

### **An Early Review of School Intervention**

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The Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP) was created in 1999 with the goal of bringing additional resources and specific improvement strategies to many of the schools whose students rank in the bottom half of state test scores. A significant, ground-breaking component of the program is a set of sanctions that occur if a participating school does not demonstrate improved student achievement in a three-year timeframe. The program is one of many recent state initiatives that seek to improve performance and hold schools accountable for student success.

While the program is new, the problem of low-performing schools and under-achieving students has been a target of education reform for decades, beginning with the federal Great Society education initiatives of the 1960s. More recently at the state level, a program similar to II/USP was proposed in 1997-98 but was vetoed by then-Governor Pete Wilson. Throughout the decades, the problems affecting low-performing schools - often schools that have low-income and predominantly minority student populations - have been persistent and difficult to eradicate even though substantial resources have been directed to such schools.

The success or failure of the II/USP initiative is not only of importance to underperforming schools. Because the issues in these schools drive much of the debate surrounding education reform, the ability of II/USP to impact performance has major implications for the broader educational arena. Successful efforts can teach us much about what can work throughout the K-12 system; failure or insufficient progress will no doubt lead to more support for vouchers and less financial and political backing for public education.

With this context in mind, it is important to examine the implementation and progress of II/USP as the program moves into its first fully operational year.

### **October 10, 2000 Seminar**

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On October 10, 2000, the California Education Policy Seminar and the California State University Institute for Education Reform sponsored a discussion on the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program. More than 60 educators, state policy makers, education researchers and elected officials attended the session.

The session began with presentations by four external evaluators who have partnered with underperforming schools under the program: Kit Marshall of Action Learning Systems, Fred Tempes of WestEd, Barry Pulliam of The Pulliam Group and Dan Chernow of the UCLA School Management Program. In addition, comments were provided by three designated “respondents,” including John Mockler, Interim Secretary for Education under Governor Gray Davis; Andrea Maxie, professor of education at California State University, Los Angeles; and LaShawn Route-Chatmon, a coach for the Bay Area Coalition of Essential Schools. The discussion concluded with a general question-and-answer session.

This report documents the proceedings at the seminar and includes background material on the II/USP. The presentations are summarized and some of the question-and-answer exchanges are integrated throughout this report. (Comments made by individuals are summarized without quotation. All text should be regarded as paraphrasing and/or synthesizing what was actually said, and not as direct quotes attributable to the presenters or other participants.)

### Program Overview

The Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program was one of the key elements of SB1x, Governor Gray Davis' 1999 special-session initiative regarding school accountability. An initial cohort of 430 schools (300 elementary, 78 middle and 52 high schools) was selected in September 1999 to participate in the first year of the program. A second cohort of an additional 430 schools was selected in October 2000. Together, these schools represent about 10 percent of the K-12 schools in the state. Total state and federal funding for the program stands at \$175 million this year (2000-01), with significant additional funding expected next year.

### Eligibility

Schools were eligible for the first cohort if their average score on the Stanford 9 test in 1998 and 1999 ranked in the bottom 50 percent nationwide. The second and future cohorts have eligibility standards based on the Academic Performance Index (API), which ranks California schools in 10 deciles. Schools in the lower-performing, 1-through-5 deciles are eligible if they fail to meet API improvement targets from one year to the next. The program also requires participants to be evenly distributed among the bottom five deciles to the maximum extent possible, ensuring that state resources are spread among a variety of low-performing schools.

The program allows schools to volunteer but provides for a lottery to select participants if not enough schools step forward. No lottery has been necessary so far. In the first year, more than 3,000 schools were eligible and more than 1,400 volunteered. For the second cohort, about 900 schools were eligible and more than 500 volunteered.

### Elements

Under the program, participating schools select an external evaluator based on criteria that have been developed and approved by the State Board of Education. The evaluator brings both expertise and an outside perspective to the process of assessing the school's problems and developing a multi-year plan to address identified issues. The assessment stage is funded by a \$50,000 grant.

Plans are reviewed and approved by the State Board of Education when complete to determine that all legal requirements have been met. According to the statute, during the implementation years of the plan, the school may receive grants of up to \$200 per student per year depending on state funding. During the 2000-2001 year, close to \$170 per student was available to participating schools.

### Defining Success

Participating schools are considered to be making satisfactory progress if they meet their API growth targets from one year to the next. If they fail to meet a target after the first year of implementation, the local school board must conduct a public hearing and implement intervention strategies at the school site.

If the school fails to meet the growth target for two years in a row and the State Board of Education rules that there has been insufficient progress, the school will be deemed a low-performing school. When this happens, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction:

- Assumes the legal rights and responsibilities of the school board with regard to the low-performing school.
- May take actions including allowing children to attend a different school, changing school site personnel, granting the school charter status, negotiating a new collective bargaining contract, closing down the school or reorganizing it with a new staff.

### External Evaluators

**Q.** As external evaluators, can you explain how external evaluators are held accountable?

**Fred Tempes:** We evaluate ourselves with an independent in-house evaluation. But in terms of accountability, you should hold us to the results of schools, which we will begin to see next year.

**Barry Pulliam:** You have to be careful. If someone doesn't have authority, it is difficult to hold them accountable. If I am not the one implementing the program, then I shouldn't be held responsible for the results.

**Kit Marshall:** The process we went through to be on the approved list of evaluators was gut-wrenching - interviews plus materials - so we feel we were selected on solid criteria. We would recommend that the state look at ways to make the process more accountable, perhaps requiring that evaluators stay with schools over time.

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## Summary

Enacted in April 1999, the program has been on a fast track ever since. Schools were selected in September 1999 and in turn selected external evaluators in October 1999. Completion of assessments was required by December 1999 and corrective plans by April 2000. The plans began to be implemented at the start of the 2000-2001 school year.

While some have complained that such a tight timeline is too fast, others have argued that we have no time to waste in addressing poor performance.

Although no school has yet completed a full year of corrective action, many of the first-cohort schools showed improvement on the Stanford 9 test scores in 2000 - perhaps due in part to the initial II/USP assessment and planning process. At some point in the future, a systematic review should occur to determine the factors that are responsible for II/USP school improvement or lack thereof.

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## Sanctions

**Q.** A lot of legislative attention and debate focused on the sanctions in the program. But schools don't seem to be worried. Why not?

**Fred Tempes:** The notion that someone will lose a job if there isn't improvement doesn't seem real to schools. In three years, half of the staff could well be gone anyway because there is so much movement. The real sanction is the Academic Performance Index ranking. Everyone is looking at it and it is very public. No one wants to have a score go down.

## Panel of External Evaluators

What follows are presentations by four of the 92 state external evaluators who have been working this past year with the first cohort of II/USP schools to develop initial school assessments and action plans. These external evaluators have worked with dozens of II/USP schools from throughout California. They were asked to talk about their experiences, observations and recommendations.

### Presentation of Kit Marshall

*Kit Marshall is the president of Action Learning Systems Inc., an educational training and consulting company that specializes in whole school reform partnerships. Her company places particular emphasis on standards implementation, literacy development, assessment design and benchmark development. In addition to being an approved external evaluator, Action Learning Systems is a state-approved literacy trainer and contracted with the state Department of Education to train 175 academic coaches to assist underperforming schools. Marshall holds bachelor's and master's degrees from California State University, Sacramento and a Ph.D. in Educational Sociology from Stanford University. She currently has five books in print on standards-based instruction.*

### Action Learning Systems Inc.

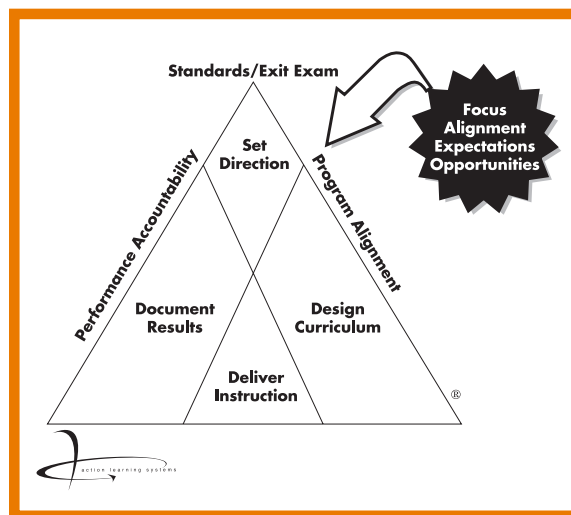
In the 20 years that we've been providing education consulting across the nation and in Canada, we've identified certain key elements that have to fit together like pieces of a puzzle for effective reform to occur. Sometimes a school may simply try a quick fix or some small classroom reform, but these approaches are often based more on activities than on results. The ends you want need to drive all curriculum, instruction and assessment decisions.

What you need is perfect alignment among four components: the setting of direction, how the curriculum is designed, how instruction is delivered and how results are documented. If any of these pieces is missing, you get fragmentation and it is difficult to make lasting change. For instance, if assessment tools are absent or not aligned, then you are not gathering timely or appropriate data to help make instructional decisions. Each piece has to be there and they all have to be aligned to each other and fit tightly together.

At each school that we work with, there are four principles that drive our approach:

- **Focus** - We work with the school to identify what the end goals are.
- **Alignment** - We push for alignment throughout: within standards, across grades, etc.
- **Expectations** - This is an area of real struggle for schools because it touches on their beliefs about what students can do and what standards are achievable.
- **Opportunities** - This involves time and methods and determines what a school can leverage to begin to make changes.

An area of emphasis for us is coaching, and many schools hire coaches for specific areas, such as literacy. We have found three components of effective coaching: time, shared focus and proximity to students. When we impact the detrimental effects of teaching in isolation, we can become much more effective with students. Coaching gives teachers and support staff the opportunity to work together. Time - both frequency and duration - has a big impact on coaching. Similarly, it is very important for people to have a common vision for coaching to work. And coaching in a teacher's classroom, with teaching going on while a teacher observes, is central and works best as an effective model. (You can bring about the fastest, most lasting change with effective coaching that is reinforced repeatedly, that springs from a common understanding about the purpose of coaching - student achievement - and that includes in-class demonstrations and observations of practice.)



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Standards-based accountability is another area of emphasis. Everyone is familiar with accountability that involves standardized testing: Stanford 9, SAT/ACT, Aprenda and the new high school exit exam. But schools need a more complete range (sometimes called “360 degrees”) of assessment that involves far more than statewide testing. There should be customized assessment through student-led parent conferences, reference-based reporting and stakeholder events. There should be localized assessment, relying on tools such as scored portfolios, performance benchmarks and curriculum-based measurement. And finally schools need to encourage personalized assessments. Students need to become lifelong learners who are accountable for their own learning through self assessment, self evaluation and goal setting.

With the above as a context, Action Learning Systems worked as an external evaluator for several of the schools selected to participate in II/USP. We found that many had common challenges to overcome in the pursuit of improvement. These include:

- **Schools and districts have difficulty abandoning ineffective strategies.** Schools tend to want to add on top of what they are already doing instead of changing or eliminating practices. The school needs to determine what it is going to continue doing, stop doing and start doing.
- **Results are defined by time and structure.** Often schools will decide to plan three hours on reading each day rather than designing instruction around the results that they are trying to achieve, such as ensuring that all students are decoding sounds properly. Under this type of planning, a school can successfully implement what it sets out to do - but student achievement may not be the result.
- **“Research-proven” programs may not be able to deliver quality services.** If not faithfully replicated or customized appropriately for a school’s situation, the best, most-tested program may not work as advertised. The program may be less reliable when it is scaled up for a school’s needs, or the school may not be able to provide adequate training for the program to be implemented properly. Simply because a program has worked elsewhere does not mean it will fit every situation.
- **Systems and tools are not in place to measure the level and quality of program implementation.** Assessment is the most-often missing piece at schools, and without assessment there is no way to tell if what you are doing is working or how you should fine-tune your efforts. When schools do have data, they often do not know how to make effective use of it. Schools also need timely data that can be used to guide their current teaching practices with the children being tested.
- **Programs to engage parents in student academic performance are lacking.** Involving parents has one of the biggest impacts on student learning – yet parent involvement is often lacking in underperforming schools where it is most needed.
- **Resources - time, people, money and facilities - are not optimized to improve achievement for all students.** Schools need to make better use of the resources they have instead of being locked into existing patterns.

Based on our experience with the II/USP schools, Active Learning Systems has five recommendations. The state should:

1. Include standards-aligned multiple measures in the API. The current exclusive reliance on the Stanford 9 is not consistent with standards-based reform efforts in California schools.
2. Fund the development of “Standards Implementation Master Plans” at board and district levels. To succeed, II/USP participants need district involvement and support. They can’t operate in isolation.
3. Develop access to and use of the World Wide Web as a communication tool across all stakeholders. Technology is increasingly important in today’s world - and it is also a highly effective way of sharing information, ideas and progress.

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## State Standards

**Q.** What can be done to be sure that state standards filter down into the classroom?

**Kit Marshall:** We need to rethink how schools use time. Teachers need to work together in vertical teams - and we need to give them more time to work together. There’s been a separation of curriculum from standards because the way school is traditionally structured doesn’t give people time. They need to be able to focus on the standards across grades and across subject content, and that requires time for teamwork and collaboration.

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- Reward reform efforts that include standards-based coaching and reorganization around data-driven teams. Nothing is more critical to changing the way schools operate and increasing the opportunities for student learning than breaking teachers out of their isolation and giving them time and resources to work as teams. This is a very powerful way of driving change and bringing about improvement.
  - Fund capacity building for teachers and administrators to access, interpret and disseminate data to improve student achievement. No amount of good data will help if teachers and administrators don't know what the data is saying or how to use it.

## Presentation of Dan Chernow

*Dan Chernow is executive director of the University of California, Los Angeles School Management Program, a national school reform effort dedicated to building the capacity of school leaders and communities to maximize student learning. He is a former secondary school teacher who has served on the State Board of Education and the California Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission. He is a part-time instructor at the School of Education at California State University, Northridge. Chernow has a bachelor's degree in History and a master's degree in Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education, both from CSU Northridge. He received his Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from UCLA.*

## UCLA School Management Program

In working with schools as an external evaluator, we found patterns that contribute to low performance, we learned things from the process that will help us make II/USP more effective in future cohorts and we identified obstacles that make II/USP less effective.

### Patterns

We observed the following common challenges in many of the schools we partnered with:

- Schools lack useful data for planning.** Some schools simply don't collect data; others don't disaggregate it in appropriate ways; and many don't relate data to practices that could be improved.
- English language learners impact school performance.** These schools are struggling with large populations of non-English-speaking students - and the tests now in use may not give them the data they need to guide their practices with these students.
- Lack of consistency across grades and between classes.** The curriculum is not integrated, either from one grade to the next or from one class to the next in the same grade. Teachers are caught in a "culture of isolation."
- Emergency-permit teachers are unprepared.** This is a major problem everywhere but more so in underperforming schools because they end up with a higher proportion of these teachers.
- There is a culture of low expectations.** Teachers, schools and districts have set beliefs about who can learn and how learning happens. This is a major issue in all low-performing schools that we worked with.
- Instruction lacks alignment with any standards.** This is not a matter of instruction not being based on state-approved standards. Many times the instructional practices are not linked to any standard whatsoever.

### Key Findings

- A culture of blame exists.** Everyone is busy pointing fingers at each other - parents, administrators, teachers, the state. To make II/USP work, participants have to move beyond blame and judgment.
- The weakest classrooms rely on whole-group instruction.** Although children come to class with different levels of preparation and learn in different ways at different rates, some schools continue to rely on lessons taught uniformly to the whole class at the same time.
- Students don't know what the goal is.** In underperforming schools, students don't understand what the standards are for what they should know; they don't know what the object or expected outcome is.

- **Teachers do not hold each other accountable.** They know what goes on in other classrooms, but they don't take steps to intervene when issues exist that are detrimental to students.
- **Principals do not spend enough time in the classroom.** Principals need to observe and provide input to teachers. Often this is lacking in their professional development.
- **Schools are not prepared for the II/USP process.** Sometimes an evaluator would arrive and a school would not even know they had been selected. They often were demoralized and reluctant to take part.
- **District mandates can interfere with II/USP.** The district may be busy enforcing mandates that get in the way of the assessment and plan that an evaluator is trying to help the school make.
- **Small-group meetings are very effective.** Meeting with just the staff within a single grade level can give strong insight into strengths and weaknesses at the school.
- **Inclusion of those who are usually excluded is very valuable.** These may be teachers who are set in their ways and normally refuse to participate. But if you can get them involved, you can achieve broader support for the plan because it is their plan.
- **A district liaison is important.** Having someone from the district on the planning team can make a big difference.
- **Time is an issue.** Not just time for the II/USP process, but time in general. People often compare our results with Japan, but what they don't recognize is that Japanese teachers are paid for two or three hours a day to work together, to review student work together.

## II/USP Obstacles

- **There is a lack of trust.** The school staff initially does not trust the outside evaluator - and without trust, the evaluator can't impact instruction.
- **There are other things going on in schools.** II/USP is not their only focus. There may be strikes, discipline problems, internal battles and other issues.
- **Internal resistance.** Change will not take place if the school staff doesn't want it to.
- **Lack of district support.** Without support from the district and involvement, the program won't work. Yet districts may have little incentive to put schools in the program and may be busy pointing the finger of blame elsewhere.
- **Lack of parent involvement.** It's important to keep parents involved all the way. In every school, there are some parents who come to everything. But the schools have to reach beyond those parents and involve everyone.
- **Lack of school autonomy.** How much autonomy does a school have? The district may block actions that need to be taken. If you want schools to improve, the district has to get out of the way and be a source of support.

## Building Leadership Capacity

**Q.** When 70 percent or more of the teachers in an underperforming school have emergency permits or are new, how do you create leadership and move these schools forward?

**Dan Chernow:** The bulk of our work has been on leadership because it is important to build the capacity to change the culture. But in these schools, where people leave so quickly and new people come in all the time, you have to have "deep" numbers. You can't just train one or two people to be leaders and drive change. You have to have leadership teams of 10 or more people.

## District Role

**Q.** The conspicuous lack of a district role in II/USP is a common theme. Should the state mandate a role?

**Dan Chernow:** I have mixed emotions. In some places, it's probably good that the district isn't involved. But overall, we need the districts to have some sense of urgency about the program. I just wouldn't mandate it.

**Barry Pulliam:** Districts need to support the process at the school. For instance, they shouldn't have people transferring in and out of the school while the assessment and implementation are going forward. And we need to encourage districts to allow schools to reallocate their categorical funding for more effective uses. Also it would be helpful if personnel assignments were monitored. A school shouldn't have a whole fourth grade with all first-year teachers and no veteran leadership in that grade.

## Presentation of Fred Tempes

*Fred Tempes directs three programs for WestEd - the Northern California Comprehensive Assistance Center, the Arizona office of the Southwest Comprehensive Assistance Center and WestEd's work as an external evaluator under California's Public Schools Accountability Act. Prior to joining WestEd, Tempes directed the California Department of Education's School and District Accountability Division, overseeing a shift from a compliance monitoring system that focused on rules and regulations to an accountability model that holds schools responsible for student learning. He also led the department's Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Division where he was responsible for, among other things, the development of the state's curriculum frameworks. A former Peace Corps volunteer and teacher, Tempes received his bachelor's degree in Economics from Stanford University. His master's degree in Bilingual Education and Ph.D. in International Education were earned at the University of Southern California.*

## WestEd

In its role as external evaluator, WestEd worked with 21 schools in the first cohort of II/USP participants. As the chart at right shows, schools across the whole program were fairly evenly distributed across the five lowest deciles. At WestEd, our contracts were with a disproportionate number of schools with rankings of two, three and four. But when you get into these schools, the difference between a two and a three or a three and a four on the API is hard to ferret out.

We approached the program with a set of basic principles:

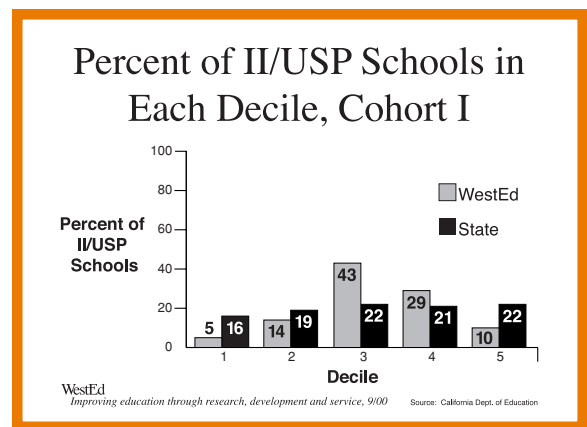
- We don't believe schools exist in isolation - there are other players involved (districts, the state, the community).
- The curriculum should be standards-based.
- The quality of teachers is crucial and one thing you can have an influence on.
- You should have evidence of effectiveness before you embrace a program.
- We want to be sure that all students, including English language learners, have access to the standards-based curriculum.
- Resource allocation should match the plan.
- You need to engage parents in the process.
- The schools need to be clean, safe places.
- Improvement is a long-term, continuous enterprise.

We looked at data in a number of dimensions: student achievement, curriculum, instruction and assessment, teaching and professional development, how the school engaged the community and how the school allocated its resources. To collect the data, we used fairly common techniques: interviews, document review, focus groups, surveys and observation. During the assessment and planning process, we conducted a community meeting, did an on-site review and provided a series of seminars on things like professional development and assessment available to school staff.

## Common Issues

We found a number of common issues across the schools:

- **Student achievement** - There were discrepancies in many cases between statewide results and their own local assessments. Many of the schools had 70 or 80 percent proficient on reading and writing based on local assessments, but when they got to the state test they were only in the 17th percentile. A major task for us was to help schools see their students' achievement in a wider context.



- **Standards** - Everyone had standards; what they didn't have was standards-based instruction. We call it the old-wine-in-new-bottle syndrome. When the state standards were issued, these schools looked at how they could fit what they were already doing into the new standards. A lot of the instruction we saw was whole-group, traditional teaching.
- **Assessment** - These schools seemed to work on the "black-box" theory. They would work hard during the year and wait to see the results of the Stanford 9. But they had no way of knowing during the year how they were doing; they had no local assessments common across grade level or across the district. This was particularly true in the case of English language learners.
- **Professional development** - It was often fragmented, pretty much a hodge-podge of stuff. They almost never had structured time to sit and talk about how the students were doing. But since they didn't have common assessments, they wouldn't have had much worthwhile to talk about.
- **Allocation of resources** - They viewed this program as yet another program with its own budget, so they weren't looking at spending current resources differently. It was hard to wean them away from ineffective "old stuff" that was already in place.
- **Family and community engagement** - They knew it was important and people wanted it to happen. But there were cultural barriers - and often schools and communities were like ships passing in the night.
- **School climate** - Interestingly, these schools were clean, well-lighted places. The buildings were fine - so that was not a big issue in the schools we worked with.

## Reflections

Based on our experience, we had several reflections on the process. First, the API has flaws, but it will get better over time as it is fine-tuned. We think the state should stay the course and keep adding new measures to it. Second, the timeline is short - but we endorse the speed. Let's get on with it, draw up plans and get moving. Third, the policy of spreading the resources across all five bottom deciles instead of investing in the lowest-achieving schools is one that we take issue with. Treating everyone equally, as though they start at the same place, isn't going to get us equal results. Fourth, we believe that voluntary participation in the program is a sensible approach. However, some schools are actually "volunteered" by others, such as the district, and may not be in tune with or aware of the II/USP initiative. Schools need to know why external evaluators are there and they need to want to be part of the program.

Finally, about sanctions: The question we have is do the sanctions have any teeth in them? We found that most schools don't believe anything is going to happen to them if they don't meet their growth targets. Three years is a long time. We really need to have a discussion about what is going to happen to schools and it needs to be based on reality.

## Ineffective Strategies

**Q.** The plans didn't show that schools are restructuring existing resources, yet many think that should be at the heart of the process. Do schools lack the capacity to move away from ineffective strategies?

**Kit Marshall:** It's difficult to get people to abandon ineffective strategies. The scary part has always been that these might be plans that would just end up on a shelf. But the reason they shouldn't is that these are very data-focused and data-driven process that the site team will be looking at several times during the year. So we should see change. One of the things that the state should look at is funding for master planning; we need to change the way the systems operate.

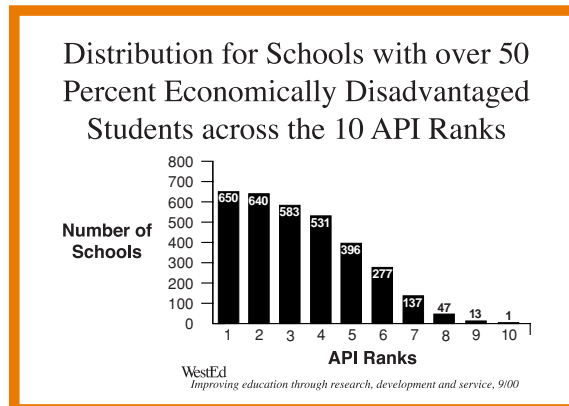
**Fred Tempes:** Getting them to reallocate resources is very difficult and you can't always get agreement. External evaluators don't have much leverage.

**Dan Chernow:** Oftentimes, plans do require restructuring of resources, but that doesn't show up in the first year because this is a planning year. High schools form special academies; money is allocated for teamwork time for staff. So changes are taking place.

## What WestEd Learned

There are some things we will do differently next time. These include:

- **Working more closely with districts.** You must have a liaison with the district and be sure that they are supporting your efforts.
- **Using the whole grant.** This takes more time than anyone originally thought. There was a sense in the beginning that the schools could invest very little in the external evaluator and then use the money for other things. We now believe the entire grant should be dedicated to this process, a part to support the work of the external evaluator and a part to support staff release time to participate in the process.
- **Seeking real volunteers.** We want to make sure we know who volunteered the school and why they are in the program.
- **Not overanalyzing the data.** With these schools, it isn't a simple matter of looking at test data and seeing what the problem is. It isn't the case that the schools we worked with need to do a better job of teaching two-digit subtraction, for instance, and that will solve the problem. There are big things these schools aren't doing. They aren't linking instruction to standards. They have no assessment. It's the big picture they need to focus on, not the more precise details that diving into data can tell us.
- **Using our action plan template.** This past year, we were flexible and told schools to use any format that they thought would work best - and we got plans all over the map. This year, we want to have a much more structured action plan by asking the schools to use our template, rather than having plans that may not have all the appropriate information or may have information in a way that is difficult to understand or follow.
- **Requiring a three-year commitment.** We want to work with the schools through the implementation process rather than just writing the action plan and then walking away. We want to monitor implementation and then report back to the school leadership team, school staff, school board and other stakeholders.



Finally and perhaps most important, this program isn't the answer to everything. If we look at the ranking of schools in relation to socio-economic status (see chart above), the relative standings may not change unless we really invest in these high-poverty schools. We need to provide more time, smaller classes, etc. These schools face serious challenges and the answer isn't just an external evaluator. There needs to be some serious investment in these schools.

## Presentation of Barry Pulliam

*Barry Pulliam is the CEO of The Pulliam Group, an educational consulting firm. The Pulliam Group served as external evaluator for 60 underperforming schools. He has been involved in public schools as a teacher and administrator since 1965, and from 1981 to 1999 held administrative leadership positions with the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools Office. From 1993-1999, he served as the County Superintendent of Schools in San Bernardino and was elected as president of the statewide county superintendents' organization (CCSESA). Pulliam has a bachelor's degree in Economics and a master's degree in Counseling from the University of Redlands, as well as an Ed.D. in Educational Management from the University of LaVerne.*

## The Pulliam Group

I want to note some of the experiences we had in our partnerships with 60 schools that are different from the experiences that others have already talked about.

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First, the speed of the journey with respect to accountability varies from district to district and site to site. And that journey often reflects some of the history and some of the culture of each school district. The internal politics of a district or a school site can become a very important dynamic in achieving change.

For example, the culture of a school district with regard to collective bargaining is an issue. The contract plays a determining role in how much time is available for staff development, planning and other activities. The union's relationship with the district and how the contract is structured becomes a very important issue.

Another issue is expectations. As we combined the data collected from 60 school sites, we could see significant themes emerging. The most critical survey issue was expectations for students. We posed the question, "Do you believe the students in this school will graduate from high school?" The responses from schools overwhelmingly indicated that the majority of parents believed students would graduate, and most students believed they would graduate. However, the majority of teachers surveyed did not believe the students they served were capable of graduating from high school. This gets to the "Yes, but" syndrome; as one teacher said, "It's not that I can't teach, it's that these kids can't learn!" So we talked about Texas where studies show that some schools with impacted socio-economic environments outperform the schools in more affluent suburbs.

We also have discovered that most schools have a lot of data - in many cases, the data is not standards based, is not timely, and is being handed to teachers in large quantities with no emphasis on quality. In short, most of what we saw should be carted off and thrown away. We've put together our own software based on our discussions with teachers and experts so that schools can look at data and see what students don't understand.

One other thing that we found is that intervention is not always designed around the skills that students lack. California spends about \$600 million on intervention for students who are not performing at grade level. But in summer school, for instance, students show up without anyone knowing what they need or how they can best be helped.

## Other issues

- **Staff development is critical.** It's especially important to help teachers understand how to teach kids who learn differently.
- **Materials that have nothing to do with the standards should be weeded out.** Schools have an abundance of materials, but much of it has nothing to do with what they are supposed to be teaching.
- **Teachers need more planning time.** These issues go back to the labor contract. Three days set aside for staff training doesn't quite get it done in low-performing schools. Our suggestion is that teachers need more time to review student data as a group throughout the year. Together they need to practice accountability by identifying which students know what, who does not know, and what they are going to do about it.

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## High Schools

**Q.** When you look at the API growth results, the overwhelming number of elementary schools improved, middle schools are a little spotty and high schools are dismal. What is going on with high schools?

**Fred Tempes:** We found that high schools are very difficult to work with. They are Balkanized across subjects and they are huge. It's just a very big undertaking to get them to change. We need more resources to have an impact there.

**Barry Pulliam:** When we looked at things like course alignment with standards, we found a complete disconnect. There's no alignment, and high schools are very resistant to the change opportunity that they have.

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## The Issue of Time

**Q.** A number of evaluators have expressed concern about collaborative time and the resources needed to fund staff development. But aren't schools getting categorical funding, and now funding from this program, that can be used to provide these opportunities? Is it simply that schools don't make this a higher priority?

**Barry Pulliam:** In our schools, 39 percent of the funding went to collaborative time for planning.

**Dan Chernow:** The same with ours. An awful lot of resources went toward professional development and getting together. We tried to make that a focus for our plans.

**Kit Marshall:** We pushed hard on spending on having teachers learn to work together as teams. You definitely have to have teams working together and reinforcing what works through classroom demonstrations, peer support and reflecting together. We need to build time into the system, not merely make it an add-on.

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## Recommendations

Everywhere we went we found good people - dedicated, hardworking teachers. But all too often they were unfocused. Working together, we can change that. We have two recommendations:

1. We need to spell out carefully what accountability is for California schools. Right now, we spell it API, we will spell it high school exit exam (HSEE), we spell it SAT, etc. There are so many multiples of what schools are accountable for that it mutes the agenda. We need to have clear and precise terms so that site administrators understand with clarity what needs to be done.
2. An important part of the process is cultural leadership by the site administrator. But schools have a revolving door that really leaves a vacuum. So we need training for site administrators to give them the ability to provide leadership that supports the school improvement that we are working toward.

## Presentations of Respondents

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### John Mockler

Politicians are more impatient than prophetic and the II/USP asks schools to move quickly with few resources. But we need to be patient. Having said that, many of the plans submitted by schools and the external evaluators that they partnered with looked a lot like School Improvement Plans from the 1980s. They were disappointing in several ways:

- There was very little analysis of data or how resources are used in schools. Instead there was a lot on process.
- Not a single plan asked for a waiver of state regulations or the ability to re-allocate resources in a new way.
- When data was discussed, the common approach was to look at the students in quartiles. These plans should have looked at students in ways that would tell us what's working and what's not. The Stanford 9 does a fairly good job for grades two through five in measuring reading, but this data was not used in a productive way in the plans.
- There was no discussion of curriculum. And there was very little mention of standards, so it was difficult to tell what the plans were really talking about.

It's going to take some time to get this right, so we do need to be patient with each other. But the next plans really have to connect key issues with what needs to be done at the schools. Those include the quality of the teacher workforce, whether the school is using standards, standards-based textbooks and other relevant instructional materials, and whether the teachers are trained on those standards. The plans also need to make better use of state and local data to drive change.

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## Andrea Maxie

Within the context of teacher preparation, the II/USP has tremendous implications. The action planning that is integral to this program should not be looked at as just a specific activity but as a dialogue that becomes part of the cultural norm of any school intent on improving student achievement.

### It's important to emphasize three ideas:

1. Both in-service and pre-service teachers need the time and the opportunity to develop new knowledge and to engage in ongoing inquiry and problem-solving about their practice. This is very important.
2. The content of new knowledge is the alignment of standards with instruction and assessment. It is also how to look at student work and how to use student data to enhance curriculum and instructional practices.
3. The process of inquiry into student work, curriculum, instruction and assessment is essential to changing the pattern of student achievement. This process needs to be a norm that characterizes the culture of the school.

We need to focus on teacher learning, and we need to provide an inquiry model for them. To change the pattern of achievement, we have to change the cultural norms in our schools.

## LaShawn Route-Chatmon

When one comes from the perspective of having just left teaching this year, the question that is foremost is one of capacity. As one educator said: "We already know more than we need to know about how to improve schools - the question is how we feel about the fact that we haven't improved thus far?" Do schools have the will and capacity to do the work that is being laid out in these plans? How do you balance the everyday urgent work and still keep focused on the long-term, bigger picture? There is a huge gulf between the policy and expected outcomes. Who will help schools with implementation? Who will help leaders stay focused on high-leverage problems?

The comments have been very focused on data, which shows what we need to work on next. But there are other issues these reviews did not raise:

- **Content.** What is it that students do not know and are not able to do?
- **Race.** We have a predominantly white teaching force with an increasingly high population of students of color. Teaching is very personal; attitudes and beliefs are critical to student success. We need to have conversations about what it means to be teaching a classroom full of students who are ethnically different and have different backgrounds from the teachers.
- **Size.** Studies show that achievement is higher in small schools that can create personalized learning environments, and so-called "at-risk" students benefit from these environment the most.

We need to be determining what the high-leverage points are, and where we can invest to produce change. We need to be certain that we are not just reproducing the same things we've done before - because we don't want the same results. What in these plans will produce an education that is qualitatively different? This is complex work, hard work that people need to do. Capacity building is the key.

## Conclusion

One of the attendees at the session summed up the challenge this way:

*We know the problem is that many students are not achieving in reading language arts and math. So if that's the problem, what do we need to do to make sure that every single child in every single school gets top-quality instruction? So you take that question back to: What do the teachers need to know, what do the principals need to know, what is the support and training that they need to have to make this happen?*

Low performance is a fundamental issue affecting public education. There is substantial activity to address the issue and some glimmers of hope in the progress of programs like the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program. But questions remain: Are there enough resources invested and opportunities available to focus on the problems in an effective way? And perhaps even more critically, can the status-quo culture of many schools and districts be overcome by courage, creativity and the external pressure employed by accountability measures like the II/USP?

### A Case of Texas Envy

**Q.** Texas is held out as a good example of a state that has improved student achievement at low-performing schools. How can California replicate Texas?

**Marian Joseph, State Board of Education:** Let's remember that the improvement in Texas started a long time ago. The results have been a long time developing. We need to stay the course over time. And we need to recognize that at least California has a system that says, "Here are standards, here are curriculum frameworks and here is the material that meets those standards." We have a structure. And with the Governor's initiative in staff development, there is a massive training effort under way.

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