

Evaluation of the High School Leadership Initiative Report 1

SRI International

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1. Introduction

Educational leadership matters. Cumulating evidence makes clear how critical the school leader's role is in a school's effectiveness (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Levine & Lezotte, 1990). In fact, research has shown that considering all school-related factors, leadership is second only to teaching in affecting student learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Yet there is a widespread sense that current means for attracting and preparing leaders are not doing the job (Murphy, 1992; Portin, DeArmond, Gundlach, & Schneider, 2003). This comes at a time of heightened scrutiny and accountability for student outcomes, when high-quality school leadership is keenly needed.

Recognizing the need for effective educational leadership, the California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP)¹ developed the High School Leadership Initiative (HSLI). Launched at the beginning of the 2007–08 school year,² HSLI was designed to develop and support high school principals and school leadership teams in implementing best practices to improve student achievement and advance educational equity. As described in the HSLI request for proposals, the program has three primary goals: (1) to strengthen the leadership of the principal and leadership team focused on student learning, (2) to document how schools create conditions that produce improved student achievement, and (3) to learn how these practices might be institutionalized (California Academic Partnership Program, 2006).

CAPP contracted with SRI International to conduct an independent evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of the HSLI program. This report presents findings from the first phase of the evaluation (March to September 2011), addressing how the HSLI is helping school leaders change leadership structures in schools to be more inclusive, navigate the dialectic decisions they face, and access the resources needed to improve teaching and learning in their schools. It also discusses the factors that support the success of HSLI and the challenges that impede progress. In the remainder of this introduction, we first describe the HSLI program. We then describe the focus of the research, present an overview of the methodology, and provide an overview of the report.

Understanding HSLI

HSLI offers an innovative leadership development model to improve school leadership capacity. The underlying logic of the model is that by strengthening leadership, HSLI ultimately will improve student outcomes (Exhibit 1).

¹ CAPP, established in 1984 by the California State Legislature, is administered by the California State University in cooperation with the University of California, the California Community Colleges, the California Superintendent of Public Instruction and other educational representatives. CAPP's mission is to develop cooperative efforts to improve instruction and prepare more students for postsecondary education. For more on CAPP see <http://www.calstate.edu/CAPP/>.

² HSLI participant schools were selected in spring 2007.

The HSLI Leadership Development Model

HSLI targets the improvement of a school's leadership through a variety of supports, including a monetary grant, onsite support, a professional learning community, and professional development workshops.³ These supports, the model posits, will cultivate effective leaders who align organizational policies and procedures with school goals, support individuals and the staff as a whole to strive for continuous improvement, support best practices across all content areas, support teacher leadership development and shared decision making, and effectively use data to inform decision making.

Through these activities, school leaders will foster the schoolwide culture and practices needed to improve teaching and learning. In the model, the schoolwide conditions for effective teaching and learning include a professional learning community focused on teaching and learning, resource alignment with school goals, a culture of high expectations and performance for educators and students, data-driven decision making, the effective use of external resources, parent and community involvement, and the use of tools to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

In such an environment, teachers will be able to create classrooms characterized by effective teaching for all students. In such classrooms, teachers have strong content knowledge and pedagogical practice, are attentive to differing student needs, use class time effectively and efficiently, reflect on their practice to improve instruction, have positive interactions with all students, and believe that all students can learn.

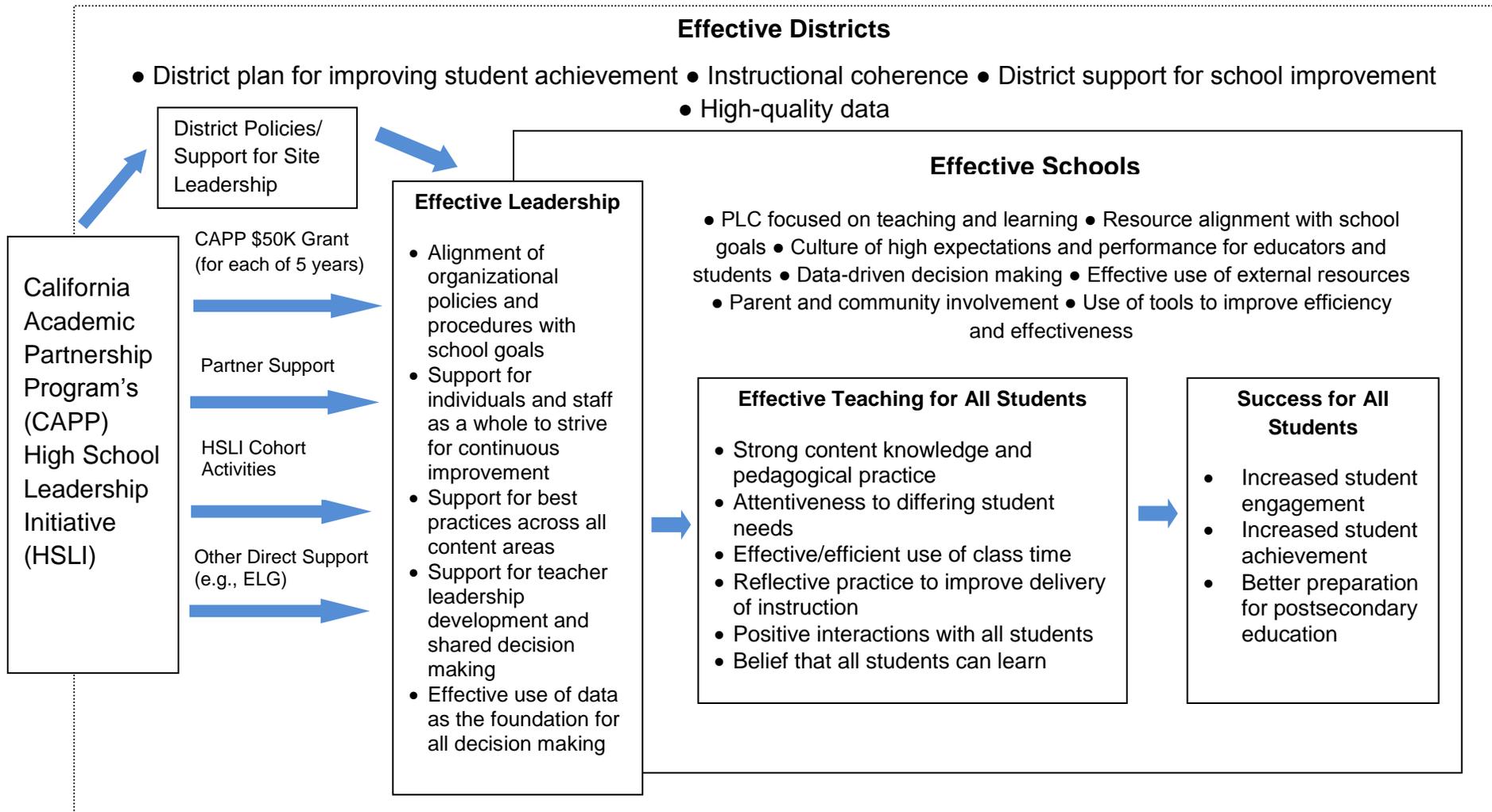
Finally, the model recognizes the importance of the district and the wider school contexts on HSLI efforts. District policies and practices can support or hinder reform work in schools. Districts with a plan for improving student achievement, instructional coherence, support for school improvement, and high quality data are in a position to support improvement at the school level. Community needs and challenges, shrinking school budgets, and state and federal policies, including accountability policies, can support or impede schools' efforts. These outside influences matter to schools, school leaders, teachers, and students.

By developing school leaders who can establish positive schoolwide conditions for teaching and learning and effective instructional classroom environments within the broader context in which they are working, HSLI aims to improve student outcomes. Specifically, HSLI is intended to increase student engagement in school, increase student achievement, and increase the number of students prepared for postsecondary education.

³ HSLI supports are described in the next section.

Exhibit 1.1 HSLI Logic Model

CAPP's High School Leadership Initiative Strategy for Building and Sustaining Effective School Leadership



Community, State, and Federal Context

Community needs and challenges
 Shrinking school budgets
 State credentialing requirements
 State and federal accountability
 Legislation

HSLI Supports

The HSLI leadership development model is predicated on schools receiving an array of supports to strengthen the leadership of the principal and school leadership team. These supports include a monetary grant, partner support, and HSLI cohort activities.

Monetary grant. Each HSLI school receives a \$250,000 grant allocated over 5 years. The grant is intended to support leadership development and strengthen instruction at the school; it is not intended for capital outlay. Within this broad parameter, the principal has discretion over how to use the funds to meet the school's needs. Examples of grant expenditures include release time for data analysis, curriculum development, and instructional planning during the school day; staff development on specific instructional strategies; and consultants to bring in particular areas of expertise and assistance.

Partner support. HSLI recognizes that principals have varying strengths and weaknesses and that they are working in specific contexts with unique conditions and circumstances. To address their individual needs, each school receives onsite support from an HSLI partner with expertise with curriculum, K–12 educational programs, and/or leadership experience. Unlike a typical school “coach,” a partner works collaboratively with school personnel, serving as a peer and colleague to the principal in building leadership capacity, establishing a professional learning community, and improving student achievement. Funded to spend 2 days per month⁴ in each school, the partners have a regular presence in the schools. Because the partners' support is tailored to meet the needs of each school, their work varies across schools and covers a range of activities. For example, they work directly with the principal providing advice, shadowing him or her and providing feedback, and conducting joint school walk-throughs and discussing observations. Partners also work with other school staff members by attending leadership and department team meetings, facilitating meetings, leading teacher trainings, and providing advice. They also work on behalf of the schools with outside organizations, for example, by advocating for the school with district administrators, securing technical assistance for the school by making connections with outside providers, and bringing in targeted expertise by tapping their colleagues. The content of partners' work addresses many areas of leadership including staffing, basic management skills, instruction, and budgeting.

Providing support across so many domains of leadership can be challenging even for the most experienced experts. HSLI acknowledges this and supports the ongoing development of partner expertise mainly through two mechanisms—quarterly partner meetings and regular feedback from the HSLI director. The 5-hour quarterly partner meetings include a discussion of assigned readings (e.g., on leadership, organizational management, or school reform) and ways the readings inform partners' work. The meetings also include time for each partner to provide an update on his or her work with each school and to raise ongoing challenges in developing leadership capacity at HSLI schools.⁵

⁴ Partners are funded to visit schools for 10 months of the academic school year calendar.

⁵ HSLI partners also play active roles in other HSLI activities including administering and analyzing the annual staff assessment survey, collecting and analyzing student outcomes, and planning the summer seminars. The quarterly meetings provided time for planning these other activities and discussing results of data collection efforts.

The HSLI director also supports the ongoing development of partner expertise. HSLI partners keep a log of their communications with their assigned schools and write regular reflections based on their school visits. The project director reviews these documents as they are submitted and initiates more in-depth conversations about the challenges to leadership development and supporting school improvement efforts and how partners might address them. The HSLI director also works with partners to address unique challenges at individual HSLI schools.

HSLI Cohort Activities. The principals of the HSLI schools constitute a professional learning community for sharing challenges and best practices. Twice each year, the principals convene for a cohort meeting at one of the schools. During each 2-day meeting, principals have the opportunity to hear presentations from the host school's faculty and students about their educational approach and special programs, tour the school, and discuss issues related to leadership. The cohort meetings are a time for the HSLI principals to share best practices; discuss challenges they face and identify possible solutions; discuss beliefs about teaching, learning, and leadership; and discuss research on effective schools and effective school leadership. The principal cohort enables the principals to expand their view of schools and leadership beyond their own school and receive support and advice from peers who may be facing similar challenges.

HSLI also hosts an annual summer seminar for the leadership teams from each of the schools. The purposes of these summer seminars are twofold: to create school improvement plans for the upcoming school year and to develop leadership skills. The summer seminars provide time for individual school leadership teams to meet to strategize for the upcoming school year. Teams are expected to develop specific school improvement plans to take back to their schools. During these summer seminars, leadership teams also attend seminars and workshops to increase their knowledge of educational issues and to build leadership skills. Examples of professional development topics include building academic literacy for English learners, facilitating effective meetings, developing ninth-grade interventions, connecting professional development with classroom practice, and creating a college-going culture.

Through these myriad supports, HSLI has developed a model of leadership development that is inward looking to be responsive to the individual needs of each school yet is also outward looking to provide outside perspectives and expertise for each school.

Overview of the Research

The evaluation of the HSLI was designed to understand the implementation and effect of the HSLI leadership development model. This report addresses the question, **How has CAPP contributed to leadership development in the HSLI schools?** Other research questions to be addressed in future reports are the following: Have student outcomes improved, overall and by subgroup, in HSLI schools? Have teachers' instructional practices changed to support the academic achievement of all students? Have conditions for teaching and learning improved in HSLI schools? Have the leadership structure and practices been strengthened in HSLI schools?

The first phase of the evaluation of the HSLI leadership development model was designed with four integrated strands of data collection and analysis: school site visits, HSLI staff interviews, observations of HSLI meetings, and document review.

School Site Visits

A two-person research team visited each of the 11 HSLI schools in spring 2011 to provide rich descriptions of the implementation and effects of the HSLI leadership development model and to describe how the model varies in response to local conditions and needs. At each school, we interviewed the principal and school leadership team members, as well as teachers not involved in school leadership team activities. Interviews addressed the school context (e.g., student demographics, teacher characteristics, organizational structures, and leadership practices), the principal's and teachers' participation in and assessment of HSLI-sponsored meetings, the role and influence of the partner; changes in leadership practices since HSLI, and supports for and challenges to strengthening leadership, school conditions for teaching and learning, and instructional practices. Researchers also interviewed a district representative to understand how HSLI fits with other district initiatives and to obtain his/her perspectives on any effect HSLI had on the school and/or district.

HSLI Staff Interviews

To understand the organizational perspective of the role of HSLI in developing school leadership and changing school conditions for teaching and learning, the evaluation included interviews with CAPP leadership and HSLI partners. We interviewed the HSLI director, the statewide CAPP director, the CAPP associate director, and the CAPP fiscal and grants manager to understand the history of CAPP and HSLI and the current status of the initiative. Interview topics included the initiative goals for CAPP, selection of HSLI schools and partners, the types of supports provided schools, and implementation challenges and successes to date.

Researchers also interviewed each school's partner to understand that role and to obtain the partners' perspectives on how the schools have engaged with the HSLI and the changes that have occurred as a result. Interview topics included the characteristics of HSLI schools and staff; processes, procedures, and strategies used to build working relationship with schools; processes, procedures, and strategies for assessing school leadership needs; processes, procedures, and strategies for building school leadership; perceived effectiveness of supports for partners; and challenges and successes to date.

Observations of HSLI Meetings

SRI researchers attended HSLI-sponsored meetings over the course of the year, including HSLI partner meetings, principal cohort meetings, and the summer seminar for HSLI leadership teams. At the meetings, researchers attended to the content of discussions, the interactions between HSLI partners and leadership team members, the interactions among leadership team members, the challenges faced by leadership team members, and the support provided by HSLI partners.

Document Review

HSLI has collected a wealth of information from HSLI partners, HSLI principals, and HSLI staff. We gathered and analyzed these documents to advance our understanding of HSLI

and its implementation and effectiveness in each school. Documents reviewed were original HSLI applications, partner documents (e.g., communication logs, reflections, and summary reports), documents for partner meetings, cohort meetings, and summer seminars (e.g., agendas, meeting materials, participant feedback), principal annual summaries, HSLI budgets and plans, and the first HSLI report, written by Ellen Hershey.

Overview of the Report

This report uses a site-level lens to document the role of HSLI in the development and/or support for leadership capacity-building structures.⁶ Chapter 2 presents an overview of the 11 HSLI schools. Chapter 3 addresses how HSLI helps create and strengthen schools' leadership system by creating shared leadership models and sustainable structures in which those models can operate effectively. Chapter 4 describes the role of HSLI in working with principals to navigate the wide range of tasks and decisions they face. Chapter 5 discusses how HSLI expands a school's network of experts and resources to enable it to strengthen teaching and learning. Chapter 6 presents preliminary student achievement trends for the 11 HSLI schools. The final chapter presents a summary of findings and describes next steps in the evaluation.

⁶ Future data collection and analysis will address the efficacy of HSLI supports.

2. Overview of the HSLI Schools

The HSLI grant program was made available to California high schools in the bottom 50th percentile of the state's Academic Performance Index (API). Interested principals, with support from their districts, submitted a brief application describing the leadership challenges they faced, how they had already addressed them, what work remained to be done, and their vision for how the grant program would help them address the challenges. CAPP received over 70 applications and selected 11 schools to participate. From the strongest applications, the final school sample was selected to represent California's diversity in geography, size, urbanicity, and student demographics. In this chapter, we provide an overview of the characteristics of these HSLI schools.

The 11 HSLI high schools vary greatly in size, from just over 500 students to more than 3,100. The schools are located as far north as Sacramento County and as far south as San Diego County. They also vary in the types of students they serve, from small percentages of English language learners (15%) to almost 40% of the entire student population speaking languages other than English. The student population at most HSLI schools (8 out of 11) is primarily Latino, and all HSLI schools serve student populations in which 50% or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. In 7 of the 11 HSLI schools, over 80% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (Exhibit 2.1).

Exhibit 2.1
Characteristics of Participating HSLI Schools

HSLI School	County	School District	Student Enrollment (2009–10)	Percentage Latino (2009–10)	Percentage English Learners (2009–10)	Percentage Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (2009–10)	API State Rank (2010–11)	Program Improvement Status (2010–11)
Baldwin Park	Los Angeles	Baldwin Park Unified	2,452	92%	18%	92%	3	Year 2
Caruthers	Fresno	Caruthers Unified	539	76	34	89	5	Year 2
Dinuba	Tulare	Dinuba Unified	1,733	89	22	90	5	Year 4
Florin	Sacramento	Elk Grove Unified	1,747	27	23	88	3	n/a*
John H. Francis Polytechnic	Los Angeles	Los Angeles Unified	3,139	91	28	80	3	Year 1
Morse	San Diego	San Diego Unified	2,339	31	15	68	4	Year 5
William C. Overfelt	Santa Clara	Eastside Union High School District	1,756	80	34	63	2	Year 3
Oxnard	Ventura	Oxnard Union High School District	3,109	75	16	50	4	Year 2
Soledad	Monterey	Soledad Unified	1,127	92	32	85	2	Year 5
Southwest	San Diego	Sweetwater Union High School District	1,739	88	39	73	4	Year 5
Valley	Sacramento	Elk Grove Unified	1,631	34	24	84	5	n/a*

*Program Improvement status is not applicable to this school because it does not receive Title 1 funding.
Sources: California Department of Education 2011 (DataQuest and STAR websites).

To better understand the multiple contexts in which HSLI operates, we provide short descriptions of the schools below, highlighting some of the most salient contextual factors that affect HSLI.

Baldwin Park High School (Baldwin Park, CA)

Baldwin Park High School, located in the urban center of the Los Angeles basin, has a student population that is almost exclusively Latino (92%). Baldwin Park has a history of low student achievement and a reputation for gang-related violence. In 2010–11, the principal was in his fifth year leading the school. In an effort to create smaller learning environments for students of this large comprehensive high school, Baldwin Park recently converted to wall-to-wall small learning communities (SLCs) whereby students are grouped into “houses” and follow a course sequence in cohorts.

Caruthers High School (Caruthers, CA)

Caruthers High School is located in an unincorporated, rural town in Fresno County, where the local economy is predominantly agricultural. Three-quarters (76%) of its students are Latino. Caruthers High School is a center of community life. Caruthers has experienced declining enrollment since 2006–07 and part of that decline has been attributed to neighboring high schools that have opened specialized programs such as a doctors’ academy. As a result, Caruthers High School is focused on maintaining and expanding advanced courses and extracurricular activities and starting its own doctors’ academy as ways to compete for students. In 2010–11 school year, the principal was in his fourth year in that role.

Dinuba High School (Dinuba, CA)

Dinuba is a town of about 21,000 people in California’s Central Valley, 45 minutes south and east of Fresno. The major employers in the area are food companies (Ruiz Foods and Odwalla) as well as a Best Buy distribution center. Dinuba High School, the district’s only comprehensive high school, enjoys strong community support and has forged a strong relationship with municipal leadership. The district is in Year 3 Program Improvement and is working with a District Assistance and Intervention Team provider to implement instructional changes at all levels using the instructional model Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI). Student enrollment at Dinuba high school has been steadily climbing over the past 8 years, from 1,445 students in 2002–03 to 1,733 students in 2009–2010 (an increase of 20%). The vast majority of Dinuba High School students are Latino (89%). As of the 2010–11 school year, the principal was in her seventh year leading the school; however, she left the high school at the end of that school year to take an assistant superintendent role in a neighboring town.

Florin High School (Sacramento, CA)

Florin High School is located in Sacramento in the Elk Grove Unified School District. Florin High School, along with the entire school district, has been experiencing declining enrollment since 2003–04. By 2009–10, Florin High had lost 30% of its student population from a high in 2003–04. Florin High also has experienced considerable principal turnover, with 10 principals in the last 6 years. The principal was in his first year as principal in 2010–11 school year and was the third principal in the school since HSLI started. The first HSLI principal at

Florin High, who now holds a district administrator position, directly oversees Florin High and provides district support. Florin High serves a diverse student population with 33% Asian, 27% Latino, 18% African American, 10% White, 3% Pacific Islander, 3% Filipino, and 7% reporting two or more ethnicities. Florin High School is not a Title I school and therefore cannot be identified as Program Improvement under the federal No Child Left Behind Act; however, the school district is in Year 3 Program Improvement for the 2011–12 school year.

John H. Francis Polytechnic High School (Sun Valley, CA)

John H. Francis Polytechnic (commonly referred to as Poly) is in the East San Fernando Valley in Local District 2 of the Los Angeles Unified School District. It is approximately 15 miles from downtown Los Angeles. Once a school of 4,700 students operating on a year-round multitrack schedule, Poly has gone through many changes during the past 5 years. With the opening of a new high school nearby, Poly switched to a single-track year round (balanced calendar) schedule and serves a population of just over 3,000 students. With the reduction in student population, Poly lost more than 70 teachers and 75 classified positions. Poly made gains in achievement over the last 5 years and successfully exited Program Improvement status in 2008–09; however, it was reidentified and is now in Year 1 Program Improvement. Ninety-one percent of the student population is Latino. During the 2010–11 school year, the principal was in his fourth year leading the school.

Morse High School (San Diego, CA)

Morse High School is located in the city of San Diego, approximately 8 miles east of downtown. Serving a diverse population of students (41% Filipino, 31% Latino, 19% African-American), Morse High School has struggled with leadership turnover at both the school and district level. San Diego Unified has had four superintendents since 1998 and Morse High School has had 3 principals in the last 4 years, with the current principal hired beginning in the 2009–10 school year. Recently, Morse High School has focused much of its energy on WASC accreditation. The school received a “limited-term” 1-year WASC accreditation in 2008–09, a 2-year WASC term in 2009–10, and a list of improvements the WASC committee will be looking for on its next visit in spring 2011–12.

William C. Overfelt High School (San Jose, CA)

William C. Overfelt High School (commonly referred to as Overfelt) is in south San Jose. Historically, the school has had trouble with gang activity, but recently the principal has worked successfully to reduce tension between rival gangs in the area. Overfelt has several career academies in place that serve a significant portion of the student population. In 2010–11, the principal and leadership team worked to secure a majority staff vote to convert into wall-to-wall SLCs in which all students will be assigned to an academy or SLC. The opening of two charter high schools in the area is putting pressure on Overfelt to seek ways to hold on to high-performing students. Eighty percent of the student population is Latino. In 2010–11, the principal was in his fourth year leading the school.

Oxnard High School (Oxnard, CA)

Oxnard High School is a large comprehensive high school in Oxnard, a city of almost 200,000 approximately 40 miles south of Santa Barbara along the Pacific coast. Once a primarily agrarian community, Oxnard now benefits from an active port and related industries while also maintaining a significant agricultural industry. Oxnard High has experienced declining enrollment, losing 233 students between 2007–08 and 2010–11. Its student population is 75% Latino. Although student performance on statewide assessments continues to be a concern, Oxnard High has an AVID program that has been identified as a state demonstration site. During the past 3 years, Oxnard High adopted and implemented a 4x4 block schedule and then reverted back to a traditional schedule as directed by the district superintendent. In 2010–11, the principal was in his first year as the principal of Oxnard High.

Soledad High School (Soledad, CA)

Soledad High School is a comprehensive high school in the rural agricultural town of Soledad in the Salinas valley (pop. 25,738) and serves primarily Latino students (92%). Soledad High School, built in 1999, is the only high school in the formerly K–8 Soledad Unified School District. Except for a small decline in enrollment in 2008–09, enrollment has grown every year since the school opened. Soledad High School is in Year 5 Program Improvement. The district is in Year 3 Program Improvement and is working with a District Assistance and Intervention Team provider to implement instructional changes at all grade levels using EDI. In addition to EDI, Soledad High School is developing curriculum guides and benchmark assessments for all courses. In the past 4 years, Soledad High School has had three principals. In 2010–11, the principal was in his first year in the position.

Southwest High School (San Diego, CA)

Southwest High School, in the Sweetwater Union High School District, is in San Diego, near the border with Mexico. The student body is primarily Latino (88%). Southwest High is in Year 5 Program Improvement and the school district is in Year 3 Program Improvement, creating a lot of pressure to improve instruction and student outcomes. The principal has had strong support from the superintendent for her reform ideas. With the school board's abrupt removal of the superintendent at the end of the 2010–11 school year, however, it is not yet clear how much support the principal will receive from the interim superintendent to push instructional reforms at Southwest High. In 2010–11, the principal had been in the position for 3 years; at the beginning of the 2011–12 school year, however the principal took a district-level position.

Valley High School (Sacramento, CA)

Valley High School is in the south end of the city of Sacramento and is part of the Elk Grove Unified School District. Valley High School is not a Title I school and therefore cannot be identified as Program Improvement under the federal No Child Left Behind Act; however, the school district is in Year 3 Program Improvement for the 2011–12 school year. Valley High has experienced declining enrollment in most years since the 1999–2000 school year, going from a high of about 2,500 students in 1998–99 to approximately 1,600 students in 2010–11. The school has a highly diverse student population (34% Latino, 30% African American, 20% Asian,

6% White, 4% Pacific Islander, and 4% Filipino). As of the 2010–11 school year, the principal was in his third year leading Valley High School.

As these short descriptions demonstrate, each HSLI school is operating under idiosyncratic conditions and facing distinct challenges. Some have increasing enrollments; others decreasing. Some have stable leadership; others have histories of principal turnover. Some are restructuring calendars or school structures or instructional programs. Most face intense scrutiny because of their Program Improvement status; some enjoy relative autonomy. Each of these factors influences how HSLI interacts in a school. In the following chapters, we examine the ways in which HSLI is developing leadership capacity in the schools. These contextual factors serve as the background for understanding the reach and the challenges of HSLI.

3. Systematizing Leadership

Principal turnover is both common and damaging to school improvement efforts. In a recent report commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, researchers suggested that leaders should be in place for 5 to 7 years to minimize the negative effects of turnover; yet, on average, a principal stays at one school for less than 4 years (Louis, Leithwood, Wahsltrom, & Anderson, 2010). When a school leader departs, improvements that have been made at the school may disappear. Indeed, leadership turnover has been found to be negatively associated with school culture, the quality of classroom curriculum and instruction, and ultimately student achievement (Louis et al., 2010).

HSLI staff and partners recognized from the project's inception the importance of schools developing sustainable distributed systems that provided leadership opportunities for teachers because such groups could be successful even if a school leader left. Consequently, HSLI grant funding was awarded to schools, not individual leaders. Furthermore, HSLI supports were designed to focus on the development of distributed leadership, which promotes structures and systems necessary for sustainable progress, shared ownership of school goals, and shared commitment to implementing strategies to achieve those goals. One partner captured the importance of developing lasting structures at a school when he⁷ described the central questions that have driven his work with his principal:

How do you put systems in place so that you don't have to re-create the wheel?... Every year [the principal and I] were talking about the same things.... We talked about how do you build systems that are sustainable over time and will transcend any person? We have such a turnover at the principalship, so how can your vision for change continue even once you leave?

Other HSLI partners confronted similar questions and responded by helping their schools establish and strengthen structures (e.g., professional learning communities, leadership teams) designed to help teachers and administrators collaborate on school improvement and instructional goals. Partners worked to strengthen teachers' abilities to lead these teams, better enabling them to endure the loss of a school leader. Most HSLI schools have changed principals at least once during the initiative, and some HSLI schools have changed principals multiple times. This chapter describes steps that partners and principals took to develop strong systems of shared leadership at their schools in order to minimize the negative effects of such transitions. Importantly, the task of "systematizing" leadership is a holistic process in which many different efforts are pursued simultaneously.

Helping Principals to Let Go

Faced with enormous responsibilities and competing demands, principals can be tempted to approach their work with an authoritarian stance: It is my way or the highway. While this

⁷ To preserve confidentiality and clear writing, all gendered pronouns in this report have been changed to the masculine form. In the next evaluation report, they will be in the feminine form.

approach can lead to success, research cautions that it is often associated with high teacher turnover rates (Dworkin, Saha, & Hill, 2003), conflict among staff (Ball, 1987), and a school that depends for its success on the personality of its principal in ways that are unsustainable for long-term progress after that principal has left (Spillane & Diamond, 2001). Across HSLI schools, we found that partners worked to dissuade principals from the notion that they needed to “do it all” and helped them identify, select, and empower teacher leaders from their own staffs.

At many HSLI schools, an important early step toward developing shared leadership structures was helping the principal understand the importance of distributing leadership authority and responsibility across the staff. As one partner conveyed, for principals to give up some decision-making power, they must confront a difficult question: Do you have enough trust in others that you will expand your decision-making sphere? We found that HSLI partners—who worked by influencing a school indirectly through discussion, advising, and questioning—were well suited to helping principals let go of some decision-making responsibility. Helping principals trust their colleagues to adequately perform essential school functions (e.g., designing curricula, leading meetings) is not something that can be forced. Indeed, all partners described helping principals come to conclusions on their own by asking thought-provoking questions. For example, one partner described his use of questioning to help a principal move toward sharing leadership:

You phrase questions that help [principals] stop and think about things without telling them what to do. As they answer the question, you summarize and paraphrase so they hear what they are saying. When you use a facilitative question, you are trying to get them to think what would happen if...What would happen if you didn't lead all the trainings and you had the teacher leaders do it?

Although most partners asked principals similar questions about leadership, evidence from the interviews suggests that conversations about shared leadership were particularly salient for certain school leaders at certain times in their careers. Specifically, new principals or principals new to a school generally reported taking a top-down approach to leadership. For these principals, taking control seems a natural and appropriate response to being in an unknown situation. HSLI partners were instrumental in helping these principals release some responsibility to teachers and exhibit a more inclusive, collaborative leadership style.

One new principal described how in the beginning of the year he wanted to “hold on to everything really tightly.” This principal instituted a highly controlled department-level professional learning community structure, in which he set the agendas for meetings and established clear expectations, requirements, and deadlines for departmental teams. While acknowledging the value of this “real solid structure,” the school’s HSLI partner reported that he worked with the principal to “not try to do it all, to allow [teachers] to take some responsibilities.” Consequently, according to both the partner and the principal, the principal has released some control over time. As the principal told us, “[The partner] wanted me to get it done, but with a kinder, gentler voice. That’s a leadership issue I have, I’m direct... My intention is not to say too much; [the partner] has helped me calm that down a little bit.”

Similarly, at another HSLI school, a principal came in to his position with a strong vision for school improvement but with a very assertive approach that some staff saw as controlling. Early on, he pushed for the removal of several staff members who did not agree with his vision, which hurt his reputation with some of the teaching staff. In response, his HSLI partner has worked to help the principal see the need to incorporate greater teacher voice and decision-making authority into school governance and increase his “willingness to engage people in the process.” According to the partner, over time the principal has come to believe more fully in distributed leadership and has put these new beliefs into practice at his school. Here, the partner describes the principal’s changes over time:

I really think that he has grown as a leader tremendously.... His autocratic style, I think that was his initial style.... He came in and I think he had some clear vision about where he wanted the school to go, and I think he didn’t have the support to move it in that direction. So he had to force it to work and just lead like a bulldozer and demand that these changes begin to occur. I think he got a lot of flak for that. And so, over time, I think he developed a style that allowed him to work more effectively with people. He had to make some decisions about the importance of his agenda versus the importance of the overall school culture and the climate and the mood on the campus, and I think he got enough feedback about how his style was divisive and...I think he heard that.

New principals may be more likely than veteran principals to respond to their positions by consolidating their power, but the tendency to do it all is strong among certain principals regardless of their career stage. For example, school staff viewed one HSLI principal as skillful, assertive, and highly organized; however, he was also seen as someone who held tightly to leadership authority during meetings with the school’s teacher leaders. According to one of the department chairs at the school, during the first year of HSLI, “It was kind of like, this is the [the principal’s] meeting, what do we talk about?” The partner recognized the principal’s tendency to take control and spent considerable time encouraging him to take teachers’ ideas seriously. During their conversations, the partner told us that he would continually “circle back to the importance of listening.” According to the partner, principal, and several teachers we interviewed at the school, the partner’s efforts have paid off: the principal has become more responsive to teacher voice. In fact, by spring 2011 the principal and teacher leaders alternated in who set the agenda for each meeting.

At another school, the principal was seen as competent, smart, and extremely productive. However, his ability to accomplish so much may have prevented his teachers from stepping into leadership roles. As the partner told us, “[Teachers] tend to always concede to the principal ... they rely on the principal for the final word.” Although this principal encouraged teachers at the school to take on leadership roles and opened up the school’s leadership group to any teachers who were interested, he still had a tendency to control the conversation. Consequently, the partner has worked with the principal to distribute more leadership authority to school staff. According to the partner, the principal “is trying to give teacher leaders something to do, so it’s off his plate. He is getting better at it and getting more trusting of their capacity to complete the

work.” Regardless of whether they are new or experienced, the willingness of principals to trust their staff is essential to their ability to distribute leadership authority.

Whereas many HSLI principals eventually shared leadership responsibilities across a wider swath of staff, not all principals accepted this leadership model. In a couple of schools, partners and principals were not able to come to a middle ground. For example, at one HSLI school, the principal did not include teacher leaders on the school’s leadership team. The partner disagrees with this decision and believes the principal “Would be stronger if he had a more formalized leadership team that involved some teachers.” However, the partner has not been able to convince the principal to bring teachers into the school-level leadership group. The principal and the partner maintain a strong and productive working relationship, but this situation demonstrates the limits of a partner’s ability to move a principal toward distributed leadership practices if the principal is not so inclined. Another partner described the limits of a partner’s authority at a school:

That’s the tension between partners and schools. We are there voluntarily. We are there at their whim. However they want to use us is how they will use us. I can talk until I’m blue in the face, but if it’s not helpful to [the principal] then he is going to do what he is going to do.

Partners were never intended to be the ultimate decision makers at HSLI schools, and no partner would assert that he should have the final word. However, the lack of partner authority at HSLI schools, combined with occasional disagreements over the extent to which leadership should be distributed across a staff, can diminish the ability of the HSLI program to develop true shared leadership on a campus. In nearly all schools, however, the partner was able to work with the principal to create more shared leadership.

Bringing in Teacher Leaders

Although it is important that HSLI principals develop trust in their teachers so as to develop structures of shared leadership at their schools, it is equally important that teachers with leadership potential step up to take responsibility. If a school lacks individuals willing to take on leadership roles, a principal has no choice but to move forward alone. Furthermore, if a principal believes in sharing responsibility with others but has not identified or selected other competent leaders to take on that responsibility, then the school will not enjoy the benefits of distributed leadership. We found that HSLI partners promoted the growth of leadership from within a school’s staff, helped principals decide who should take on leadership roles, and encouraged the principal to vest more power in groups of teacher leaders.

Partners at several HSLI schools worked with individual teachers to help them develop their leadership skills and in some cases encouraged them to take on leadership responsibility. For example, at one school the partner has worked with several teachers and teacher leaders, helping them improve their planning and management skills. The partner spoke about helping one teacher leader become more effective in running meetings. As he said, “I help him focus and tell him meetings are what you do after you’ve spoken to most of the people one on one. He has about one hundred ideas, and I tell him to focus on three.” For his part, the teacher leader spoke

about how the partner helped him. “He asks those hard questions that people are not asking, he asks very deeply about your implementation plans, and he does it with a lot of respect.” In this case, the partner provided highly valuable support to help the teacher leader improve his leadership skills. The success of the partnership was evident in the teacher leader’s professional ascension, as he moved from the high school to a district position in charge of curriculum and instruction. The partner’s work with the teacher helped him rise to greater levels of influence and responsibility.

At another HSLI school, the partner worked with an English language arts teacher, serving as a source of general advice on management skills and leadership. After working with the teacher for some time, the partner encouraged him to apply for a department chair role. This teacher reported that other than mentoring from the partner, he received no other mentoring on leadership. He described the support provided by the partner: “He has allowed me to say things to him and hear things from him, to help me see the whole picture, what needs to happen in the end; he helps me see what to do.” In this case, the partner helped improve the leadership skills of a teacher at the school, identified that teacher as a potential leader, and encouraged the teacher to rise up and assume more leadership responsibility.

There are several other examples of HSLI partners helping identify talent within the teaching staff. One HSLI school went through a significant reduction in staffing and enrollment during the HSLI grant, losing a third of its students and a similar proportion of its teachers. During this difficult process, the partner was able to help the principal decide which teachers would be a good fit for the downsized school. The result of the partner’s efforts was a downsizing process that teaching staff widely viewed as transparent and fair.⁸ According to both the principal and the partner, it also resulted in a teaching staff that is more cohesive and in tune with the principal’s instructional vision.

Similarly, at another HSLI school, the partner helped a teacher leadership team become more effective by encouraging certain members of the group to leave. The teacher leadership team had grown accustomed to focusing on “noncore” issues such as procedures, student discipline practices, and other operational concerns as opposed to instruction. The principal and the partner envisioned a new direction for the leadership team as an instructional “think tank.” However, certain members of the leadership team remained focused on noninstructional issues. Recognizing this inconsistency, at one meeting of the team the partner initiated a frank conversation about the purposes of the team, and, according to the principal, said something to the effect of “The leadership team of the past has run its course; it might be time for people to rethink why they are here and their purpose for being here.” This suggestion led certain members of the leadership team to leave and allowed the remaining team members to focus on instruction. The principal appreciated the partner stepping in, saying, “It was appropriate for an outsider to see that. I have to be careful because I don’t want it to seem as if I am pushing anybody out.”

⁸ The process the school used to downsize is discussed in the next chapter.

Establishing or Strengthening Leadership Structures

In addition to their work developing potential teacher leaders and identifying talent within the teaching staff, many partners encouraged principals to expand the power of existing teacher leaders and teacher-led groups. At one school, for example, the partner urged the principal to give the teacher leaders in charge of academies more power over school governance. At another HSLI school, the teacher leadership team focused mostly on analyzing student achievement data and implementing small-scale interventions to improve the scores of subgroups of students on certain tests. Although these interventions were successful to a point, they were largely peripheral to the central instructional concerns of the school. In response, the partner at this school urged the principal to give the teacher leadership group a greater role in school-level decision making. At a third school, the partner consistently urged the principal to pay more attention to a strong department chair with whom the principal had difficulty working. The partner convinced the principal to take the department chair more seriously, and since then the department chair has taken a very important role on the school's instructional leadership team and has become a strong ally to the principal in making positive changes at the school.

Aided in part by the HSLI program, many schools developed a variety of teacher-led structures designed to distribute leadership responsibility throughout the teaching staff. Although these structures often were in place before the HSLI program began or were initiated without the involvement of HSLI, almost all partners worked to make leadership structures at their schools more effective. In all cases, these structures served to foster teachers' collaboration with colleagues to improve teaching and learning. Further, by serving on these teams, teachers developed their own professional skills. The most common shared leadership structures that partners helped develop were instructional teams, governance teams, and task forces.

- **Instructional teams.** All HSLI schools had one or more instructional teams in which teachers played leadership roles. Across the schools, instructional teams varied in scope from the school, department, grade, or course level. Larger schools tended to have multiple types of instructional teams, whereas smaller schools were more likely to have just one (e.g., department teams). Teachers were assigned to certain instructional teams on the basis of their positions (e.g., grade-level teams), while other instructional teams were staffed on a voluntary basis. Some instructional teams were open to all teachers, but others required teachers to go through an application process to join. Instructional teams served a variety of functions but were frequently intended to facilitate data-driven decision making, help develop formative assessments, aid in implementing specific instructional strategies, provide a community of practice in which teachers could discuss teaching strategies, or some combination of these activities.
- **Governance teams** (e.g., leadership teams). Most HSLI schools had at least one governance team that was engaged with school-level decision making and incorporated leadership roles for teachers. Although they served a variety of functions, governance teams were commonly used to promote a wide range of teacher voices in conversations about school reform, foster leadership capacity across the school for issues integral to the school at large, and develop and/or develop support for school reform ideas. Whereas governance groups might make broad decisions about instructional change, in general they left the details of deconstructing teacher practice to instructional teams.

- **Task forces** (e.g., data teams). Some HSLI schools instituted temporary or permanent teacher groups to fulfill a specific function, such as implementing common literacy strategies across the curriculum, making vertical articulation agreements with feeder middle schools, or developing formative assessments. Most often, these groups were teacher led.

Partners helped improve the effectiveness of these shared leadership structures by improving the capacity of their members, helping them develop tools and organizational routines, and providing general feedback and guidance. Nearly all HSLI partners provided feedback, advice, and mentorship for teachers in leadership groups. Most partners spent time with instructional teams and asked questions, gave guidance, and generally served as thought partners. In this work, as in their work with principals, partners typically served a facilitative role and refrained from giving explicit directions. One partner described how he contributed to discussions among the school’s teacher leadership team:

I like to move the debate along, push discussion to the edges. I like to introduce topics they may overlook, especially when they try to generalize. I always remind them of the students that are disengaged. They look to me as a wise person...they will turn to me and say, “What do you think?”

Many teachers we interviewed had very high opinions of the partners who worked with them. Teachers valued partners for their ability to ask perceptive questions and for their big-picture perspective. One English language arts teacher whose partner had sat in on department meetings described the contribution of the partner: “Being an outsider, he brings a new perspective [that makes us say], ‘Wow, we didn’t think about it that way.’” A department chair from another school said, “I have been amazed at what he has seen and the points that he has brought up; it has been shocking to me. I think one of the reasons we have done well is because of him.” In addition to providing general advice and guidance, several partners connected teachers to research literature relevant to issues at hand.

Another way that partners helped strengthen the leadership structures was to assist principals and teachers in developing tools and protocols to make shared leadership practices become more efficient, productive, and sustainable. These practices served as “systems of institutional memory,” in the words of one partner, and were intended to help HSLI schools use consistent practices over time. Partners worked with teacher teams to develop protocols, policies, and rules that would enable the teacher teams to be high functioning and smooth. For example, at several HSLI schools, the partners worked with teachers and administrators to design protocols that would clearly articulate the steps, procedures, and intended outcomes of a broad range of school functions, including communication with parents, discipline systems, lab procedures, aligning instruction with state tests, and analyzing data from formative assessments. These protocols were designed to allow the school to use consistent practices over time and to help facilitate collaboration across the staff (e.g., by initiating common practices for looking at student data).

In addition to helping schools develop the tools and routines that provide organizational consistency, some partners helped build leadership capacity by working with groups to develop

their collaborative practices. Partners' most common assistance across HSLI sites was working with teachers to help them analyze student achievement data. For example, at one school, the partner worked directly with the math department on data analysis, curriculum design, and the development of common assessments. According to both the partner and teachers, his role has been helpful. "The dialogue [in the department] has really increased and improved over time," said the partner. At another school, the partner also worked with the math department on analyzing student data and adjusting instruction accordingly. The partner told us that with his help the department has "Taken the initial steps towards becoming a self-reflective learning group." Apart from their work with specific departments, several partners gave trainings to the staff as a whole. These trainings usually were about data analysis, instructional strategies, or collaborative practice in an instructional group.

These examples illustrate the tremendous value of the partner in building a school's leadership capacity, but other HSLI supports, such as the summer seminar and grant funding, also help strengthen leadership systems at HSLI schools. For most HSLI schools, the summer seminar has provided valuable time for teacher leadership groups to develop and strengthen. One department chair described how summer seminars have helped the leadership team at his school become more unified and how summer seminars in general provide a unique and valuable forum:

I know that [the summer seminar] brings us closer together...it helps us become more comfortable working together. There is really something to say for having a meeting with your colleagues when you are not on campus. Some people are like, "Well, why do you need to meet for a couple of days far away when you could meet, for less money, at your school?" But when you meet at school there are a lot of different distractions, your mind is on a million different things. You can't really hash it out.

Other HSLI schools echoed this appreciation for the summer seminar as a place to team-build and come together.

HSLI grant funds also served to strengthen shared leadership groups and support the work of teacher leaders. Most HSLI schools spent a portion of their funds to support release time for instructional or governance groups and provide honoraria for teacher leaders. At one school, for example, almost all HSLI funds over the first 4 years of the grant were used to provide release time for the instructional leadership group. In this school and in others that directed HSLI funds toward teacher release time, this long-lasting financial support for the instructional team has helped it become institutionalized at the school. In fact, several principals reported that they will try to find ways to fund release time to support leadership teams even after the HSLI grant has ended.

In addition to funding release time to participate in leadership groups, many schools allocated HSLI funds to stipends and honoraria for teachers in leadership roles. For example, at one school, funds were used to compensate teachers for taking on newly developed leadership positions, including a professional learning community coordinator who developed agendas for instructional groups on campus and a teacher on special assignment who helped coordinate testing and student discipline at the school. Although such stipends were often small relative to

the amount of work teachers took on, many teachers receiving them insisted that it still mattered in terms of the recognition the stipends conferred. In the words of one course lead, “It’s nice to know that our time is valued. And that makes teachers buy in a lot more and put some more effort into it.... We’re very, very appreciative.”

The annual staff assessment of the principal is an additional component of HSLI that supported the development of leadership capacity. By asking teachers to evaluate the school’s principal, the survey served as an opportunity to promote teacher voice in school governance. The principal also took the same assessment to compare and analyze similarities and differences in survey responses. In a clear example of how the survey can be used to facilitate shared and systematic reflection on leadership, one school used time at the summer seminar to openly discuss and reflect upon the survey results. In coordination with the principal, who was initially out of the room, the partner used the survey as a jumping off point to facilitate a conversation among the attending staff about the principal’s leadership. The partner then met with the principal to discuss the feedback. The public, candid, and thoughtful nature of the experience was reported to be quite valuable for the staff as well as for the principal:

Two hours after their discussion, I would be called back in the room and then they would talk to me about all the areas I did well in and all the areas I needed to fix....That has the most helpful for me—an opportunity for people to really discuss my leadership...to really be able to strengthen my practice for the coming year.

The assessment has been a valuable tool to promote reflective leadership practice.

Summary of Systematizing Leadership

HSLI works to distribute leadership expertise and responsibilities across administrators and teacher leaders to create the conditions in which school policies and programs designed to support improved student outcomes can be sustained even in the face of principal turnover. At many HSLI schools, a first step in systematizing leadership was helping the principal understand the value of a distributed leadership system and helping him or her relinquish tight control of all school functions. Partners were most effective in getting principals to consider new leadership systems when they asked questions and discussed the benefits and challenges of different leadership models with them rather than asserting a particular model. While many principals did let go, this took time, with the need to build trust with their staff first. Partners also helped create sustainable leadership systems by identifying teachers with strong leadership potential, helping them step into leadership roles, and providing professional development in leadership skills. In schools where teachers already had leadership responsibilities, the partner helped improve their effectiveness by introducing tools and routines, and, where appropriate, encouraging the principal to expand the teachers’ sphere of influence. The HSLI summer seminar and grant funding further supported the development of shared leadership structures by giving teacher leadership teams valuable time to meet as a group and funding teachers in leadership positions.

4. Navigating the Dilemmas of Leadership

Few problems that a high school principal encounters have clear solutions. Rather, most require difficult choices among competing goals: How should limited resources be allocated? How should efforts to improve test scores be balanced with efforts to improve instruction in ways that current high-stakes assessments may not capture? How should a principal prioritize among the enormous and varied expectations for schools?

In most public high schools, the principal is left to navigate among these competing demands alone. When possible, he or she may seek the counsel of trusted colleagues, but such support is rarely regular, systematic, or disinterested. Few have regular thought partners who are unencumbered by agenda or constituency and who can help the principal to navigate the dilemmas of leadership. As discussed in the previous chapter, at times this isolation can lead principals to adopt a go-it-alone approach, trusting few colleagues at the school site or in the district offices enough to allow them to participate in key decisions. Principals trust fewer still to engage in their candid reflections about these decisions. This isolation is thus a double-edged sword: It encourages school leadership that is personality driven rather than systematic, and it discourages the kind of open dialogue that enables professional growth.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the partner can play a key role in shifting principal leadership from a go-it-alone style to a shared leadership approach by encouraging the principal to bring others in to the decision-making process. In this chapter, we examine how access to regular, candid conversations with a partner and with other principals through the HSLI network of schools enables the principal to engage with the problems of leadership in a thoughtful, reflective manner. We found that by working with a principal to navigate the dilemmas of leadership, the partner contributes not only to better decisions for the school, but also to an improved decision-making process. We begin this chapter with discussion of the partners' ways of working with principals, and we explore the role that other HSLI schools play in fostering a working PLC for school leaders. Then we present two key categories of problems principals and partners regularly engage in: developing and clarifying school improvement plans and managing transition. In each of these sections, we discuss how the principals' work with their partners and with other school leaders in the HSLI network contributes to positive outcomes for the school. We conclude the chapter with a discussion of the factors that contribute to a successful partnership between HSLI partner and principal.

Principal and Partner Engagement

Given the isolating dynamic described above, HSLI—largely through the partner—offers a rare and valuable opportunity: a dedicated thought partner who is both knowledgeable about the domain of school leadership and independent from it. Each principal we interviewed extolled the benefits of having someone who was expert in educational leadership “in the room” as a sounding board as he or she thinks through ideas, wrestles with challenges, and engages in the decision-making process. Findings from interviews suggested two interrelated ways that partners worked that were particularly effective in helping principals navigate the dilemmas of leadership

and promote professional growth. First, they leveraged their rich knowledge and experience through generative questioning about real problems of practice, helping new principals to start more quickly and encouraging veteran principals to take the time necessary to reflect. Second, through professional support that began with careful listening, they worked from a trusted position that was outside the system yet still responsive to the needs of the school. Interviews also revealed that HLSI cohort meetings offered principals similar opportunities to reflect on practice and collaboratively engage in the dilemmas of leadership.

Generative Questioning

Rather than tell principals what to do, partners often used questioning strategies designed to elicit reflection on problems the principals were facing. The benefits of partners' counsel and professional support were most explicitly discussed by principals who were new to the school or new to the role of principal. One principal, for example, reflected on the critical role that the partner played in his first year at the job. This support enabled him to hit the ground running:

[In the first year] I made it well known that I didn't know what I was doing and I was willing to admit it. . . . I needed [the partner] to help get credibility and capacity to gain the respect of the high-flying departments and bring in other departments. What [the partner] helps me a lot with is to ask the guiding questions to refine plans. When I present my plans to [him], [the partner] asks questions that get me thinking. [He] asks the kinds of questions that cause me to reflect after [he] leaves.

In this example, the partner acted as a catalyst, enabling the principal to more rapidly assume the leadership role, while also supporting the principal's ongoing professional growth. In other cases, the expertise partners brought to the table enabled new principals to better navigate the complex political environment of public schooling. For example, one principal reported how working with the partner helped him understand state policies so that he could make better decisions for his school:

[The partner] helped me understand the larger picture [of state politics]—how it all works—which helps me make better decisions specifically on the ground. . . . What I found is that a lot of people that are in education are not in tune with state politics—budgets and things like that—so a lot of times what I found is that they react very, very late and only when it is really effecting their situation.

As this example illustrates, a unique quality of the principal-partner relationship is that it embeds professional growth in the problems of practice: Reflection is focused on the actual decisions that the principal encounters every day. For at least one principal, the enormous challenges of budget and staff reductions he encountered early in his tenure became opportunities for growth rather than simply problems to react to:

My overall understanding of the job has continued to improve. . . . This has allowed me to become more confident, assertive, decisive, and efficient. As this has happened, we have experienced some of the most

difficult issues and circumstances in the history of our school. Without the growth that I have experienced over the last year, I would not have been able to navigate our school through these times and continue to move our school in a positive direction.... [The partner] has been incredibly valuable to my growth as a leader, as well as processing and developing a clear direction for our school as we navigate through continued staff reduction and loss of resources.

Appreciation of the partner's counsel was not limited to new principals. Many veteran principals noted that the day-to-day demands of leading a school are often so overwhelming that even they rarely find time for the kind of reflection necessary for sustained professional growth. In such cases, the partner helped the principal to take the time to proceed through decisions in a thoughtful manner. As one principal reported,

This world is so fast paced that principals don't have an opportunity to reflect and take a breath; we just have to go, go, go 1,000 miles an hour, and when you have [a partner] some really good things come out of that. So one of the good things is an opportunity to reflect, to stop. [The partner]...was a period in a sentence that said, "Wait before we move forward. Let's talk about this." Because in our world we don't have periods or commas or semicolons, we just go.

Careful Listening

When working with the principal, the partners' approach was neither directive nor didactic. Rather, the partner helped the principal consider the range of issues involved and think through toward solutions that, in the principal's view, were most appropriate for the school. The partner served as a mirror, helping the principal reflect on the problem's particulars and asking timely questions that prompted the principal to think carefully through difficult decisions. Ultimately, however, the decisions were the principal's to make. As one principal reported, "I haven't done everything exactly the way, I suspect, that [the partner] would have. And he's always respected that and that is fine, but his insight and his perspective have really helped."

In fact, partners often stressed that their role was to listen first and be responsive to the needs of the principal and the school rather than to push any particular agenda. From this "listen first" stance, partners were able to leverage their knowledge and experience to pose questions that challenged the ways the principals framed problems and approached solutions. This stance, in conjunction with the partners' position outside the district system, also helped assuage the evaluation anxiety that can shut down generative dialogue. Interviews suggested that partners were effective in helping principals to reflect on their own practice and scrutinize their own decision-making process. As in the above example, principals commonly reported that these efforts led them to think more carefully about problems of leadership.

Although questions posed by the partners often were reported to facilitate candid, generative discussions about key issues of educational leadership, they were not always comfortable for the principal. Several principals spoke about the frankness of the partners' feedback. For example, one principal recounted that when he asked for the partner's opinion of a

staff meeting, the partner pulled no punches, saying, “That was really crappy. You talked a lot but you didn’t get anywhere.” Because of this candor, however, the principal felt he could trust the partner’s positive feedback, which, he said, “Has more meaning to me because I know I deserved it.”

In addition to work with the partner, HSLI cohort meetings offered similar opportunities for open dialogue and thoughtful discussion about the problems of educational leadership. Principals emphasized the opportunity to speak candidly with peers who were outside the competitive environment of their own school district. For example, one principal described a district context in which open dialogue among principals was “politically dangerous.” As he said, “In this district, we are competitive about resources and academic achievement and test scores. There’s favoritism. You worry about telling them what you got. It’s not a collegial place that way.” For this principal, cohort meetings offer a safe space for less isolated decision making where he “Could talk to these principals about stuff I couldn’t say in my own district.”

The Problems of Leadership

Through generative questioning and careful listening, partners have helped principals navigate dilemmas of leadership. By design, however, HSLI does not provide partners with a guide or framework that suggests what types of support they might provide for their principals or a sequence in which to provide it. Not surprisingly, the activities of partners across the HSLI sites and the areas that each partner focuses on vary greatly across the program. However, two leadership challenges were salient in nearly all HSLI schools, and nearly all partners assisted in these areas: developing schoolwide improvement plans and managing leadership and programmatic transitions.

Schoolwide Planning

One important and ongoing dilemma that a principal faces is setting the priorities for school improvement. Establishing school improvement plans that are focused on a few impactful, realistic, and clearly articulated goals is critical. However, developing a school improvement plan is fraught with uncertainty and competing interests. It benefits from a deliberative process incorporating the voices of those who must commit to enacting it. In this section, we discuss how HSLI’s support helped principals think through the uncertainties involved in planning and helped make the planning process an opportunity for shared ownership of and commitment to the school’s progress. We also discuss the outsized role that current accountability pressures play in school improvement planning and how it affects the principal’s and partner’s work together.

Given the challenges of setting schoolwide priorities and establishing plans for improvement, it is no surprise that principals commonly reported that their partners were invaluable to the planning process. Some principals emphasized partner support that helped them think through the long-range impact of school improvement plans. This seemed to help mitigate the tremendous responsibility principals feel for improving the school. For example, one principal framed the partner’s contributions to schoolwide planning within the context of the highly risky position of being a high school principal:

It's a very odd job.... As a principal...I'm everyone's supervisor and I have the least job security on the campus and that's a very interesting dynamic. Everybody is really aware of that in education...the whole idea of leadership from this position is interesting. It's really based on how people feel, how willing they are to be led. And so, getting [the partner's] perspective on things and how he's seen things play out...I'll ask him has he ever seen things like this? I'm planning on doing this, what are your thoughts? How do you think this will play out? Those kinds of things. It's really nice to have that.

In addition to principal and partner conversations, interviews suggested that time spent during the HSLI summer seminar to develop the CAPP plan was helpful as a way to start conversations about school improvement strategies with a wider group of school staff. It helped principals, staff, and partners work together to set priorities, decide what goals were realistic and by when, and think through the mechanisms for attaining the goals. Conversations about the CAPP plan at the summer seminar often provided staff with a common language, laying the groundwork for ongoing collaborative work within the school. As one principal reported, summer seminars helped create “A common language with my own team.... Whether we agree or disagree with whatever is presented—that's not the most important. The most important thing is that we can walk away being able to talk about it.”

At a few schools, the CAPP plan was integrally related to the overall school improvement plan. In such cases, that integration facilitated far-reaching conversations among school leaders about how to set goals for the school and work toward them systematically. These goals, in turn, led to actions. For example, several interviewees at one school suggested that the long-term effort to develop a focused plan for school improvement has led to a cultural shift in professional practices across the school, both for administration and instruction. The leadership team transitioned from an emphasis on “Team building to lip service about what should be done to actual productive work: What we plan, we really are doing.” Moreover, the impacts from these planning sessions were not exclusive to the leadership team. Several teachers we interviewed at this school reported that efforts to be more inclusive in the planning process led to a shift toward “de-privatized” instructional practices. In their view, collaborative time newly focused on a common set of schoolwide goals was helping the staff to “Get outside of their own classrooms.” Similarly, nearly all spoke of a shift from a collection of individual classroom goals to a commitment to schoolwide progress—a shift from “How can I teach *my* kids in *my* class” to “How can I help to improve the performance of students at the school.” As a result, this school has experienced more cross-discipline and cross-age thinking (e.g., greater consideration of how a teacher's current instructional strategies might impact student learning next year) and more coherency across staff in the process of changing instruction (e.g., a shared commitment to following the school's model for teaching and learning).

An important caveat is that while the process of *developing* the CAPP plan was often a touchstone for rich conversations and schoolwide planning efforts, we found that the plan itself was rarely discussed as a formal document to follow to the letter. In fact, one partner described the formal text of the CAPP plan as something of an afterthought, even while its development was integral to the school's larger improvement efforts. As he said, “The CAPP plan is not a

separate plan, it's just 'this is what we are trying to do at the school' and the CAPP plan, which has to be submitted, is written after we decide what we want to do and then it's 'which part would be appropriate to put in the CAPP plan?'"

A key element of school improvement plans common to nearly all HSLI sites is improving student performance as measured by statewide tests. This priority is reflective of the enormous accountability pressures schools are under as well as a principal's desire to do well by the most visible and widely accepted measure of school success. In short, API and AYP are the coin of the realm. Interviews and partner reflections revealed partners' efforts to help the principal navigate accountability pressures and consider them in light of other partially overlapping, partially competing efforts to promote college and career readiness.

Partners who tackled this tension rarely reported unambiguous progress. In fact, a core effort of partners seemed to be helping the principal to see that tension may exist in the first place. Partners were helping principals gain perspective on external accountability pressures and feel less obligated to improving test performance as the *entirety* of their educational responsibilities. Partners often expressed frustration at how dominant a role improving test performance played in the principal's school improvement efforts. For example, one partner advised principals to recognize the necessity of focusing on achievement data while keeping in mind the larger goal of developing well-rounded students ready for postsecondary success.

Managing Transitions

A second area in which many partners helped principals and schools related to transitions. Change is a constant for public high schools in California. Principal turnover is high, and the complex accountability pressures have been accompanied by a steady influx of new initiatives at the district, state, and federal levels. Moreover, to be responsive to the unique needs of the local context, school leadership has little option but to layer additional changes on top of these external mandates. Within this state of complexity and flux, partners can help a school's leadership to manage transitions in ways that promote systematic processes rather than ad hoc triage. In fact, our interviews suggested that when a school is confronted with major changes, a partner's key contribution is to continually remind the principal and school leadership that process matters.

Two kinds of transitions most clearly revealed the importance of the partner's role: transitions to a new principal and changes involving the organizational structure of the school (e.g., adopting a small learning community structure). In each kind of change, the partner's support—as a thought partner and sounding board and sometimes simply as an additional expert staff member—seemed to facilitate the process, leading to transitions that were relatively smooth and systematic.

Partners were invaluable in helping the transition to new principals, both for the principal and for the school. For example, in a school besieged with frequent principal turnover over the past several years, the partner was able to help it through yet another change in leadership. The partner accomplished this by collaborating with existing teacher leaders as well as the district superintendent to keep the leadership team together at the end of the exiting principal's tenure while also helping bring the new principal in to his position as the head of the leadership team

during the 2010 HSLI summer seminar. The following passage from the partner's reflection reveals how he helped the teacher leadership team and the school through this transition:

The current principal was indicating that he wanted to wait until the new [principal] came before dealing with the Long Beach workshop. I decided that waiting was not an option and that we needed to continue to move forward with a group of teacher leaders and determine how to prepare for the meeting in Long Beach in June. I met with the Superintendent to ascertain where they were in the process of hiring a new principal and if they had any concerns with me leading a process that would keep the focus on moving forward and laying the foundation for the new principal. I asked the principal for permission to continue with this process and he also concurred.

In addition to taking active steps to facilitate a smooth transition in leadership, partners also represented a key resource for institutional memory to schools confronting principal turnover. Through their deep knowledge of the school and its functioning, partners were critical in helping incoming principals get up to speed about the school's established ways of working, as well as inform them of key challenges, staff concerns, and sources of conflict. By leveraging this valuable partner resource, leaders could move beyond the trial-by-error approach that is all too common among principals new to a school.

Partners also support principals through changes in school structure or resources. For example, a partner worked closely with the principal of a school encountering a significant reduction in student population and the concomitant loss of a large number of staff. Here, the partner's work with the principal focused on how to make the tough decisions about which teachers to encourage to stay and which teachers to encourage to leave. Throughout this 2-year experience, the partner helped the principal identify the teachers who were the best fit for the school's new size, offered a steady reminder to the principal that the process the school uses to make such difficult decisions matters a great deal, and provided critical support to the principal on communicating his decisions. Interviews suggested that these purposeful actions resulted in a process that was widely viewed as transparent and fair, which, given the situation, was no small feat:

One of the things I worked with [the principal] on over those years was how to keep communications flowing, especially when the opportunities were there for people to volunteer to go to the new school, and when enough people didn't volunteer, how the downsizing was going to occur, and how to go to people and talk to them directly, as painful as it was, when they were given March 15th notices or notices that he knew about that they were going to get cold in the mail—because, as you might guess, in a large district they don't do a lot of things personally.

Understanding Effective Partnerships

As illuminated throughout this and the previous chapter, HSLI partners are vital to the initiative's success. They play a critical role as advisor, provide professional development to administrators and teachers, bring in specialized expertise, and garner valuable resources (discussed in the next chapter). Given the weight of these contributions, considering what elements contribute to a productive relationship between principal and partner is important. We found that partnerships were most effective when the partners were deeply knowledgeable about the local context, trusted to be independent from the district, viewed as expert in school leadership, and responsive to the school's agenda.

The 11 HSLI schools represent the full range of California high schools relative to size, urbanicity, and student demographics. They also have unique histories, leadership structures, reform agendas, resources, and capacities. A key strength of the HSLI is that its supports are tailored to the unique needs of each local context in which it operates. To be effective, such an individualized approach requires a rich understanding of the messy particulars of school-level issues and concerns. When partners worked hard to build this understanding over the course of their time at each site, they were better able to leverage their own knowledge and expertise to support the school—their support complemented the school's strengths and helped to bolster areas of weakness. Developing deep knowledge of a site typically involved more than simply knowing district policies and school demographics. Rather, it included a deep understanding of the school as a cultural-historical milieu where the staff has unique ways of working (or not working) together, ways of working that have been developed over time and through personalities past and present. It is an understanding that requires both perspective and intimacy. By combining the eyes of experience with periodic participant observation, the partner is uniquely situated to gain this understanding.

However, gaining this deep understanding is a two-way street: It also requires that the partner be let in to the school. In this, the *partnership* is critical. While the partner must build a genuine and in-depth knowledge of the school and its staff, the principal, and ideally the school, also must be open to the partner in an authentic way. For the principal, this involves risk taking and a willingness to expose vulnerabilities in himself or herself as well in the school. It is therefore essential that the principal trust that such candor will be free from evaluative judgment. This leads to a paradox: The partner must be embedded in the system and seen as independent from it. A critical element of the HSLI that came up repeatedly in interviews is that partners *are not* evaluators. They were most effective when they were clearly understood to be external to the system and independent from the district agenda. Much of the candor characteristic of the powerful conversations described in this chapter was possible because the principals trusted that what they said—the doubts expressed, the mistakes revealed—would not be used as a data point in a negative evaluation or as a rationale for a district administrator to withhold from allocating needed resources. While nearly all principals cited the importance of the partner being outside the district system, a few teacher interviews suggested that it was also important that the partner be seen as independent from the principal. This independence seemed particularly true for partners who worked regularly with groups of teachers. Teachers sometimes reported that their work with the partner—for example, on their development as teacher leaders—benefited from teachers knowing that what they said would not be reported to the principal.

As a component of building this trust, we also found that partners needed to be viewed as credible experts about school leadership. In interviews, principals and teacher leaders revealed that they highly valued their partner's ability to speak from on-the-ground experience when weighing in on school concerns. Many partners had extensive school or district-level experience that conferred credibility in their work with school staff. Given that the education literature often discusses the distrust of "outsiders" as a challenge for school improvement efforts, it is no surprise that interviews suggested that the partner's credibility of experience was important in opening the door to candid conversations about authentic school problems.

At the same time, although such experience was clearly valued, partners were also wise to avoid taking on an authoritative stance. Rather, their expertise was most effective when it was leveraged to promote thoughtful discussions, for example, by posing challenging questions, rather than to drive the school's agenda. Related to this, interviews with principals, teachers, partners, and other HSLI staff were strikingly aligned around a key directive for the partner's work: to listen first. Principals in particular emphasized the importance of having a partner who was tuned to and respectful of the principal's own priorities. The partnerships seemed most productive when the work emerged from the principal's needs rather than the partner's proclivities or ideological commitments. Partners often challenged principals' thinking on problems, but they did not tell them what to do; while partners sometimes helped set agendas, they did not drive them.

In sum, findings indicate that partnerships are most effective when (1) the partner becomes deeply knowledgeable about the local school context, (2) the partner is trusted and viewed as independent from the school system, (3) the partner is viewed by the principal and staff as credible and expert in school leadership issues, and (4) the partner does not drive the agenda but is responsive to the needs of the principal and the school. Having these characteristics, however, does not alone guarantee the success of HSLI in any school. Challenges to building effective partnerships must also be addressed, discussed next.

Challenges to Building Effective Partnerships

Analysis of the interview data suggests three potential challenges to building effective partnerships: (1) the tension between partnering *with* principals and schools and doing work *for* them, (2) the challenge of HSLI supporting the partners' work within the context of a highly individualized initiative, and (3) the interpersonal hurdles involved in establishing a trusting principal-partner relationship. Given that these challenges represent emerging questions not explicitly investigated during data collection, future reports will explore them more directly.

Doing for versus doing with. Partners bring invaluable expertise and experience to schools. At the same time, schools and principals are operating with glaringly limited resources. Thus, it can be very tempting for partners to simply step in and do what needs to be done. This is understandable given the vast needs of many public high schools, but it can also challenge the sustainability of leadership development at the school if it becomes a pattern of dependence—a vital component of any scaffolded support is that the scaffolding is eventually removed. At a few sites, it was unclear whether the partner was taking on too intensive a role in the daily operations of the school—becoming a *de facto* staff member—and assuming leadership responsibility more than building leadership capacity. Future reports will examine this directly by asking schools and

partners about their progress toward a thoughtful and deliberate fade-out of the partner's role. It will be critical to understand how a partner's work in the final year of the initiative may promote the sustainability of leadership development efforts at the school and mitigate the painful loss of a valued staff member.

Directionless versus individualized support. HSLI is designed to be locally responsive, flexible, and individualized in contrast to the one-size-fits-all trappings of programs that are prescriptive, regimented, or doctrinaire. In an effort to avoid a heavy-handed, overly programmatic approach, HSLI does not provide partners with a detailed guide for what types of support they might provide and when, nor does it provide a specific set of criteria for measuring effectiveness. One important way in which HSLI has attempted to mitigate this challenge has been through quarterly partner meetings (discussed in chapter 1), which serve as a collaborative venue for partners to share difficulties and strategies for the work. Although many partners simply noted the idiosyncratic, sometimes ad hoc, nature of the work as a part of the job, the limited guidance was clearly difficult for some. In fact, a few partners reported occasionally feeling adrift, without a clear sense of what was expected of them or how they could most effectively support the principal and school. Future reports will examine how widespread this challenge is across sites and the extent to which partners perceive it hindering their effectiveness. We also will explore the extent to which it may affect the scalability or replicability of the initiative.

Untrusted other versus outside expert. Developing the kind of trusting, candid relationships to support leadership development is not easy. Features of the initiative—such as the partners' clear independence from districts—helped to facilitate this process. Yet it is important to recognize that the challenges were salient and enduring, for some partnerships more than others. Clearly, the personalities and backgrounds of the partner and the principal, as well as the school's history (e.g., recent dismissals or perceptions of being under district scrutiny), all play an important role. While we identified some partner characteristics that seemed to contribute to positive relationships (e.g., the credibility of experience), future reports will investigate whether particular characteristics of the partner or principal may stymie the development of open, trusting relationships.

Summary of Navigating the Dilemmas of Leadership

HSLI plays an important role in helping principals and other school leaders make difficult decisions that all school leaders face. The partner brings knowledge of school systems, leadership expertise, and an outside perspective. This set of characteristics enables the partner to pose thought-provoking questions about real problems of practice in a nonthreatening manner. Opening up frank dialogue embedded in practice enables school leaders to reflect on dilemmas, carefully weigh their choices, and obtain valuable outsider input. Across most HSLI schools, partners were especially constructive in helping leaders establish schoolwide goals and improvement plans and manage leadership and programmatic transitions. Partners were effective contributing to leadership development because they were knowledgeable about the local context, independent from the school system, expert in school leadership issues, and responsive to the school's needs. There are challenges, however, to building effective partnerships. These challenges include partners finding the balance between partnering with the principal and doing the work for him or her, having sufficient direction for the partners while maintaining an

individualized program, and surmounting interpersonal hurdles between the principals and partners.

5. Expanding Ideas and Resources

Leading a public high school can be isolating. A long list of tasks and intense time pressure can make it difficult for a principal or other school leader to step outside the immediate situation and look around. HSLI offers school leaders a valuable opportunity to break through school or district walls and learn from what other educators are doing. Cohort meetings and summer sessions help HSLI principals learn from the experiences of other schools. At the same time, HSLI partners and CAPP leadership, drawing on their years of educational experience, make a rich menu of resources available to participating schools. HSLI is uniquely situated to help schools significantly expand their network of available resources. In this chapter, we discuss how the HSLI professional learning community, the HSLI partners, and the HSLI director have expanded the resources available to HSLI schools.

HSLI Professional Learning Community

Research abounds about the positive effects of “de-privatizing” teaching and creating professional learning communities (PLC) that take teachers outside their own classrooms (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). However, less attention has been paid to the importance of professional networks for principals. HSLI attempts to fill that gap. Principals reported that one of the beneficial aspects of HSLI was the community of principals that it created. The cohort meetings and the summer seminar provide the forum for principals to discuss challenges openly and without fear of recourse and hear about potential solutions. For principals in small districts, the principal PLC provides one of the only opportunities to meet with peers. For principals in large districts, the principal PLC provides one of the only opportunities to meet with peers in a forum that is both noncompetitive and external from the politics of the district.

Cohort meetings and the HSLI summer seminar, by creating a PLC, help to expand the universe of resources available to HSLI schools by leveraging the experiences and knowledge of the program’s 11 participating schools.

Cohort Meetings

HSLI cohort meetings provide opportunities for the HSLI principals to learn from each other by offering regular opportunities for school principals to observe firsthand how other HSLI schools are tackling a range of issues, engage in productive dialogue with other principals on specific school improvement strategies, and in some cases adopt concrete strategies used by other principals to implement in their own schools. At these meetings, principals engaged in conversations about organizational structures for leadership and specific instructional strategies, focusing on the strengths and limitations of specific structures and strategies within their particular school contexts. For example, at the fall 2010 cohort meeting, the host principal described the organizational structures that he put in place to facilitate department-level instructional planning meetings and student data analysis. HSLI principals were then invited to observe planning meetings in small groups, ask questions of the host principal, and discuss how what they were seeing could or could not be replicated in their own schools. During the spring 2011 cohort meeting, principals engaged in an in-depth discussion on the use of the Explicit

Direct Instruction, an instructional system in place at multiple HSLI schools, and whether or not EDI was an appropriate intervention at the high school level. Not all principals came away from these meetings with concrete, implementable strategies that they could use in their own schools, but some principals saw value in exposure to what other principals were doing. For example, reflecting on his experience at cohort meetings in general, one principal from a small HSLI school said

I'm just fascinated by the different dynamics the larger schools are dealing with and I'm trying to process, well, what do I think about that? How would I do that as a leader of a school like that? Is there anything that they are doing or had to do that I could bring back here? And I always get something out of [cohort meetings] that way.

Despite the demographic and geographic diversity of the 11 HSLI schools, many of the principals were able to find commonality and learn from others who were in similar circumstances. For example, one HSLI principal reported that his school's four-by-four schedule was unique in his district and he was grateful to have another HSLI principal running a school on the same schedule to consult about challenges. According to the principal, talking to another principal at a four-by-four school was helpful because "Not too many schools operate that way, so there's not a lot of people you can go up to and say, Hey, how are you dealing with this issue?" Another principal assessed the general value of cohort meetings in one of his HSLI reflections: "Although our schools are diverse, I always pick up best practices and learn from the experiences of my colleagues."

In some cases, principals did take specific programs or strategies from cohort meetings and implement them at their own schools. One HSLI principal reported that members of his school leadership team lacked the commitment to make the structural and instructional changes called for in his HSLI plan. On a cohort visit, this principal learned that another HSLI school had faced a similar challenge and, in response, had developed an application and interview process for prospective team members. The process was designed to explicitly lay out the expectations of serving on the school leadership team and to create a transparent process for selecting leadership team members. After learning about this application process during the cohort meeting, the principal replicated it at his own school with great success. The principal and school leadership team members reported that the new application process resulted in selecting teachers who were committed to implementing the HSLI plan. Furthermore, use of this transparent process improved the overall standing of the leadership team members. Whereas previously they had been seen as "puppets of the administration," they were now viewed as leaders of the school improvement process.

The principals at two other schools described learning about specific approaches from similar schools in HSLI:

The HSLI cohort network of schools also serves as a resource for [my school]. I have the opportunity to learn about how schools outside of [my district] approach dealing with similar challenges. For example, [my school] has embraced the use of Data Director, which is currently utilized in several HSLI cohort schools. Additionally, Naviance

Success, which was shared at [an HSLI school] during the school year, will also be phased in at [my school]. Naviance Success will help provide students with a clear, well-defined route that leads to outstanding achievements, both in school and beyond.

Participating in the HSLI has provided me with many opportunities to visit other principals of the cohort schools and learn various strategies to improve the instructional as well as operational programs at my school. As a result of these visits and discussions, I have been able to share with my leadership team the best practices which led to implementing some structural changes at [my school]. Those changes include implementing a schoolwide testing campaign as well as providing me with a successful structural professional learning community model for continuing to pursue our WASC recommendations.

Whereas the cohort meetings provided a valued opportunity for many principals to learn from their colleagues, some principals reported that the meetings did not always meet their needs. Principals offered two main criticisms of the cohort meetings. First, some principals perceived the meetings to be more of an opportunity for the host school to “show and tell” highlights from their site than an opportunity for leaders to exchange ideas or discuss challenges. Second, a few principals reported that they did not always find the issues and strategies discussed at cohort meetings to be particularly relevant for their school. Future evaluation reports will investigate these concerns more directly in order to understand how widespread they were across sites and the extent to which they affected the experiences of HSLI principals.

Summer Seminar

While principals learned much from cohort meetings, the annual HSLI summer seminar provides opportunities for entire school leadership teams to share and learn from other participating schools, further broadening their network of resources. One science department chair reflected on the general value of learning from other teachers at the summer seminar.

I have a viewpoint that I don't care what industry you're in, I don't care how long you've been in it, you're never going to be the best, there's always something you can learn. Sitting around that room talking with 80 some teachers, I learned a lot.

An instructional coach at another school noted that he was introduced to new tools at the summer seminar that changed the way he is able to communicate with teachers.

I have gotten things that have just changed the way I work. They were very good at giving us very timely resources that were extremely useful. In fact, two summers ago they connected us with the edresults.com site. It has completely changed the way I'm able to communicate needs to schools by looking at data that is so informative. It's cutting through all the data baloney.

Another teacher in this school talked about the benefits of learning and connecting with teachers from other schools in similar situations and facing similar challenges.

There are people to advise you. Not only the [partner], but also the other network schools. And you feel that once you're in [the summer seminar] as well as beyond that... [there are] people who are going through similar things at the time, and there are diverse ways to get at goals.

A teacher from another school said simply, "It's interesting to hear what other people are doing."

Just as it provides ideas to school-level staff, the summer seminar can offer new resources to educators at the district level. A superintendent from one HSLI district recounted a find he made at a Long Beach HSLI meeting: "I was able to get my hands on some curriculum for advisory period. You get those gold mine resources [at summer seminars]...because somebody else has already done the work." The summer seminar, just like the cohort meetings, allows school leaders to go outside the boundaries of their own schools and districts to explore ways in which the experiences of other participating HSLI schools could help inform their own efforts.

HSLI Partners

While cohort meetings and the summer seminar bring new ideas and resources to schools, partners, too, play a crucial role in expanding the network of resources available to HSLI schools. In interviews with partners as well as principals and teacher leaders, it was evident that partners assisted schools in finding the resources they needed to plan, develop, and/or implement strategies and programs aimed at improving student outcomes. Sometimes these resources came in the form of the partner's own expertise with a particular program or skill. For example, one HSLI school tapped into its partner's expertise with California Partnership Academies (CPA) to help the school apply for a CPA grant to grow its academy. That partner has also used his expertise in homework centers to help two HSLI schools establish their own centers. The partner at another HSLI school had an interest and background in analyzing student outcome data. He has worked extensively with individual staff members to build capacity at both the school and district level to collect and analyze student data to identify pressing issues around the goal of preparing students for college success.

Partners also capitalized on their expertise navigating district-level politics to help HSLI principals garner resources. For example, a partner realized that his school was understaffed at the administrator level and that district administrators needed to hear from an outside expert that the current staffing level was undermining efforts to improve student outcomes. This partner established a positive working relationship with district administrators and engaged them in discussions about appropriate staffing levels for comprehensive high schools. The partner's concerted efforts to engage the district leadership in discussions about the needs of the high school were instrumental in getting the district to allocate an additional assistant principal position to the school.

Partners went beyond their own expertise to help HSLI schools address their goals by tapping into their own professional networks to find the resources schools needed. For example,

after talking with other HSLI schools that were using DataDirector, an online data and assessment management system, one HSLI principal began investigating the possibility of getting it for his school site. The principal encountered what appeared to be a dead end: The district did not support that data system, and the data system company refused to work with schools in the principal's district. The partner initiated conversations between the district, the data system company, and the HSLI director to explore how the school could get access to DataDirector. The partner also had contacts in districts that had used DataDirector and arranged for the HSLI school to connect with experienced users of the software to support system implementation. When asked about his role in supporting his school, this partner reported

I think I was good at mobilizing other resources, because I've been in the business a long time.... I think I have been able to bring in additional expertise that has supported the school's agenda.

The principal confirmed the value of his partner's extensive network, saying, "With [our partner's] extensive network, whenever he's at the table and we're talking about a need or an idea, he has this amazing repertoire of people he can refer us to." This school also was investigating alternatives to its annual calendar in an effort to provide students with additional learning opportunities. The partner was familiar with another school using the alternative calendar and arranged for representatives to visit, using CAPP funds, to observe the school and discuss the challenges of implementing such a calendar. A science teacher described the benefit of this assistance from the partner:

Every time I've met him...his mode of, of operation has always been what can I do to help you guys out? And he's...really done that for us. And I know one of the things we wanted to do was when we were discussing the four by four [approach to block scheduling], which we're on, is to help us by finding money to send a group of us down to San Diego to look at some schools that were already doing it. 'Cause we had questions like what do you do about this, what about testing? That kind of thing. And it was very helpful to see some schools that were already doing it.

When the needs of a school went beyond the HSLI partners' skills and individual professional networks, they drew on the experience of other partners in the HSLI network. For example, one HSLI school was struggling with concepts concerning distributed leadership. In response, the partner brought in another HSLI partner with formal experience teaching others about leadership. Drawing on this background, the visiting partner guided the leadership team in a training on characteristics of good leaders. A teacher leader described the content of the training:

Common knowledge of good leaders...good leaders don't answer the question for you...they talk to you and get you to come up with that answer...so they work from the problems rather than just saying here's what I want you to do.

The teacher leader added that the training “really helped us a lot.” At another HSLI school, the partner was working to expand strategies used in the Expository Literacy Grant (ELG) to multiple grade levels, but a small but vocal group of teachers raised concerns about using it in other grades. The partner sought help from another partner with more experience with ELG and brought him to the school to discuss ELG strategies. The visiting partner was able to engage the concerned teachers in a discussion about ELG and was successful in assuaging their concerns.

HSLI Director

Like the HSLI partners, the HSLI director has extensive experience working with California schools and a wide network of supports to aid high schools in their efforts to improve student outcomes. Since 1994, the HSLI director has served on the CAPP Advisory Board, which, with each grant cycle, assesses the effectiveness of programs and specific interventions to build on those successes in future cycles. These assessments also help CAPP leaders build a network of programs and consultants they can draw on to support schools facing particular challenges. The HSLI director has used this network to garner additional resources for HSLI schools that support school improvement and leadership development efforts that are outside the scope of the HSLI grant. For example, in addition to HSLI, CAPP is currently administering the ELG to improve expository reading and writing skills. Initial assessments of ELG indicated that the participating schools were having successes in improving student outcomes. Knowing that many of the HSLI schools were struggling in expository reading and writing, the HSLI director made additional funding available to support the participation of a subset of HSLI schools in the ELG program. Similarly, the HSLI director had worked with a mathematics consultant on previous CAPP grants and let HSLI partners and principals know that this consultant could be a valuable resource. The HSLI director also made Transcript Evaluation Service (TES) available, including training on it, to all HSLI schools to support efforts to improve college and career advising.⁹

In addition to consultants, programs, and services, the HSLI director also has found creative ways to obtain the resources schools felt they needed for their improvement efforts. For example, one school wanted to purchase a service at a time the district was not allowing any contracts with external organizations. The HSLI director was able set up a contract between the service organization and the California State University, using a portion of the school’s HSLI grant to pay for the service. Though the additional resources and support the HSLI director brought were not part of HSLI supports at the outset of the grant, the intent of the initiative was to go beyond the original grant supports to find schools the resources they needed to address their most pressing school improvement challenges.

Summary of Expanding Ideas and Resources

Through multiple avenues, HSLI helps to infuse new ideas and new resources into its high schools. Cohort meetings and the summer seminar provide opportunities for principals to discuss shared challenges and identify best practices. Many HSLI principals and teachers have

⁹ TES provides student- and school-level reports based on school transcript data that track the courses needed to meet college entrance requirements or requirements for postsecondary goals. For more on TES see <https://www.transcriptevaluationservice.com/>

implemented tools and strategies at their schools that they learned in these meetings. HSLI partners contribute a wealth of ideas and resources. Drawing on their own areas of expertise, their ability to navigate district politics, and their vast networks of colleagues and professional associations, partners are able to expand schools' capacities. CAPP leadership, too, brings accumulated knowledge and additional grant opportunities to schools to help them improve student learning.

6. Student Outcome Trends

The HSLI logic model presented in chapter 1 highlights the ultimate goal of HSLI: to improve student outcomes. Over the course of the evaluation, SRI will investigate achievement trends for a variety of measures, including

- California Standards Test (CST)
- California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)
- Early Assessment Program (EAP)
- Advanced Placement (AP)
- Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)
- The ACT
- Graduation rate
- A-G completion.

For this first evaluation report,¹⁰ SRI collected data on the elements listed above for the 3 years leading up to HSLI participation (2004–05 through 2006–07) and the 4 completed years of HSLI participation (2007–08 through 2010–11) when publicly available. This review of student outcome trends was conducted to provide (1) baseline data on HSLI schools before their involvement in HSLI and (2) trend data on HSLI schools' performance as they progress through the initiative, relative to state averages and percentages.¹¹ In this chapter, we summarize these student outcome trends as HSLI schools enter their final year of the initiative.

California Standardized Tests

The California Standardized Tests are administered annually in grades 2 through 11. California's accountability system (the Academic Performance Index) relies almost exclusively on CST results. CST results also play prominently in the federal accountability system. At the high school level, students take CST exams that are associated with the courses they are enrolled in for mathematics, science, and social studies (e.g., students enrolled in Algebra I take the Algebra I CST exam). In English, all students take a grade-specific CST exam (e.g., ninth-grade English), regardless of the English courses they are enrolled in. In 10th grade, all students take the 10th-grade life science CST exam, as well as the exam associated with the science course they are enrolled in that year (e.g., biology, chemistry, physics).

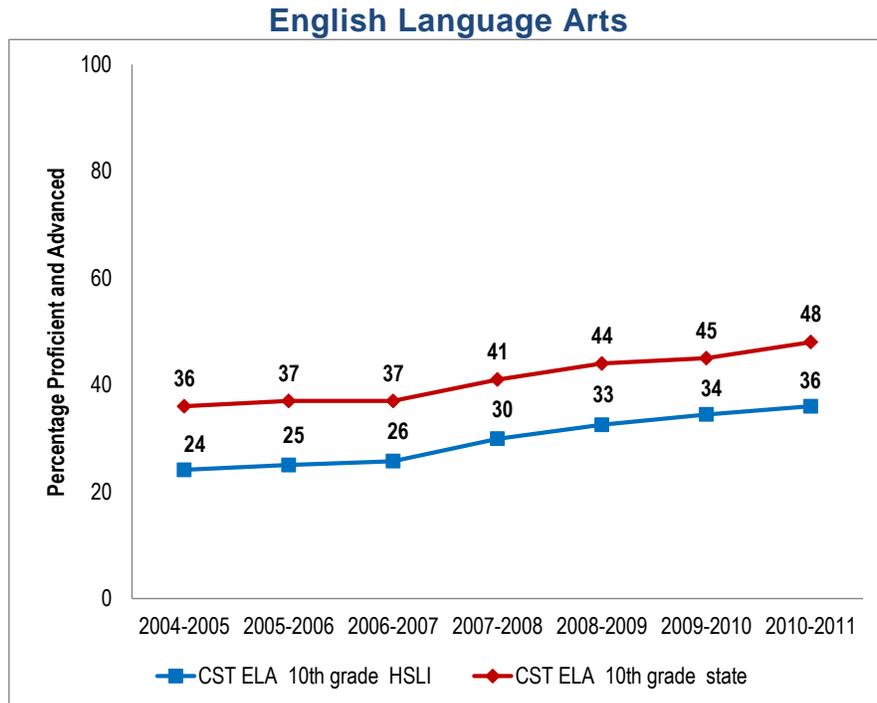
Eligibility to participate in HSLI was limited to those schools performing at or below an API state rank of 5. Because the API state rankings are derived largely from CST results, HSLI schools, on average, performed below the state on the mathematics and English language arts CSTs before HSLI participation. Since they began participating in HSLI, HSLI schools have continued to lag behind the state in ELA. On average, ninth-grade students in HSLI schools perform similarly on the Algebra I CST exam. For Algebra II, the CST results show that although HSLI schools do not perform as well as the state as a whole, the gap in the percentage

¹⁰ This first evaluation report covers the first 6 months of the 2.5-year evaluation.

¹¹ State averages and percentages include HSLI schools.

of students performing at proficient and advanced between the state and HSLI schools began to narrow in the year before HSLI participation (Exhibit 6.1)

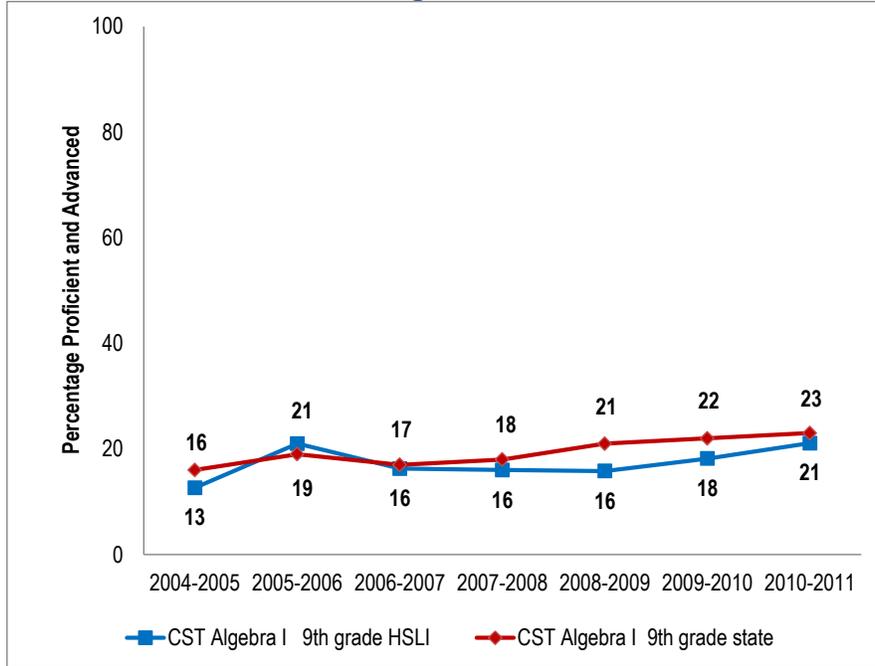
Exhibit 6.1
HSLI and Statewide CST Results for English Language Arts,
Algebra I, and Algebra II, 2004–05 to 2010–11



Source: DataQuest 2011

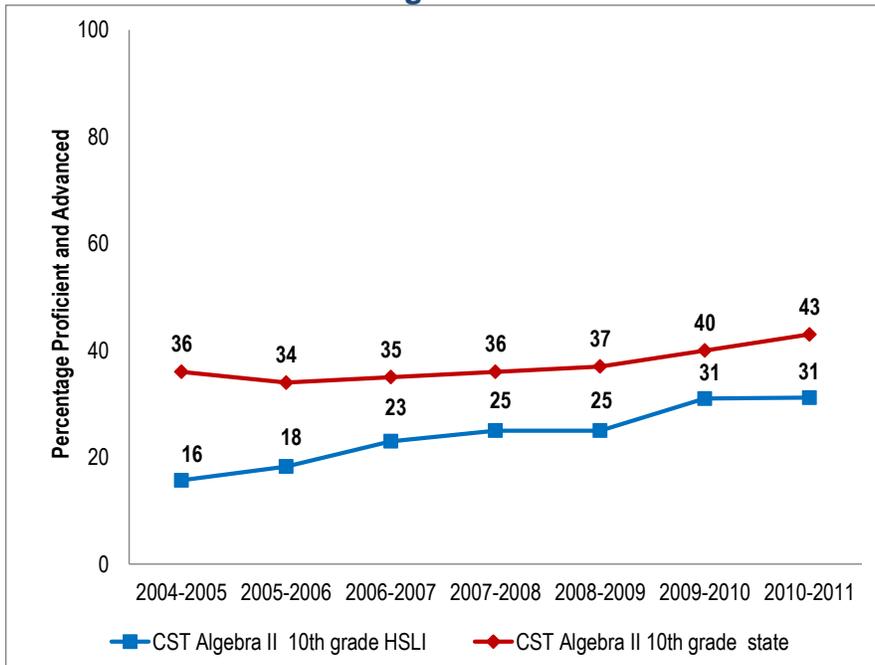
Exhibit 6.1 (concluded)
HSLI and Statewide CST Results for English Language Arts,
Algebra I, and Algebra II, 2004–05 to 2010–11

Algebra I



Source: DataQuest 2011

Algebra II

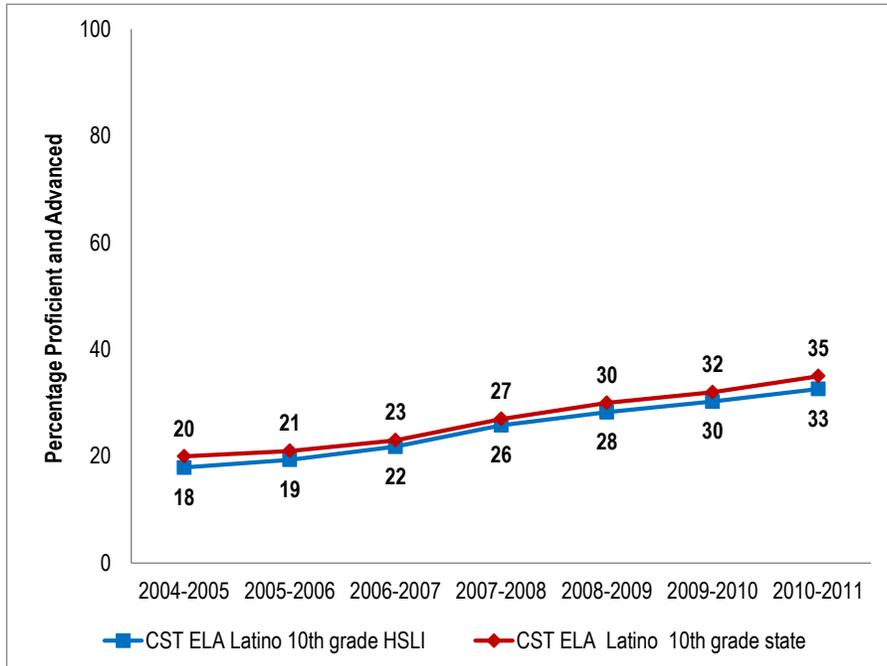


Source: DataQuest 2011

CST data disaggregated by Latino and socioeconomically disadvantaged (SED) student subgroups show that, on average, HSLI schools perform at about the same level as the state in ELA (Exhibit 6.2). HSLI schools also perform at about the same level as the state in Algebra I and II (not shown).

Exhibit 6.2 HSLI and Statewide ELA CST Results for Student Subgroups

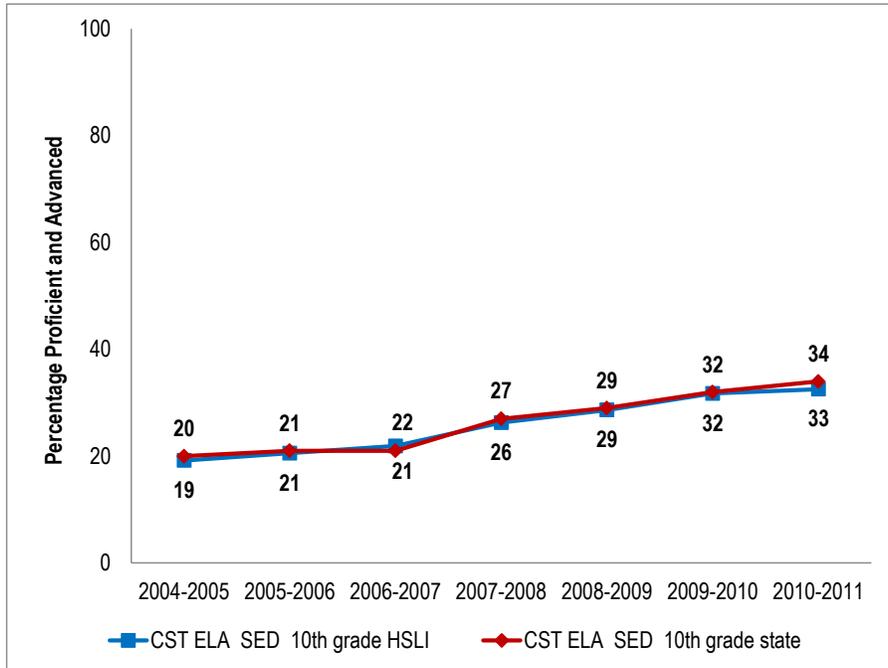
Latino Students



Source: DataQuest 2011

Exhibit 6.2 (concluded)
HSLI and Statewide ELA CST Results for Student Subgroups

Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students

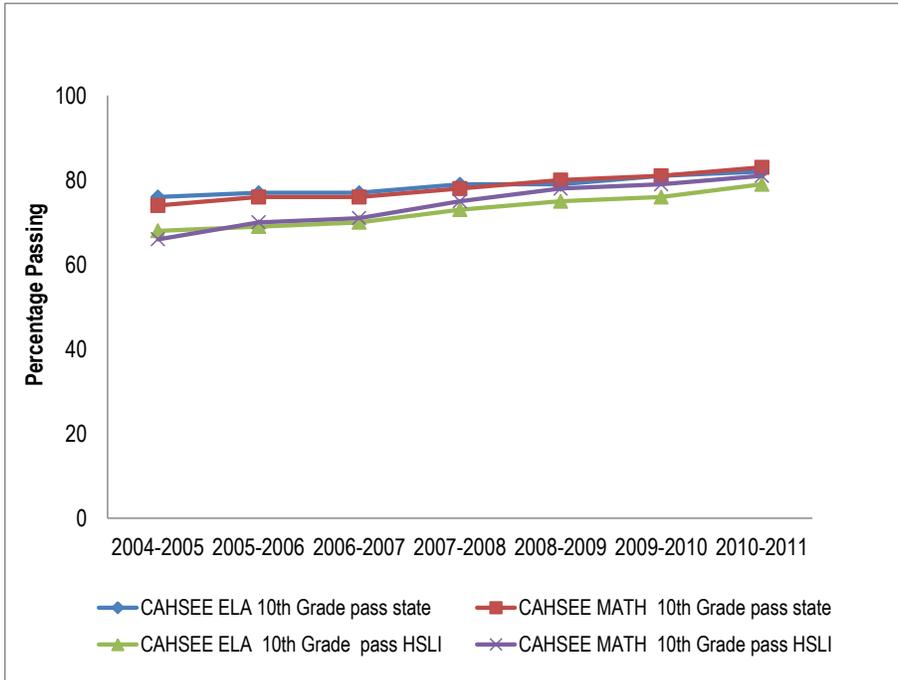


Source: DataQuest 2011

California High School Exit Exam

The California High School Exit Exam consists of two sections covering mathematics and ELA. Passing the CAHSEE first became a graduation requirement with the class of 2006. Since its introduction, CAHSEE passage rates have increased each year. Statewide, approximately 95% of students from the class of 2011 passed both portions. The results show that the average CAHSEE pass rate for HSLI schools is only slightly lower than the state CAHSEE pass rate for both the mathematics and ELA portions of the exam, and the gap in passing rates between the state and HSLI has narrowed in both subjects since 2004–05 (Exhibit 6.3).

Exhibit 6.3
HSLI Average and State CAHSEE Grade 10 Pass Rates

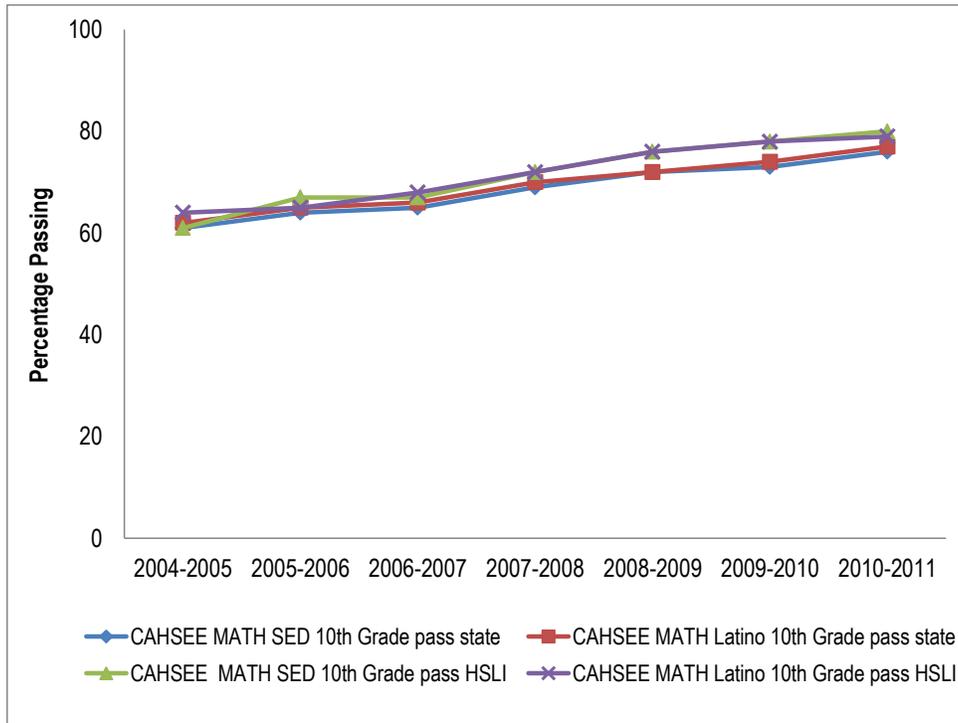


Source: DataQuest 2011

Disaggregated by Latino and SED students, HSLI schools, on average, had nearly the same CAHSEE passing rates as the state in 2004–05 and have kept pace with increases in the statewide passage rates for both mathematics and ELA (Exhibit 6.4).

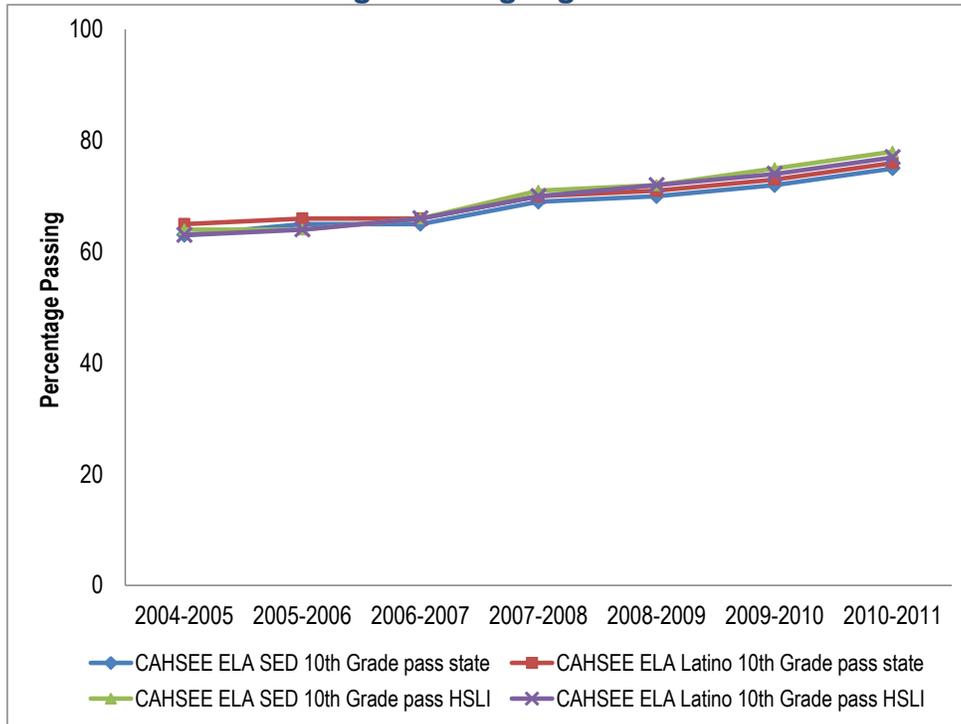
Exhibit 6.4 HSLI Average and State CAHSEE Passing Rates by Subpopulation

Mathematics



Source: DataQuest 2011

English Language Arts



Source: DataQuest 2011

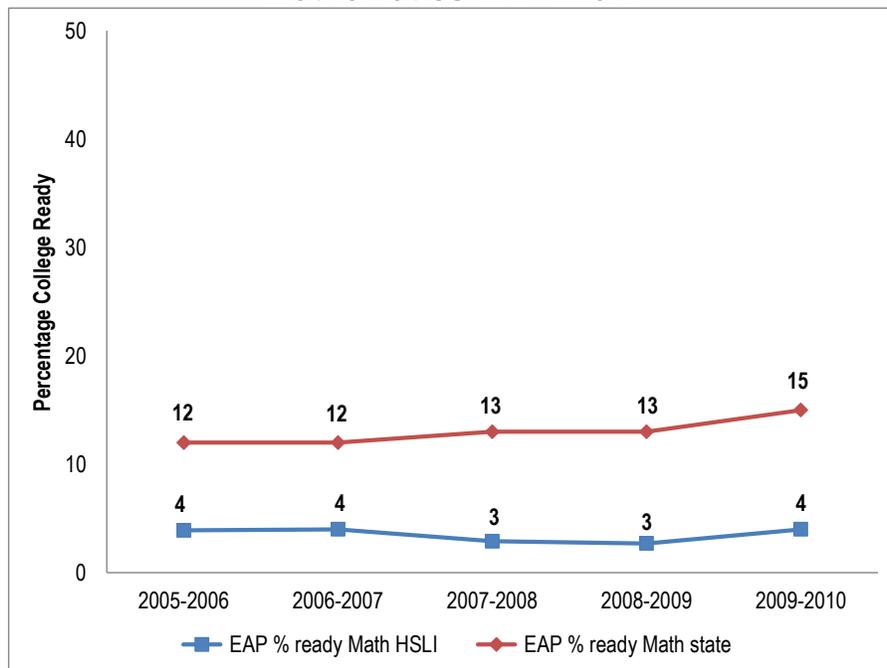
Early Assessment Program

The Early Assessment Program began in response to the large percentages of college freshman attending the California State University System who were required to enroll in remedial coursework because of low academic skills in mathematics and ELA. EAP is an optional assessment offered to 11th-grade students. Students who are deemed ready for college-level coursework on the EAP are exempt from taking California State University system placement exams in mathematics or ELA.

Very few students who take the EAP statewide are deemed ready, with less than a quarter ready for college-level English (21%) and only 15% ready for college-level mathematics. The average percentages of students in HSLI schools deemed ready for college-level mathematics and ELA are lower than those statewide. Moreover, the gap between HSLI schools and the state appears to be growing (Exhibit 6.5).

Exhibit 6.5
Readiness for College-Level Mathematics and English,
HSLI Average and State

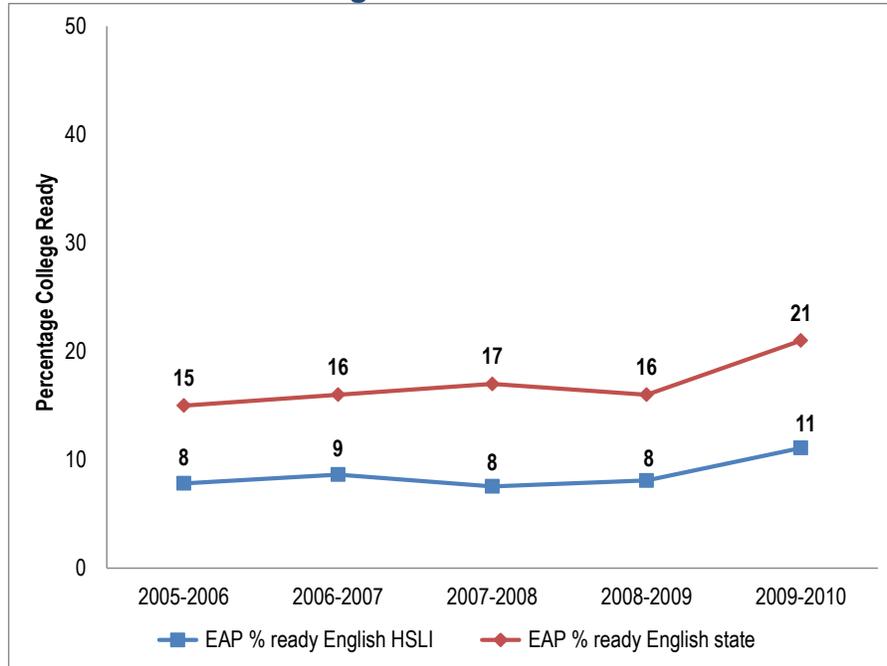
Mathematics EAP Exam



Source: CSU Chancellor's Office 2011

Exhibit 6.5 (concluded)
Readiness for College-Level Mathematics and English,
HSLI Average and State

English EAP Exam

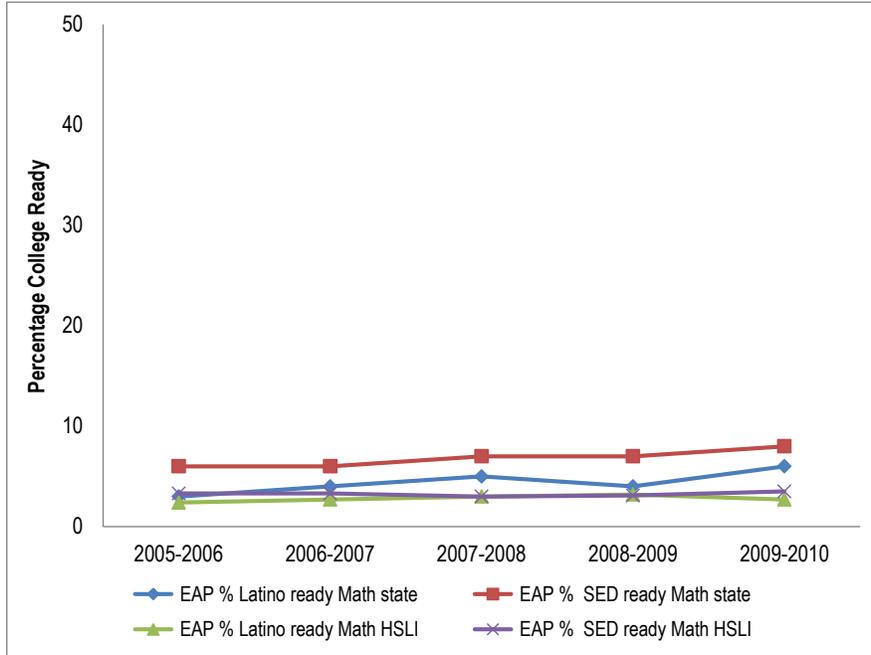


Source: CSU Chancellor's Office 2011

Although the gap in EAP results appears to be widening between HSLI schools and the state overall, the performance of Latinos and SED students in HSLI schools, on average, is generally keeping pace with the state. Not more than 10% of students in these subgroups are deemed ready for college (Exhibit 6.6).

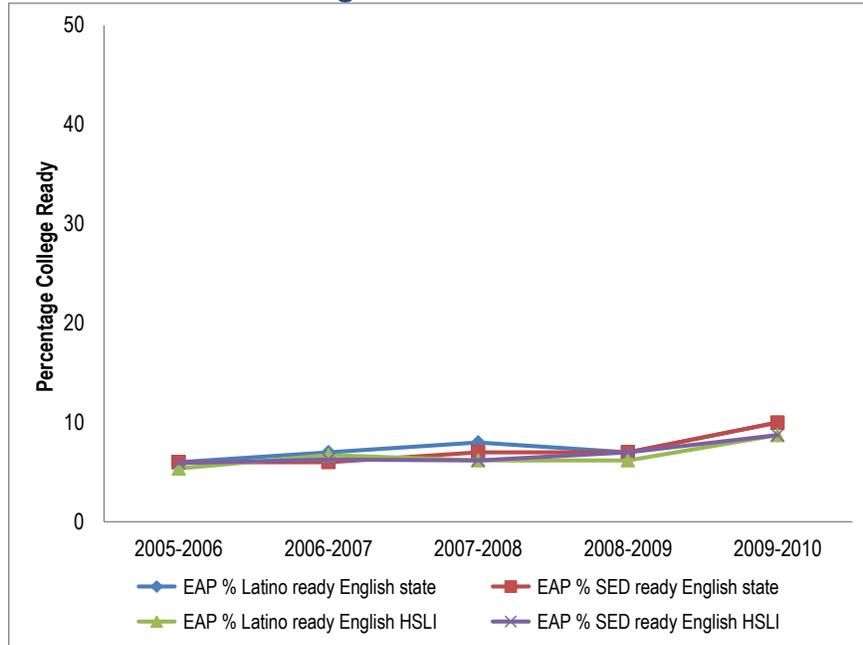
Exhibit 6.6
Readiness for College-Level Mathematics and English
by Student Subgroups, HSLI Average and State
(Latino and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged)

Mathematics EAP Exam



Source: CSU Chancellor's Office 2011

English EAP Exam

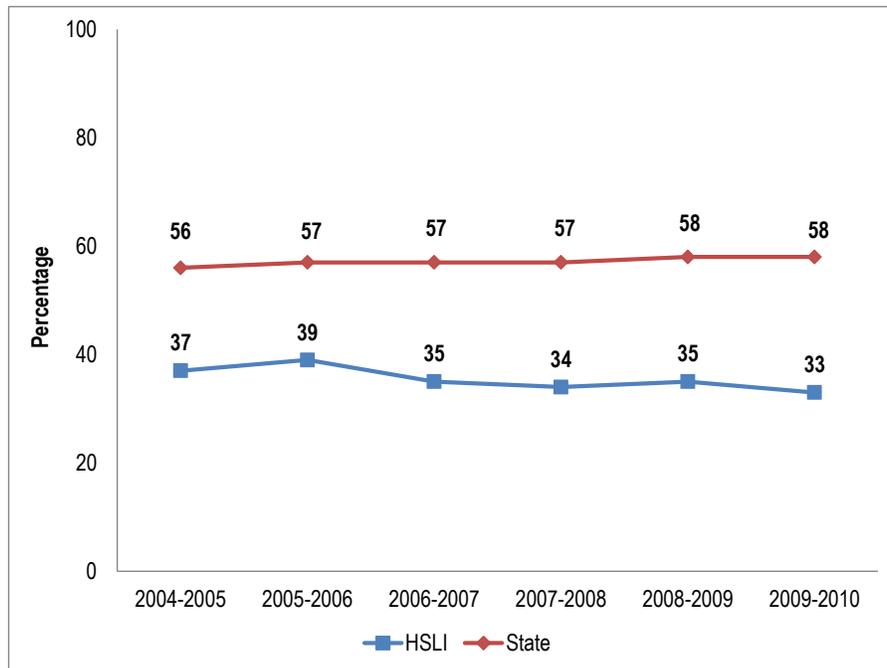


Source: CSU Chancellor's Office 2011

Advanced Placement Exams

Every year, students can choose to take Advanced Placement exams in more than 30 subject areas. Scores of 3 or better on an AP exam can earn students college credit. While statewide data on AP exams are limited, the percentage of tests taken that receive a score of 3 or better is publicly available. Statewide, the percentage of AP tests receiving a score of 3 or higher since 2004–05 has remained relatively flat. During the same time period, the percentage of AP tests receiving a 3 or better in HSLI schools has declined slightly, widening the gap from 19 to 25 percentage points in 2009–10 (Exhibit 6.7). Note that between 2004–05 and 2009–10, both the state and HSLI schools increased the number of AP tests taken. Statewide, the number of AP tests taken increased from a little over 329,000 to a little over 448,000, an increase of 27%. HSLI schools also increased the number of AP tests taken from 2004–05 to 2009–10, from 3,254 to 4,629 tests, or approximately a 30% increase. AP data are not available for student subgroups.

Exhibit 6.7
AP Tests Receiving a Score of 3 or Better,
HSLI Average and State

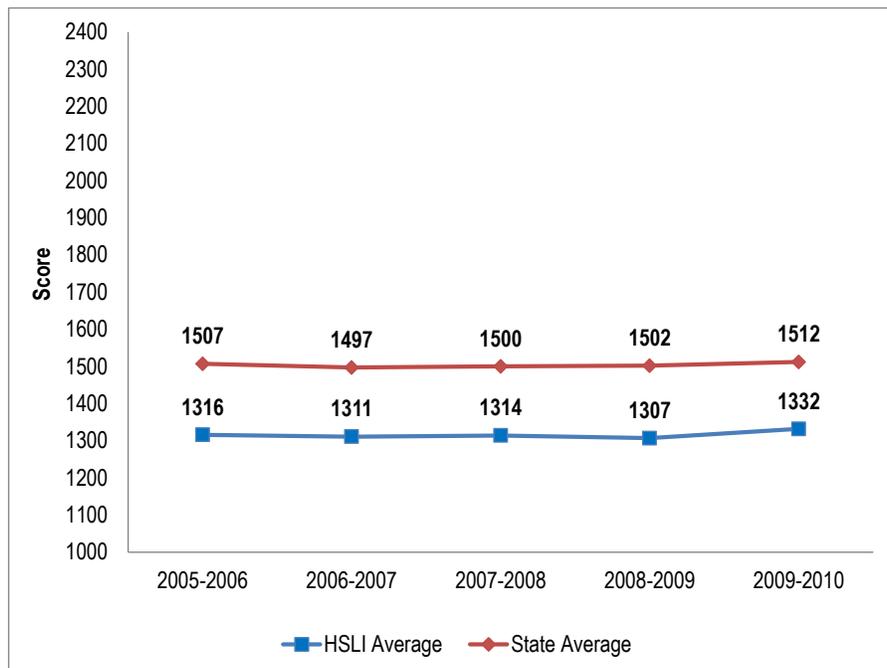


Source: DataQuest 2011

SAT Reasoning Test (formerly the Scholastic Aptitude Test or the Scholastic Assessment Test)

The SAT is a college entrance exam that covers reading, mathematics, and writing. The writing portion was added in 2005–06. A comparison between HSLI schools and the state shows that average SAT scores have remained relatively flat since 2005–06 with HSLI students, on average, scoring below state averages (Exhibit 6.8). SAT scores are not available by student subgroups.

Exhibit 6.8
SAT Scores, HSLI and State Averages

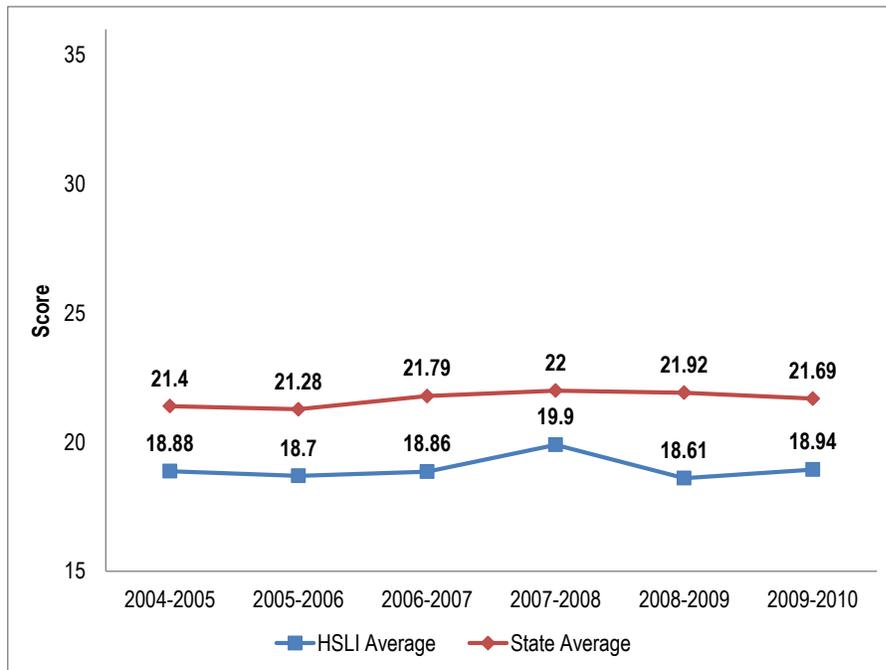


Source: DataQuest 2011

The ACT

The ACT is a college entrance exam that includes four tests: English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning. An optional writing exam was added in 2005. ACT scores have remained relatively flat since 2004–05, with statewide averages hovering between 21 and 22. On average, students in HSLI schools have scored lower than state averages on the ACT, both before and since joining HSLI (Exhibit 6.9). ACT data are not available by subgroup.

Exhibit 6.9
ACT Scores, HSLI and State Averages

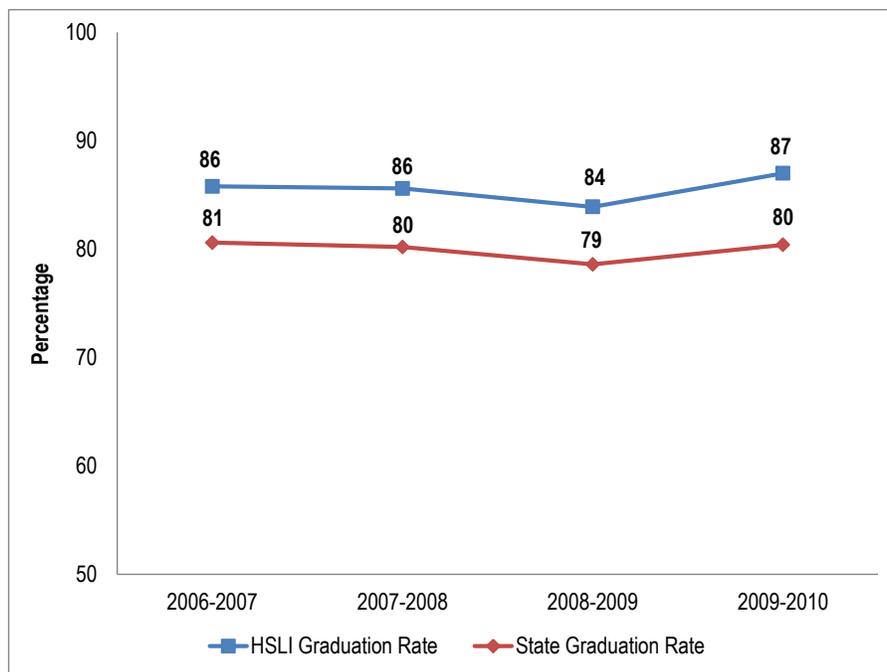


Source: DataQuest 2011

Graduation Rate

In 2006–07, the state of California began using the NCES definition for calculating graduation rates and began a 4-year cohort analysis to provide a more accurate accounting of graduation and dropouts. The state released the graduation rate based on the cohort calculation for the first time in 2009–10.¹² Because there is only one year of data using the cohort calculation, we present the graduation rate using the NCES definition for 2006–07 through 2009–10. The data show that, on average, HSLI schools have had higher graduation rates than the state graduation rates in the 1 year before HSLI participation and in the 4 years of HSLI participation (Exhibit 6.10).

Exhibit 6.10
Graduation Rates, HSLI and State (NCES Definition)



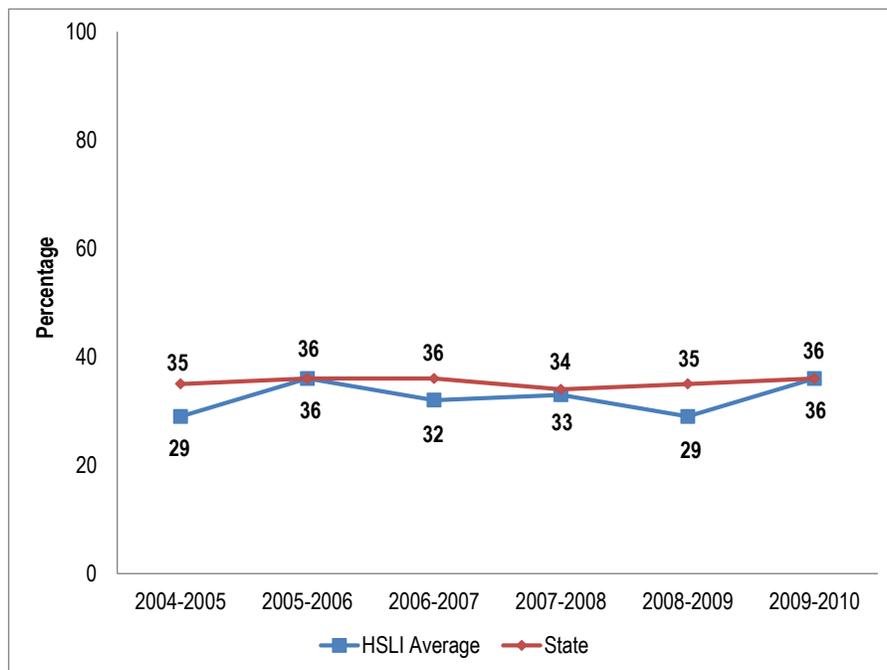
Source: DataQuest 2011

¹² The graduation rate based on a cohort analysis is the percentage of ninth-grade students who graduate 4 years later.

A-G Completion

The University of California and the California State University system have identified a sequence of high school courses to fulfill the minimum eligibility requirements for admission. This course sequence is known as the A-G requirements. Data on A-G completion show that neither the state as a whole nor HSLI schools as a group are steadily increasing the percentage of graduates completing the A-G requirements. At the state level, the percentage of graduates completing A-G requirements was relatively flat between 2004–05 and 2009–10. HSLI’s average percentage of graduates completing A-G coursework shows no consistent trend but ranges from 29% to 35% (Exhibit 6.11). In 2008–09, two HSLI schools reported that none of their graduates completed the A-G requirements and in 2006–07 one HSLI school reported having no graduates who completed the A-G requirements. These schools reported percentages of students completing A-G requirements in other years, so it is unclear whether an error in reporting occurred or whether these schools truly did not have any graduates in those years completing A-G requirements. The averages for these 2 years may be skewed because of those schools reporting no graduates completing A-G requirements.

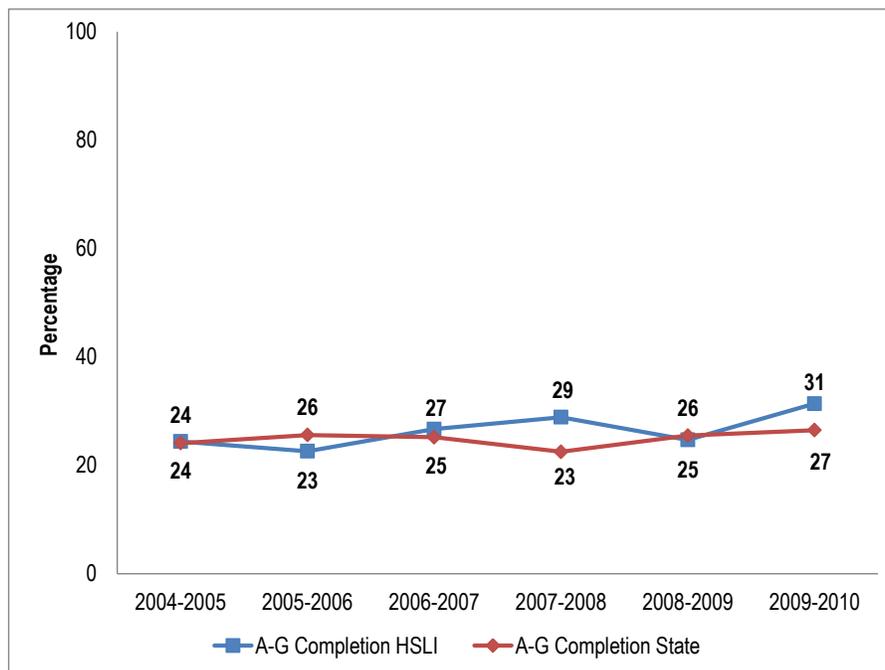
Exhibit 6.11
High School Graduates Completing the A-G Requirements,
HSLI Average and State



Source: DataQuest 2011

Latino students in HSLI schools have performed, on average, about the same as their counterparts statewide before and since HSLI participation (Exhibit 6.12). (SED subgroup data are not publicly available for A-G completion data.)

Exhibit 6.12
Latino High School Graduates Completing the A-G Requirements,
HSLI Average and State



Source: DataQuest 2011

Summary of Trends

The student outcome trends presented in this section show that before HSLI participation, HSLI schools as a group generally performed below the state on all but one of the outcomes—high school graduation rate. HSLI schools reported a higher average high school graduation rate in the year before HSLI participation than the state graduation rate. However, when looking at disaggregated data for two student subgroups—Latino and socioeconomically disadvantaged, when available—HSLI schools performed at about the same level as the state on the CST, CAHSEE, the English EAP exam, and A-G completion in the years before HSLI participation.

In the 4 years that schools have been participating in HSLI, student outcome trends show mixed results. Overall, HSLI schools continue to perform below the state on most outcomes for the entire student population but have improved at approximately the same rate as the state on the English and Algebra I. HSLI schools, as a group, have almost closed the gap with the state on the CAHSEE and have made progress on closing the gap on the Algebra II CST, although the closing of those gaps began before HSLI participation. Graduation rate is the bright spot for HSLI schools, as HSLI schools as a group have continued to outperform the state. A-G completion also shows that HSLI schools are performing, on average, on par with state levels. However, the gap appears to be widening, with HSLI schools performing worse over time in

comparison with the state for two college-ready indicators, the EAP exams and the percentage of AP exams scoring high enough to receive college credit. Disaggregated student data for the years of HSLI participation show that HSLI schools as a group perform at about the same level as the same subgroups at the state level on the CST, CAHSEE, A-G completion, and the EAP English exam; however, the EAP mathematics exam continues to be a challenge for these student subgroups in HSLI schools.

In sum, progress on student outcomes for HSLI schools has been mixed. Perhaps these findings are due to the blunt instruments of measuring student outcomes or to the fact that it will take more time for HSLI to reach student outcomes, having to effect leadership and instructional practices first. As the evaluation moves forward, we will update trends as data become available. At the end the 2011–12 school year (the last year of HSLI participation), SRI will analyze the relationships between student outcome trends and HSLI participation to explore more directly the effect of HSLI on students.

7. Conclusion

HSLI is an innovative model to develop high school leaders who can create the schoolwide conditions for teaching and learning necessary to improve student outcomes. HSLI recognizes that improving school leadership capacity requires a broad conceptualization of leadership that includes administrators and teachers, a suite of supports to develop leaders' knowledge and skills, and a flexible approach to meet the individual contexts and needs of high schools.

The aim of HSLI is to improve high school leadership, but it would be a serious mistake to think of it as nothing but professional development for principals. Although principals are a key focus of HSLI, the initiative has worked to improve leadership practice writ large at its diverse cohort of participating schools by helping teachers become leaders, developing their capacities, and bringing in outside resources, both programmatic and financial, to assist their schools.

HSLI partners served as valuable mentors to the principals at HSLI schools, helping them grapple with the dilemmas of leadership and move forward in the midst of uncertainty. Partners worked with principals to develop strong plans for school improvement and navigate schoolwide transitions, even helping with transitions to a new principal. Indeed, working from an understanding that principal turnover is common, HSLI is working to develop systems of shared leadership at participating schools so that a school might continue to be successful even if a principal leaves. HSLI supports helped principals develop systems to distribute leadership authority across their teaching staffs and helped identify, train, and empower teacher leaders. Through partners and other HSLI supports, such as cohort meetings and summer seminar sessions, participating schools were exposed to new ideas and valuable external resources.

HSLI is not without challenges, however. Principal turnover, external mandates, and declining resources create obstacles to the implementation and effectiveness of HSLI. Nonetheless, with its tailored supports and nimble approach, HSLI still can be a powerful model for leadership improvement. The question is what are the effects of this model on leadership, teacher practices, and student achievement. This report is only the first of three reports on HSLI, and it summarizes the findings from the first 6 months of the HSLI evaluation. This first phase of the evaluation set the foundation for our understanding of HSLI, the supports provided to HSLI schools, and the successes and challenges the initiative has faced. The second phase of the evaluation, which will run from October 1, 2011, through September 30, 2012, will focus on the changes that have occurred at HSLI schools over the course of the initiative, including changes in

- Student outcomes, overall and by subgroup, in HSLI schools
- Teachers' instructional practices to support the academic achievement of all students
- Conditions for teaching and learning in HSLI schools
- Leadership structure and practices in HSLI schools (including practices of principals as well as other site level administrators).

The second phase of the evaluation also will explore how the challenges discussed affect successful development of leadership capacity in HSLI schools. Further, it will begin to explore how to sustain the efforts that have been put into place for leadership development and school improvement at HSLI schools.

Data collection for the second phase of the evaluation will begin on October 1, 2011. Over the next year, SRI researchers will attend HSLI partner meetings, HSLI cohort meetings, and CAPP advisory meetings, when appropriate. We will continue to review partner documentation (e.g., partner communication logs), principal annual reflections, and the results of the HSLI teacher surveys. Researchers also will interview every HSLI principal and CAPP leadership. The second phase of the evaluation also will mark the first time that SRI will take responsibility for the annual HSLI teacher survey of principals. We will replicate important survey items from the previous surveys and develop a series of survey questions that will address changes in instructional practices, conditions for teaching and learning, and leadership structures. Case studies are not a part of the second phase of the evaluation but will return as part of the final phase of the evaluation (October 1, 2012, through September 30, 2013).

As the evaluation of HSLI continues, we aim to provide important information for CAPP and for those involved in the initiative to inform HSLI and future CAPP grant programs. Additionally, we believe lessons from this important endeavor will contribute to the field of leadership development in general.

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