, two schools—an elementary and an intermediate school—created parent literacy classes. Together the two sites offered seven classes in Spanish, one in Arabic, and four in Punjabi during 2017–18. The classes met 2 days a week for 17 weeks, and the sites provided child care. A supplemental services director noted that one parent who learned English in the program is now president of the district's Migrant Parent Advisory Committee.

Finally, transition programs in district high schools reached out to the parents of students entering high school to introduce them to available school services and family activities and to encourage them to become involved in the school. For example, the Reagan Educational Center—located on the shared Clovis East High School and Reyburn Intermediate site—created a large and comfortable room for both students and parents to gather, and it has extended its counseling services to the families of its students.

Continuous Improvement in Clovis USD

The engine for continuous improvement in Clovis USD is a synergy between *autonomy* of areas and schools to address local needs, *competition and collaboration* to support high standards and shared learning, and *accountability* to push continuous improvement at all district levels. The emphasis on autonomy could be a formula for highly uneven results across the district's areas and schools, but instead we found strong systemwide progress on meeting CCSS and other measures of student success. The district's continuous improvement has also been supported by a stable and loyal cadre of teachers and administrators who are committed to their students and community. The dynamic for systemic improvement in Clovis USD is a balancing act between competition and collaboration and between autonomy and accountability.

The dynamic for systemic improvement in Clovis USD is a balancing act between competition and collaboration and between autonomy and accountability.

Competition and Collaboration

Competition as an engine for education improvement is deeply rooted in Clovis USD's culture. Superintendent Doc Buchanan began his "charge" to new district professionals with this statement:

We believe in high standards in Clovis schools. We believe competition is an ingredient of high standards and an important motivational tool. We recognize three levels of competition. First, we want you to make sure that all of our students learn to compete against themselves. Second, we want you to encourage our students to compete in specialty areas to help them build on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses, because that's the way they get jobs and that's the way they have to perform in life. Third, we want you to teach our students to work in groups and to compete in groups because we think that students who can't work in groups are going to have trouble in tomorrow's world.

The district's culture extends Buchanan's ideas to professionals in the system. Clovis educators believe they should compete with themselves to grow in their specialties and character and that they should compete against other schools and areas to meet and exceed district standards.

Clovis USD leaders and teachers talk about how competition motivates: It leads them to expend extraordinary effort, and they take pride in the high standards they hold for all students. When standardized test scores initially dropped after the adoption of CCSS, educators were motivated by their identity as a high-performing district to change their instructional approaches and raise achievement back to previous levels. As a district leader said:

We're so driven in Clovis Unified. We want 85% or higher. We want every student at mastery. And then Common Core came and all of a sudden, we weren't performing that well the first couple of years. And, yes, we are one of the highest-performing for a school our size, or a district our size, in the state of California, but it's not good enough because we're still well below 85%.

The Clovis High School learning director insisted:

Until we're at 100% of our kids, 100% of our kids being 4-year [state university] eligible, 100% of our kids graduating ... I don't think we're ever going to rest.

Clovis USD leaders expressed a holistic view of school achievement that goes far beyond standardized test scores. The district's school accountability system—Clovis Assessment System for Sustained Improvement, or CLASSI—also includes measures of parent engagement, an evaluation of a school's cultural competency, and the quality of student co-curricular activities such as band and chorus. This broad view of standards for success forges collaboration among teachers and staff beyond the boundaries of grade-level and course PLCs. The competition lies mainly in achieving CLASSI standards (versus being better than another school or area), and falling short of achieving those standards prompts new effort and collaboration.

Perhaps ironically, the competition between Clovis schools and between areas to win annual CLASSI awards drove collaboration within and between area schools, which was essential to their continuous improvement.

Entrepreneurship and system innovation

Clovis USD encourages its schools to innovate in ways that address the particular needs of their students. As noted, the district avoids “forced marches”—or required professional development for all teachers. Rather, it responds to school or district requests for support for particular initiatives. A district administrator described entrepreneurship in this way:

I don't want you to confuse entrepreneurship with rogue ... [as in] “I want to make a name for myself and create something brand new.” It really isn't that. There is a lot of structure. And within that structure [educators are] allowed to identify something that's not being successful and then say, “Okay, what can I do at my site to make it more successful?” Then, [they can] look at something that is successful, and go, “I like that. I'm going to adapt it, I'm going to tweak it a little bit, I'm going to try and see if that will help us with student achievement, if that will help us with behavior, if that will help get more parents into our meetings and connectedness with our students.”

The district office stance is that site-based funding, combined with the unique student population of each area and school, lends itself to an entrepreneurial spirit and that risk-taking is essential to improvement. The district customizes its supports in response to school or area requests, as a senior district administrator explained:

When you look at the intervention services that we provide, you get a lot of entrepreneurship in those areas. I think we know that there are certain EL strategies that work across the board, there's no doubt about that. [Entrepreneurship is] based on the student population, ... their site funding, what they have available, the staff that they have, [and] what they have access to.

School entrepreneurship drives systemic innovation and improvement in Clovis USD through its structures for creating dialogue about student data. With common standards and metrics, and regular meetings in which to review and talk about data, schools within an area become aware of each other's innovations and outcomes. District interim assessments and CLASSI, along with state assessments, provide common districtwide metrics for assessing outcomes of area and school initiatives. Two district administrators commented, respectively:

School entrepreneurship drives systemic innovation and improvement in Clovis USD through its structures for creating dialogue about student data.

We believe there are certain things that should be assessed across the district, and that way we can look at a comparison model, because if we're trying to find somebody who's doing it better, it's hard for us to have two different models of assessment. Are we measuring the same thing? That doesn't mean that they don't have their own weekly checks and those types of things that they do at their sites, but there are some essential, important data points that people need, [which] we collect as a district.

I think the way we look at data really helps our principals and our leadership know: "Gosh, this school's doing really well, I wonder what they're doing," and they're good about talking to each other, and we set up professional learning that we structure so they can talk to each other and share.

Principal meetings within each of the five areas are key to spreading site-based innovations, which include researching and adopting established programs. Once an initiative shows evidence of success and catches on across schools within an area, it often spreads to one or more other areas. Examples of such "incubated innovations" include Reading Apprenticeship, which spread from the Buchanan area to Clovis North and Clovis East schools; Internal Coherence, which spread from Clovis East to Clovis West schools; and AVID, which spread from Clovis West to all other area high schools and intermediate schools and, in 2017–18, to five high-poverty elementary schools.

As another example, a Clovis High School administrator talked about how seeing data from Clovis North prompted Clovis High to invest in a program called ListenWise, which is designed to improve listening comprehension:

"Making a claim" is something that we've been really struggling with on the CAASPP assessment. Clovis North has been doing very well. So I've been in contact with their learning director and have gotten access to a program called ListenWise, so that we can hopefully improve and grow in that specific claim.

These examples show how Clovis administrators and educators continuously innovate in ways that improve student success, share their results, and learn from good practices incubated in other areas.

Autonomy and Accountability

The belief that school autonomy should be coupled with accountability for results is deeply rooted in Clovis USD's culture. As a district administrator put it:

We believe in site-based leadership, which means you can have entrepreneurs at your sites and they can better define what's needed for them. With that, as Doc would say, comes accountability. It's never done without accountability. You can have site-based leadership and entrepreneurship, but you're going to be held accountable for what the product is.

The district holds schools and areas accountable in a number of ways. They are expected to meet expectations spelled out in the district's strategic plan and the LCAP. CLASSI evaluates whether schools have achieved district-specified student outcomes and other measures of school quality. The biannual English language arts and mathematics interim assessments allow the district to gauge each school's progress on SBAC-related outcomes. But the dynamic of autonomy and accountability in Clovis USD goes well beyond these measures. It is embodied in communication and trust between system levels and how both the central office and area superintendents define their roles and provide support to schools.

Communication and trust between district office and areas

District administrators and staff respect each area's autonomy and hold their administrators accountable for leading improvement in their feeder system. One district administrator explained:

As district administrator, we don't tell them what to do. Nobody told me what to do [when I was an area superintendent], but we have a strategic plan. We have our expectations, which are clearly communicated. Then within that, and working with your schools and your principals, you really are the professional developer for your area principals, your teachers sometimes. [For example,] you're going to hear about Internal Coherence from the Clovis East Area schools. That's something they all did together to improve. It's teacher leadership, it's working on the system. And so we give areas the autonomy to implement what they think is most effective with their students and their community.

Regular meetings of area superintendents and district instructional leaders and principals with their area leaders are important forums for communication and taking stock of the various improvement initiatives. A district administrator described them in this way:

We do a division meeting, once a week, which is all of the area superintendents and all of Debbie's [Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction] directors, curriculum instructors, and developers. So, we all meet once a week, and then the area superintendents meet every single week with their secondary principals, every other week at the minimum at the elementary level; and if it's a new principal, it might be a little more frequently, but every week at the elementary level.

The productive balance between autonomy and accountability in Clovis USD is rooted in trust and mutual respect between system levels, as well as in regular communication. A high school principal in Clovis East told us:

I think our district really trusts us as leaders. Hiring is something that's always been the most important thing that we do in this district, so our superintendent and the district office team put a lot of effort into building relationships with their leaders so that we're all basically on the same page. They have our backs, and they trust us to make good decisions, so when we come forward and say we want to do this, it's: "What do you need? How can we help you?" We're given the freedom to do that. And if we fail or things aren't going well, ... they're not like, "I got you," but they're like, "Okay. We know [that you understand] as leaders how to [reflect on] what works and what doesn't and how to make changes and move forward and try something else."

Trust also grows through consistent district communication and action to support school and area improvement efforts and the risk-taking that entails. A district administrator said:

I think it's part of the culture that it's okay to take risks. I know we talk a lot about accountability, but accountability is when I say, "Okay, ... where do you want your school to be? It's not there yet. What have you done to get it there? How can I support you? What obstacles can I remove to help you get there?"

Supporting school improvement from the area and central offices

District leaders said that balancing autonomy and accountability is possible only if they build school-level capacity to support continuous improvement. Clovis district administrators defined their roles in terms of providing support to area leaders and schools.

One Clovis district administrator described relationships among the district, the areas, and the schools as follows:

[When I was] area superintendent, I had someone like Norm [Associate Superintendent], who would guide me.... Personnel issues [would] come up, all those kinds of things, and I would call, and we would have regular meetings. We'd focus on, "What are you doing in your area?" The area superintendent has regular meetings with each principal, whether you do them at your school site or in the area office. And then our jobs now, in the roles we have, are to support those areas [in their improvement efforts].

The line of accountability from school to area to district office places the area superintendents in a key mediating position in the system. They walk the fine line of balancing accountability and support.

The principal of a Clovis East elementary school described turning in PLC documents to the area superintendent to provide assurance that teacher PLCs were working in ways that were aligned with strategic area decisions. She also reported a requirement to turn in agendas for professional

development at weekly area principal meetings. The purpose of these requirements was to hold principals accountable for pursuing district and area priorities and also to give area leaders information on how each school was pursuing site-specific improvement efforts.

Schools' interactions with and support from the district office were more remote and infrequent than those between area administrators and district administrators and staff. Yet the support was valued. An elementary school principal explained:

I look to [district leaders] as a resource, as just guidance overall when things happen. I know who I can call to get feedback and ideas. Also, any legal issues that we need to know, they're really good about making sure we know human resource changes, and changes in discipline laws, and all of that stuff comes out of the district office. We're not expected to just learn that on our own. So, we get that information funneled to us well. But I think overall, the most [important role the district plays] is just support, ... and that's what they see themselves as.

When asked what happens when a school does not get a CLASSI award, an elementary school principal described a combination of accountability and support from the area:

It's definitely a conversation with your area superintendent if you didn't earn it. That's your reality, that's fine. So, what are you going to do now? And you have to address it ... with our superintendent and deputy superintendent. You're putting your data up there and you have to say, "This is where we failed. This is what we see happened. These are the steps [we're going to take]." I think it's more that they just want to know that you have a plan, and is it research based? What strategies are you using? [The superintendent makes sure you're] not just randomly selecting something.

Central office support to schools also comes from regular conversations between district assessment directors and school learning directors about school data. An assessment director described this scenario in which support led to accountability:

I was sitting in this room meeting with all of the learning directors [LDs] from all of our [five] high schools, and we were looking at just the grades by course. So, they wanted it by course, by school ... and then by teacher. We all know that there are certain teachers who will give more D's and F's. So whenever you can get that type of data, it's useful.... As a site, they only have access to their own data. [The cross-school look revealed an individual teacher who is out of line with the district norm,] and now that particular LD can go back to that teacher and just say, "Hey. I'm noticing this, it's not a district trend."

This district assessment director also described meeting with all of the English learning directors from across the district, all the math learning directors, and all the science directors and prompting them to look at the letter grades in their courses. The discussion then turned to, "What are you doing for these students in your MTSS system? What kind of support do they already have, what things have you put in place, [and] are those things working?"

District leaders said that it can be challenging to find the right balance between holding schools accountable for district priorities and encouraging them to innovate. Yet the effort to do so is worthwhile, they said, because the combination is a powerful force for school improvement. One of the three district associate superintendents described the challenge in these terms:

Our role is finding the balance between giving them the entrepreneurial spirit to do what they need to do for their community and their kids but stay tied to some district philosophies and district initiatives. That's the constant battle, leadership-wise, for us to stay in touch with [them], but we really feel it's powerful, and it's founded on our competitive spirit, that entrepreneurial piece.

Conclusion

Understanding Clovis USD's extraordinary success on the new state assessments requires attention to both the district's unique culture and specific approaches to supporting student learning, particularly among students of color. Our analysis of interview, documentary, and observational data allows us to describe key factors that helped support student success in Clovis USD.

First, core values are embodied in "Doc's Charge," which hangs in district offices and schools. Originally a charge to new teacher recruits, the document expresses the district's commitment to high standards, to competition as a motivator of individual and team effort and as a driver of success, and the importance of providing every student a fair chance to succeed ("a fair break for every kid"). It also expresses pride in the professionalism and trust among Clovis USD educators and in the absence of collective bargaining.

The five district areas, each of which includes a high school and its feeder elementary and intermediate schools, compete to achieve success for all of their students and take pride in bringing students up as Cougars or Timberwolves or one of the other high school's mascots. Site-based management fosters an entrepreneurial approach to continuous improvement, with schools and areas designing interventions and supports for their particular students. Accountability and the spread of best practices come through systemwide assessments and myriad structures for sharing and interpreting data. "Doc-isms" such as "people, not programs" and "a fair break for every kid" express and reinforce Clovis USD's commitment to going beyond the call of duty to address the needs of each and every student.

Further, a commitment to serving all students is a key criterion for screening new teachers and administrators. Clovis USD's rigorous, multistage hiring process is one of its key strategies for developing an innovative, collaborative, and service-oriented professional staff. Despite a relatively low salary scale, educators are attracted to and retained by Clovis USD because of its strong school and area identity and culture as well as its effective interventions for students that support teachers' work and success. The district attracts large numbers of its graduates back to teach and has created a pipeline to develop its own certificated and classified staff.

The "Clovis Way" of adopting new curricula and instructional resources is to involve teachers, parents, and the community in the selection. In the case of establishing CCSS-aligned curriculum guides and interim assessments, the district brought teachers together to create their own. This strategy served as a powerful form of professional learning for all involved and created a sense of ownership that encouraged teachers to use the resources. Because teachers know their students and the standards, teachers are granted professional autonomy to draw on instructional resources in whatever ways they deem most effective in supporting their students' learning.

Clovis USD uses a wide range of intervention services to support struggling students and students at risk of falling behind. Areas and schools are encouraged to innovate to find effective interventions, and successful ones find their way across the district. As expressed by "all means ALL," equity is a key principle in the design of intervention services and the inclusion of students. Notably, students most likely to be placed at risk by systemic challenges—foster youth, homeless and migrant students, English learners, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds—are included by default in services such as after-school programs. The transition program is a powerful districtwide

innovation to ensure that students who are the most at risk do not fall between the cracks as they shift from one school to another. Also notable are targeted supports for social and emotional learning, including support groups and peer counseling.

Data-based decision-making is ingrained in Clovis USD's culture and structures. From teacher PLCs that use assessments as they plan their instruction to principals diagnosing student learning needs based on state test data during their "charge" each fall, the district is using data to guide its decisions. The CLASSI accountability system makes sure that schools focus not just on students' academic performance, but also on students' co-curricular activities and the quality of school life. Rewards go to schools that nurture the "whole child," including supporting students' social and emotional learning, engaging their families, and celebrating cultural diversity. Continuous improvement in Clovis USD goes well beyond improving students' academic outcomes to developing their character and well-being.

Appendix A: Clovis 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	0.197	50	34
Math Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	35	21
Math African American	0.228	34	16
Math Latino/a	0.245	37	21
Math White	0.183	57	49
ELA All Students	0.224	60	44
ELA Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	44	31
ELA African American	0.267	44	28
ELA Latino/a	0.259	49	32
ELA White	0.200	68	61
2015-16			
Math All Students	0.143	55	37
Math Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	40	24
Math African American	0.178	39	18
Math Latino/a	0.199	43	24
Math White	0.149	61	53
ELA All Students	0.140	66	48
ELA Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	52	35
ELA African American	0.121	57	31
ELA Latino/a	0.185	57	37
ELA White	0.139	73	64
2016-17			
Math All Students	0.199	57	38
Math Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	43	25
Math African American	0.244	38	19
Math Latino/a	0.229	46	25
Math White	0.197	63	53
ELA All Students	0.267	70	49
ELA Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	56	36
ELA African American	0.272	54	31
ELA Latino/a	0.298	61	37
ELA White	0.252	76	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 Clovis USD	Rate in California
African American	95%	73%
Latino/a	92%	80%
White	94%	87%
All Students	94%	83%

Source: California Department of Education. (n.d.). DataQuest. <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

Table A3
Suspension Rates, 2016–17

Demographic	Rate in Clovis USD	Rate in California
African American	9.2%	9.8%
Latino/a	5.4%	3.7%
White	3.8%	3.2%
All Students	4.3%	3.6%

Source: California Department of Education. (n.d.). DataQuest. <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

Appendix B: Methods

This individual case study of Clovis Unified School District is part of a larger, three-part, mixed-methods study that includes a quantitative analysis of district performance in California,²⁶ six additional individual case studies of positive outlier districts conducted from fall 2017 through winter 2018,²⁷ and a cross-case study that synthesizes findings from all seven individual cases.²⁸

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,²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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 Clovis 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.³¹ 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. These interviews were coupled with data and document analysis. Among the sources were the district's Local Control Accountability Plan, website review, Single Plan for Student Achievement from two district schools, and curriculum guides and supplementary materials supplied to us by the district.

During 2-day site visits in fall 2017 and winter 2017–18, researchers conducted 30- to 60-minute interviews at district central offices and at two secondary schools and two elementary schools in two of the district's highest-poverty areas. Participants included district leaders, principals, coaches, teachers, and other staff and community members. The research team identified potential sites for school-level interviews through discussions with district offices. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to identify interviewees. In other words, researchers selected and interviewed several participants based on their positions and responsibilities and then asked those participants to recommend others well placed to 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. In addition, researchers sought to visit schools serving students of color and those from low-income backgrounds and to interview staff who could speak to programs supporting achievement and increased equity in the district.

Semi-structured interviews at the district level were conducted with district administrators and teams in the departments of Supplemental Services and Curriculum and Instruction. These included teams with responsibility for English language arts, English language development, mathematics, and assessment and accountability. These group interviews involved 24 central office leaders and staff.

At each of the four school sites, we interviewed the principal, other site leaders, and teachers— involving 7 school administrators, 6 transition team personnel, and 29 teachers. Observations included brief classroom visits in three of the school sites and a visit to an after-school program in the fourth site, observation of an award ceremony at one elementary school, and participation in a district Local Control and Accountability Plan dinner meeting with school staff and parents. Researchers took narrative notes during these visits.

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.

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.

Appendix C: “Doc’s Charge” and Core Values

“Doc’s Charge”

In 1960, the Clovis Unified School District was established with Dr. Floyd Buchanan as its first superintendent. From 1960 through 1991, “Doc” personally interviewed and shared his vision of Clovis Unified with every new hire. His vision and “charge” to new hires were eventually put in writing and have come to be known as “Doc’s Charge.”

We believe in high standards in Clovis schools. We believe competition is an ingredient of high standards and an important motivational tool. We recognize three levels of competition. First, we want you to make sure that all of our students learn to compete against themselves; that’s the toughest competition of all. Second, we want you to encourage your students to compete in specialty areas to help them build on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses, because that’s the way they get jobs and that’s the way they have to perform in life. Third, we want to teach our students to work in groups and to compete in groups because we think that students who can’t work in groups are going to have trouble in tomorrow’s world.

Competition does not start with schooling. Competition starts with little children just wanting to play—to catch or hit or kick a ball. Eventually, they learn a few skills and all of a sudden one of them looks at the others and says hey, let’s keep score. Now they’re interested in winning and losing, which is mostly what life’s all about.

While you are working with our children in Clovis we want you to remember the heart of the Clovis program. We want you to teach students to win with class and to lose with dignity. But we also want you to teach them that there is a lot more to being a winner than the final game score. We want you to teach them to root for their team to win, not for their other team to lose. We want you to teach our kids what to do when they lose. And if we can teach them not to be quitters by the time they finish the twelfth grade in the Clovis schools, they will probably make it through life.

Our philosophy is very simple: A fair break for every kid. We believe the schools and the students belong to the people. If our community wants their children to read, write, do arithmetic, sing, dance, play in the band, or compete in forensics—whatever our community wants, we are going to do—but we’re going to do it first class.

The professionals who work in our district are proud that we do not have collective bargaining. We are the only large school district in the state where the teachers and the administrators can still publicly say they like each other. I say that tongue in cheek, but my goodness, it’s amazing how often you read in the paper of adults fighting over rights and benefits of adults. Does anybody remember children anymore?

In Clovis, we still like children. We make no bones about it. We've got a Clovis image to keep up, and we're looking for people a cut above the average. We're concerned about your appearance, your attitude, your teaching skills, your ability to work with students, but most of all we're concerned about your character and your values. You are going to be around our children when nobody else is there. You are going to see and do things with them that nobody else will ever know about.

We're looking for role models, and we've learned an interesting thing—if you really want to develop winners you've got to surround children with winners. And a lot of people think you are a winner or you wouldn't be sitting here. Nobody gets this far without being recommended by a building administrator. And that administrator's reputation is on the line because he or she has recommended you and hopes you reciprocate a little bit by trying to make his or her judgment look good.

So what we're really saying to you is we think education revolves around teamwork and trust. We want you on our team, and we want to know that you want to be there. So we spend a lot of time telling you about the people and facilities you are going to work with and in—the school staff, the community, and the children, as well as the supplies, equipment, and materials—so from the first day of school it's all forward. We don't want you to look around at the beginning of the school year and say, "My Gosh, if I'd known it was like this I would never have signed with this district."

If you are still interested in working at Clovis under those conditions, we'd like to offer you a contract. We people in Clovis get excited when teachers and students do things nobody thought they could do. As long as you work in Clovis don't you ever lose that spirit ... and never forget our motto, "Sic 'em!"

Endnotes

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14. California Department of Education (n.d.). Local Control Funding Formula. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/>. Further, California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) provides three branches of funding. Base funding is uniform for each district or charter school based on a per-pupil head count; supplemental funding is additional funding provided to support targeted disadvantaged students; and concentration funding is provided to districts in which the unduplicated count of targeted students exceeds 55% of student enrollment. See: California Department of Education. (n.d.). Local Control Funding Formula overview. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/FG/aa/lc/lcffoverview.asp>.
15. California School Boards Association. (2016). Golden Bell Awards: 2016 winners. <http://awards.csba.org/golden-bell/2016-winners/> (accessed 06/04/19).
16. Each Clovis school site has a School Assessment and Review Team composed of the principal, several staff members, interested parents and community members, and students and may include some residents who do not have children at the school. The team serves as an advisory body to the school principal. See <https://www.cusd.com/SART.aspx>.
17. An assessment director explained that the IDAC came about in 1987, following a federal investigation of a racially charged incident in one of the district high schools. The IDAC is essentially a focus group of English learners and African American, Hispanic or Latino/a, Native American, and Hmong community members.
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19. Richard and Rebecca DuFour, and the Solution Tree LLC they created, have conducted 1- and 2-day training sessions for teacher teams from districts throughout California over the past 2 decades. The sessions define a moral imperative for teachers to collaborate on the challenge of bringing all students in their grade level or shared course up to academic standards. The PLC model focuses a teacher team on four questions that should precede and follow their classroom instruction: (1) What do we want students to learn? (standards), (2) How will we know if they learned? (common formative assessment and data review), (3) What do we do if they haven't? (intervention), and (4) What do we do if they have? (enrichment). See Richard DuFour's article on district PLCs: <http://www.advanced.org/source/professional-learning-communities-key-improved-teaching-and-learning>.
20. CAASPP data in 2015 showed that the difference in the proportion of Hispanic or Latino/a and White students meeting or exceeding state standards was 20 percentage points (37% vs. 57%). By 2017, the difference had narrowed to 17 percentage points (46% vs. 63%).
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