TO: Members of the Board of Education
FROM: Superintendent, Robert G. Nelson, Ed.D.

**SUPERINTENDENT – Robert G. Nelson, Ed.D.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BC NO.</th>
<th>FROM</th>
<th>REGARDING</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S-1</td>
<td>Robert G. Nelson, Ed.D.</td>
<td>Superintendent Calendar Highlights</td>
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<tr>
<td>S-2</td>
<td>Robert G. Nelson, Ed.D.</td>
<td>Information for April 12, 2019 Board Workshop</td>
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</table>

**ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES – Ruth F. Quinto, Deputy Superintendent/CFO**

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<tr>
<td>AS-1</td>
<td>Kim Kelstrom</td>
<td>School Services Weekly Update Report for March 28, 2019</td>
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**HUMAN RESOURCES/LABOR RELATIONS – Paul Idsvoog, Chief HR/LR Officer**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HR-1</td>
<td>Paul Idsvoog</td>
<td>Special Education Budget Update Schedule</td>
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<td>HR-2</td>
<td>Paul Idsvoog</td>
<td>Revised Job Descriptions</td>
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**SCHOOL LEADERSHIP – Kim Mecum, Chief Academic Officer**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SL-1</td>
<td>Bryan Wells</td>
<td>Education Resource Strategies Article on Designated Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>SL-2</td>
<td>Joe DiFilippo</td>
<td>Agreement with Wonder Valley Ranch</td>
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<tr>
<td>SL-3</td>
<td>Philip Neufeld</td>
<td>Agreement for Learning Analytics Research Services for Fresno Unified’s Personalized Learning Initiative and Secondary Math</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RGN: gmm
Attachments
The purpose of this communication is to inform the Board of notable calendar items:

- Held interviews for Principal
- Spoke at the Principal’s Meeting
- Gave welcome at the Lao Educational Conference
- Attended Dailey Board Meeting
- Attended Californians for Civic Learning Board Meeting
- Attended Linked Learning Alliance Superintendent’s Council
- Held interviews for Director Instructional Division
- Gave interview with John Fensterwald, EdSource, regarding potential change in facilities funding
- Attended Fresno Compact Meeting
- Held interviews for Instructional Superintendent Curriculum and Instruction

Approved by Superintendent:
Robert G. Nelson, Ed.D. Date: 4/5/19
FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BOARD COMMUNICATION  

From the Office of the Superintendent  
Date: April 5, 2019  
To the Members of the Board of Education  
Prepared by:  
Phone Number: 457-3884  

Cabinet Approval:  

Regarding: Information for April 12, 2019 Board Workshop  

The purpose of this communication is to provide the Board information for the April 12, 2019 Measure X Board Workshop. The binder includes the data previously provided on March 8, as well as additional data including the Measure X Recommended Priority Projects and Potential Projects Tracking Log (Measure X Log).

The Measure X Log has been modified to indicate the balance of funds available, after recognizing projects completed and obligations to date for projects in process and underway. Approval of any funding noted as “potential estimated state funding” would increase the funds available for projects. The top grouping, Recommended Priority Projects, are those projects that I would recommend, given the Board’s goal for me to establish equity in facilities. My intent is to have this priority list begin the conversation on where to direct funds. Again, as I have repeatedly stated, staff’s responsibility is to faithfully implement the Board’s facility priorities. The remaining projects are presented by high school region, ordered from highest to lowest estimated project value. A brief description of the recommended priority projects previously contemplated by the Board is provided below:

- McLane New Pool Complex (balance not in General Fund allocation): pool, bleachers, timing system, locker rooms, coaches office, concessions  
- Wawona K-8 Dual Immersion Program Conversion - Phase I: three new permanent classrooms, five modular classrooms, restroom building, fencing, playground and hard courts, relocation of existing tot lot to accommodate Dual Immersion grade span progression  
- Cafeteria Air Conditioning - 17 schools: Baird, Centennial, Cooper, Dailey, Ericson, Fort Miller, Gibson, Holland, Manchester, Powers-Ginsburg, Pyle, Roeding, Scandinavian, Viking, Vinland, Wishon, Yosemite (AC for Del Mar, Jackson and Roosevelt included in potential renovation projects)  
- Exterior Lighting & High Definition Security Cameras: all elementary schools, and middle and high schools as needed for replacement  
- Modular Classrooms to Support Enrollment and Program Needs - 2019/20 school year: Calwa, Ewing, King, Kirk, Phoenix Elementary, Sunset, Vang Pao, Viking, Wilson  
- McLane Stadium Accessible Restrooms, Synthetic Turf and Entry Improvements: to increase accessibility and allow daily use of stadium for physical education, athletic practices and competition, band, and regional and community events; on draft May 1 Board meeting agenda,  
- Starr Special Ed Classrooms - Inclusion Improvements: renovation of existing classrooms and new classrooms designed for inclusion
- CTE Facilities for Comprehensive High Schools: Edison, Fresno, Hoover, McLane, Sunnyside
- Phoenix Secondary Master-Planned Modular Campus: specialty community day school campus for approximately 130 students at Church and Orangewood
- Ventura and 10th - Site Demolition and Remediation: required soils work and demolition of former juvenile detention facility
- Ventura and 10th - Site Improvements: security fencing, parking lot improvements, lighting, landscaping, building upgrades
- Ventura and 10th - New Construction, Phase 1 (JE Young, eLearn, Educational Resource Center): initial development of Urban Academy
- Fulton/Millbrook Program Relocation: exploration of potential options
- Deferred Maintenance and Small Capital Projects (through 2021/22): various projects based on evaluation of need
- Juan Felipe Herrera Elementary School: balance student populations in southeast region
- Special Ed Accessibility Improvements: various schools based on evaluation of need
- High School Softball/Baseball Fields - Bullard, Edison, Sunnyside: accessibility, bleachers, field improvements
- Ericson and Ewing Portable Replacement, Site/Accessibility Improvements: Highly portable impacted sites (Ericson – 28 portables, Ewing – 23 portables)
- Fresno High Locker Room Make-Up Air Upgrades & Roofing: second phase of project to improve cooling conditions in gym/locker rooms

Please call me if you have any questions.

Approved by Superintendent:
### Measure X Recommended Priority Projects and Potential Projects Tracking Log

Status: C - complete, I - in construction, D - in design, A - being/to be assessed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Total Estimated Project Cost</th>
<th>Obligated to Date</th>
<th>Estimated Remaining Cost</th>
<th>Balance (funds available)</th>
<th>Approved CTE Grants</th>
<th>Potential Estimated State Funding</th>
<th>CTE - Pending Review</th>
<th>Modernization Eligibility</th>
<th>New Construction Eligibility</th>
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<td>Ventura and 10th - Site Improvements</td>
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<td>Ventura and 10th - New Construction, Phase 1 (JE Young, eLearn, Educational Resource Center)</td>
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<td>Juan Felipe Herrera Elementary School</td>
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<td>Special Ed Accessibility Improvements</td>
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<td>High School Softball/Baseball Fields - Bullard, Edison, Sunnyvale</td>
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<td>Ericson and Ewing Portable Replacement, Site/Accessibility Improvements</td>
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<td>Fresno High Locker Room Make-Up Upgrades &amp; Roofing</td>
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<td><strong>Other Projects - Grouped by High School Region (listed by estimated project value)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Bullard High Region</strong></td>
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<td>Addams - New Classrooms, Entry Relocation, Site/Security Improvements</td>
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4-5-2019
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<th>Estimated Remaining Cost</th>
<th>Balance (funds available)</th>
<th>Approved CTE Grants</th>
<th>Potential Estimated State Funding</th>
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<td>Hoover Library/Student Union Expansion/Renovation</td>
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4-5-2019
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<td>(235,577,512)</td>
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The purpose of this communication is to provide the Board a copy of School Services of California’s (SSC) Weekly Update. Each week SSC provides an update and commentary on different educational fiscal issues. In addition, they include different newspaper articles related to education issues.

The following SSC Weekly Update for March 28, 2019 is attached.

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact Kim Kelstrom at 457-3907. Thank you.
DATE: March 28, 2019

TO: Robert G. Nelson
    Superintendent

AT: Fresno Unified School District

FROM: Your SSC Governmental Relations Team

RE: SSC’s Sacramento Weekly Update

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**Education Policy Committees Consider More Than 30 Bills**

On Wednesday, March 27, 2019, the Senate and Assembly Education Committees considered a combined 33 bills including some measures that would have a significant impact on the K-12 system.

One of those bills, Assembly Bill (AB) 751 by Assembly Education Committee Chair Patrick O’Donnell (D-Long Beach), is a reintroduction of a bill that was vetoed by Governor Jerry Brown last year after making it through the Legislature with zero no votes. The bill would, commencing with the 2021-22 school year, require the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to approve one or more nationally recognized high school assessments, such as the SAT or ACT, that a local education agency (LEA) could administer in lieu of the grade 11 Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment. The bill passed out of the Assembly Education Committee unanimously (6-0) and will next head to the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

Another bill that aims to enhance college and career readiness for high school students is AB 1233 by Assembly Member Christy Smith (D-Santa Clarita), which also passed out of the Assembly Education Committee unanimously. This bill would establish a grant program to cover the costs of advanced placement (AP) examination fees for eligible low-income high school students. Many LEAs have used funding from the College Readiness Block Grant (CRBG) the past few years to cover AP exam fees for their students; however, 2018-19 is the final fiscal year for funds to be expended from the CRBG.

One of the more hotly debated bills at the Assembly Education Committee hearing was AB 221 by Assembly Member Cristina Garcia (D-Bell Gardens). The bill would, commencing with the 2020-21 school year, prohibit LEAs and charter schools from entering into a contract with a third party organization (such as Teach for America):

- To employ teachers who commit to teaching in the organization for fewer than five years
- To employ teachers at a Title 1 school
• To pay a recruitment fee when hiring teachers, consistent with an employment agency

While the bill eventually passed out of the committee on a 5-1 vote, its policy implications were debated for more than an hour, especially as it pertained to Teach for America. The bill will now go to the Assembly Appropriations Committee where its fiscal implications will be scrutinized.

At the Senate Education Committee Senate Bill (SB) 138 by Senator Richard Roth (D-Riverside) was approved unanimously (7-0). This bill would require school districts and charter schools to identify the best methods of informing students and parents about Type 1 diabetes and implement those methods by January 1, 2021. This bill was met with bipartisan support and will now go to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Another bill that was approved by the Senate Education Committee unanimously was SB 297, by Senator Richard Pan (D-Sacramento), which would allow school and community college districts to award construction contracts prior to Division of the State Architect (DSA) approval. This bill will now head to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The education policy committee agendas will continue to ramp up over the next month in order to meet legislative deadlines. Bills that have been keyed as fiscal will need to be approved in policy committees by April 26, 2019, while bills without fiscal effects will have until May 3, 2019, to meet the deadline.

Leilani Aguinaldo
Robert Miyashiro
Can California Close Its ‘Achievement Gap’?

By Dan Walters
CALmatters
March 25, 2019

The biggest issue facing the nation’s biggest public school system – California’s, with six million students – is a stubborn “achievement gap.”

That’s the term educators use to describe persistent differences between what white and Asian students learn, as revealed by academic testing, and what Latino, black and poor students are getting from the public schools.

The differentials eventually result in much higher rates of high school graduation and college attendance by the former, thus preparing them for success in an increasingly complex and technology-driven economy.

California’s response to the gap has been to spend more money on what has been described as “high needs” students through the Local Control Funding Formula. It directs additional state aid to districts with large populations of those youngsters on the assumption that it will be spent to enrich their educations and thus close the gap.

The LCFF was the brainchild of former Gov. Jerry Brown and his successor, Gavin Newsom, continues it in his first budget.

However, so far, there’s scant evidence that LCFF is having its intended effect and, in fact, we cannot be certain that the extra money is even being spent on its intended beneficiaries. The controls over the extra money are weak and Brown resisted tighter monitoring, saying he trusted local school officials to do the right thing.

This is no small matter because under the criteria governing LCFF outlays, about 60 percent of California’s K-12 students qualify by their poverty or lack of English skills for the extra help. If they continue to lag behind, not only will their individual futures be at risk, but the state will be deprived of the educated workforce that its economy needs.

So is there something else that California needs to be doing to close the achievement gap?

Newsom has embraced the concept that poor and English-learner students start school without the advantages that other kids have, so need a comprehensive array of pre-kindergarten services, from childcare to elementary instruction, that would level the academic playing field.

Early childhood education has a strong constituency among professional educators, school unions and civic groups. Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon, who was an early childhood education advocate before entering politics, has appointed a special commission to design a program and it’s issued a preliminary draft.
Such a comprehensive program would be very expensive, and the draft does not contain a financial component, although the commission promises one will be in the final version.

So would early childhood education finally turn the corner on closing the achievement gap?

Studies about its efficacy disagree. Some indicate that while it has benefits during the first few years of elementary school, they tend to wear off and the achievement gap reopens as students move into middle and high schools.

A new nationwide study, conducted by a team of academics and just published in Education Next, offers a cautionary tale about closing the gap.

“We find that the opportunity gap – that is, the relationship between socioeconomic status and achievement – has not grown over the past 50 years. But neither has it closed. Instead, the gap between the haves and have-nots has persisted,” the team concluded.

That doesn’t necessarily mean that closing the gap is impossible, but it implies that we shouldn’t be terribly optimistic that early childhood education will be any more successful than LCFF.

Note: California Senator Kamala Harris unveiled her first major policy push as a presidential candidate by proposing to spend $315 billion over 10 years to boost teacher pay.

**Sen. Kamala Harris Says Federal Government Must Step In To Close the ‘Teacher Pay Gap’**

By Louis Freedberg

*EdSource*

March 25, 2019

At a time when state legislatures are coming under increasing pressure to increase funding for education, presidential candidate Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., has come up with a different approach: Have the federal government allocate funds to close the gap between what teachers and other comparable college graduates earn.

“I’m declaring to you that by the end of my first term we will have improved teachers’ salaries so that we close the pay gap,” Harris said in a speech at Texas Southern University in Houston on Saturday. “Because right now, teachers are making over 10 percent less than other college-educated graduates and that gap is about $13,000 a year and I am pledging to you that through the federal resources that are available, we will close that gap.”

Following teacher strikes in Oakland and Los Angeles, teachers have been promised pay increases — in Los Angeles 6 percent over two years and in Oakland 11 percent over four years — but those will still almost certainly not boost teacher salaries, especially those of beginning teachers, to cover the escalating costs of living, especially housing, in those districts.
Harris did not say how her proposal, which she said would represent the largest federal investment in teacher pay ever, would be paid for. But anticipating the obvious question, Harris said, “People are going to say, ‘Well, how’s she gonna pay for it?’ Well, here’s the thing. You understand that your analysis is not how much does it cost. The question is what’s the return on the investment. And on this, the investment will be our future.”

According to her campaign, Harris’ proposal was informed by a report issued last September by the progressive Economic Policy Institute, in collaboration with UC Berkeley’s Center for Wage and Employment Dynamics. It was written by Lawrence Mishel, a distinguished fellow at the Economic Policy Institute and UC Berkeley economist Sylvia Allegretto that showed a startling widening of what they called the teacher “wage penalty” over the past several decades.

Their research showed that the mid-1990s marked the start “of a period of sharply eroding teacher pay and an escalating teacher pay penalty.”

On average, teachers in 2017 earned just 76.2 cents on the dollar compared with what other college graduates earn, they found. What’s more, there is no state where teacher pay is equal to or better than that of other college graduates.

The wage gap varies tremendously by state. According to the researcher’s calculations, teachers in California earn 15 percent less than comparable college graduates in the state. In Arizona the gap in 2017 was 36.4 percent.

Allegretto said that even though the wage gap in California is narrower than most other states, “it is a huge gap.”

“If someone told you tomorrow you were going to get paid 15 percent less than other workers with similar qualifications, you wouldn’t be happy,” she said, noting that California’s gap was still about half of what it is in the states with the largest gaps. Arizona tops the list, followed by North Carolina, Oklahoma, Colorado — all states where there were massive strikes and the so-called “RedforEd” movement gained ground.

What’s more, the 15 percent figure is an average that does not take into account the high costs of living in several of the state’s major metropolitan areas. In those areas, college-educated workers in other professions, especially in tech, are paid far more than teachers and the wage gap is likely to be higher than 15 percent.

The federal government only provides just under 10 percent of education funding in California. Traditionally those funds have been for programs like Title 1 funding for low-income children, school nutrition and special education, and not for teacher salaries. But there is a recent precedent during the Great Recession in which the federal government provided massive funding for underwrite teaching and other education jobs.

Beginning in 2011, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act sent close to $100 billion to states for education spending, much of it going to avert teacher layoffs. A 2012 report from the Center for Education Policy concluded that “the ARRA largely met its primary purpose of saving or creating K-12 teaching and other education-related jobs.”

Allegretto said that the wage gap that Harris’ proposal is intended to address helps explain the teacher shortages being experienced in every state. “To pick a career where you will fall farther and farther behind, compared to what other professions you could pursue, will make it hard for young students to choose a
teaching career path,” she said. “There should be a lot of thought as to what role the federal government should play.”

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Note: SB 276 (Pan, D-Sacramento) would further restrict vaccine exemptions by forbidding doctors from giving them, and would instead require parents who want vaccination exemptions for their kids to go through the California Department of Public Health.

California Bill Could Ban Anti-Vaccine Parents from Doctor-Shopping for Medical Exemptions

By Andrew Sheeler
The Sacramento Bee
March 26, 2019

A California lawmaker has introduced a bill to crack down on doctors issuing medical exemptions to anti-vaccine parents, a practice he says has escalated since the state adopted more stringent standards on mandatory vaccination.

“Some schools are reporting that more than 20 percent of their students have a medical exemption,” Sen. Richard Pan, D-Sacramento, said in a statement introducing the bill. “It is clear that a small number of physicians are monetizing their exemption-granting authority and profiting from the sale of medical exemptions.”

Pan, a doctor, has been one of the most vocal proponents of vaccination in the Legislature. He sponsored the 2015 law that required children to receive vaccines if they attend school, day care or development centers.

His proposed Senate Bill 276 would further restrict vaccine exemptions by forbidding doctors from giving them. Instead, parents who want to petition to let their children attend school without vaccines would have to ask the California Department of Public Health.

“Physicians will submit information to CDPH, including the reason for the exemption, the physician’s name and license number and they will need to certify that they have examined the patient,” Pan’s office said in a statement for SB 276.

The bill also would create a state vaccine medical exemption database, and grant state and county health officials the authority to revoke exemptions “if they are found to be fraudulent or inconsistent” with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention vaccination guidelines.”

SB 276 comes as the nation continues to struggle with outbreaks of measles, a disease nearly eradicated in the modern world until British doctor Andrew Wakefield published a since-discredited study purporting a link between the MMR vaccine and autism. There is no link between vaccines and autism, as the CDC reports.
So far this year 314 cases of measles have been reported in the United States. California was one of the states recording a case of measles; others include Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Texas and Washington.

“Three years ago, we stepped up our state’s vaccination laws to protect students and the entire public from being exposed to potential diseases. Now, we’re seeing ant-vaccination parents and a few doctors get around that law by loosely seeking and issuing medical exemptions when families are willing to pay,” bill co-sponsor Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez, D-San Diego said. “The real cost is a threat to herd immunity and public health”

SB 276 also is co-sponsored by Vaccinate California, the California Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, California.

“This new legislation will close a loophole in the current law that has allowed a small handful of rogue doctors to skirt the spirit of the original law and has put millions of Californians at risk,” CMA President David H. Aizuss said in a statement supporting the bill.
From the Office of the Superintendent | Date: April 5, 2019
---|---
To the Members of the Board of Education

Prepared by: Paul Idsvoog, Chief of Human Resources | Phone Number: 457-3548

Cabinet Approval: 

Regarding: **Special Education Budget Update Schedule**

The purpose of this communication is to provide the Board an update on the status of the Special Education budget presentation. Currently, the Special Education and Board budget discussion is to be presented at the May 1, 2019 Board meeting in alignment with our current bargaining process and timeline. The objective is to encompass the alignment of the recommendations of The Council of Great City Schools, review the work completed by the Special Education Committee, and our interest based bargaining sessions with Fresno Teachers Association around Special Education.

As we continue to work and gather information we will update the Board.

If you have questions or need further information, please contact Paul Idsvoog at 457-3548.

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Approved by Superintendent: 
Robert G. Nelson, Ed.D. | Date: 4/5/19
From the Office of the Superintendent | Date: April 5, 2019
To the Members of the Board of Education
Prepared by: Paul Idsvoog, Chief of Human Resources | Phone Number: 457-3548
Cabinet Approval:
Regarding: Revised Job Descriptions

The purpose of this communication is to provide the Board additional information pertaining to the six revised job descriptions which are on the April 10, 2019 Board agenda as “Approve” items.

1. Clinical School Social Worker
   The revisions reflect change in the area of “Licenses and Other Requirements” to include the following:
   - Incremental progress requirements towards obtaining a valid license as a Clinical Social Worker issued by the California Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS). The purpose is to ensure employees in the position are able to obtain their license within five (5) years of date of hire into the position. In addition, the following require verification within specific time periods:
     - Registration as an Associate Clinical Social Worker within 45 days of hire
     - Supervised experience for each of the first three (3) years submitted by July 1st for the previous year. Also stipulates a minimum of 600 hours annual requirement by the District
     - Register for and pass the examination required by the BBS and obtain the LCSW by completion of year five (5)

2. Head Counselor
   The revisions reflect change in the area of “Licenses and Other Requirements” to include the following:
   - Change from a valid California Pupil Personnel Services credential to a valid Pupil Personnel Services credential under School Counseling with three years of experience as a School Counselor

3. School Counselor
   The revisions reflect change in the area of “Licenses and Other Requirements” to include the following:
   - Change from a valid California Pupil Personnel Services credential to a valid Pupil Personnel Services credential under School Counseling
4. Executive Director, Special Education
The revisions reflect change in the areas of "Title" and "Grade" to include the following:

- Change title from Director, Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) to Executive Director, Special Education
- Change Grade on the management salary schedule from E-27 to E-29

5. Manager II, Social Emotional Support
The salary placement revision from E-25, 228 duty days to E-25, 215 duty days reflects the schedule required for the position

6. Climate and Culture Specialist
The revision reflects change in deleting the Plus .175 factor as the factor does not apply to this position and was inadvertently left on the job description

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Paul Idsvoog at 457-3548.

Approved by Superintendent:

Robert G. Nelson, Ed.D.  Date: 4/5/19
From the Office of the Superintendent

To the Members of the Board of Education

Prepared by: Bryan Wells, Executive Officer

Cabinet Approval: 

Regarding: Education Resource Strategies Article on Designated Schools

The purpose of this communication is to provide the Board information regarding an article written for a national audience on the positive impact of Fresno Unified’s Designated Schools. Education Resource Strategies (ERS) is a national non-profit (funded by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) that partners with district, school, and state leaders to transform how they use resources (people, time, and money) to create strategic school systems that enable every school to prepare every child for tomorrow, no matter their race or income.

Fresno Unified was one of eight urban school districts from across the nation to be asked to participate in this research study. The Instructional Division, in conjunction with School Leadership Department, embarked on a five-month journey, collaborating with ERS to conduct a deeper-dive analysis into Fresno Unified’s strategic resource use for Designated Schools.

Finally, the article highlighted three specific moves that the district initiated:

1. Extend the length of the school day in targeted elementary schools
2. Build the capacity of principals and central office staff to serve as instructional leaders for teacher Professional Learning Communities and how this process correlates to improved student intervention time
3. Prioritize professional learning time and content

The article highlights how these shifts changed the teacher and student experience, as well as resulted in positive student performance outcomes over time.

Attached is a copy of the ERS report that will be published in May of 2019.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Bryan Wells at 457-6111.

Approved by Superintendent:

Robert G. Nelson, Ed.D. 

Date: 4/5/19
**Common Challenge**

In 2013, Fresno Unified’s highest-poverty elementary schools performed in the bottom 30 percent of all schools in California. Students’ average proficiency in math and ELA lagged behind more affluent schools in the district and the state—but teachers didn’t have enough time or support to catch their students up.

**Fresno’s Approach**

Fresno Unified leveraged an infusion of state funding to add intervention time for students and professional learning time for teachers. The district worked hard to align everyone—teachers, principals, and the central office—on how this additional time could translate into improved instruction.

**Fresno’s Results**

Five years later, the same group of elementary schools has improved performance among low-income students at nearly double the rate of other elementary schools in the district! One-third of these schools now meet or exceed the district’s average performance in math—and together, their progress far outpaces average progress statewide.¹
ERS Districts at Work Series

Visit bit.ly/districtsatwork to learn from each case study in the Districts at Work series:

**Dallas, Texas**
Dallas Independent School District: Advancing Equitable Access to Great Schools

**New Orleans, Louisiana**
FirstLine Schools: Reorganizing Time to Help Teachers Grow

**Fresno, California**
Fresno Unified School District: Adding Time to Accelerate Student & Teacher Learning

**Burien, Washington**
Highline Public Schools: Leveraging Strategic Planning for School Improvement

**Oakland, California**
KIPP Bay Area: Supporting Principals to Manage Budget Uncertainties

**San Diego, California**
San Diego Unified School District: Building Paths to Graduation for Every Student

**Springfield, Massachusetts**
Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership: Empowering Principals to Successfully Lead School Turnaround

**Tulsa, Oklahoma**
Tulsa Public Schools: Redesigning Schools for Professional Learning—one Budget

**TAKE ACTION IN YOUR DISTRICT!**

Dig deeper.
Visit bit.ly/fresnoartifacts or look for the artifact icon throughout this case study to access tangible materials—such as templates and tools—that leaders in Fresno Unified created to guide their work.

Don’t beat the odds—change them.
Go to bit.ly/snapshotmini to take our System Snapshot Mini, a brief self-assessment tool designed to help your team explore how to take strategic approaches to the work happening in your district.

What are the gears of change in my district? Where are our gears getting stuck? Where do we need one gear to push another to enable meaningful change?

Get support.
For more than a decade, ERS has worked with school systems to transform how they use resources. We are ready to partner with your school system or connect you with other service providers. Send an email to contact@erstrategies.org to talk to us directly.

Share these stories.
@erstrategies
#districtsatwork
ERS Districts at Work Framework

We studied eight school districts that struggled with the same challenges as many urban systems around the country—and like many others, the eight districts we studied set strategic priorities that they hoped would address their challenges. What sets these eight districts apart is that they didn’t stop there.

Think of these strategic priorities as a gear—without focusing on what is needed to power it, the gear stays stationary. Just setting the right strategic priorities is not enough to produce or sustain the results district and school leaders hope for.

Leaders from Fresno Unified School District (FUSD) and the other districts we studied rolled up their sleeves to carefully and collaboratively construct three other gears that effectively powered their strategic priorities. They developed a clear theory of action by identifying: (A) the big changes that schools needed to make to power progress toward the strategic priorities, and (B) how the central office needed to support schools to successfully implement those changes. To power their theory of action, these districts made tough trade-offs in a series of resource shifts, and they made process shifts to ensure central office management structures enabled schools to efficiently, effectively, and sustainably implement the changes.
Fresno Unified: Strategic Priorities

To address the student performance challenges, FUSD set a goal: accelerate the growth of the district’s highest-need elementary school students to level the playing field early in their academic careers and to provide a strong foundation for the secondary grades. District and school leaders identified two strategic priorities to achieve this:

Support teachers in improving instructional quality.
FUSD set up job-embedded, curriculum-connected professional learning communities (PLCs). In schools with the highest concentrations of poverty, the district dramatically increased time for these PLCs and layered on additional supports to help teachers get the most out of this time.

Provide differentiated instruction for students.
FUSD increased student learning time, targeted intervention strategies to meet students’ needs, and provided more opportunities for students to access rigorous instruction both during and beyond the school day.

Fresno Unified: District at a Glance

District leaders knew that high-needs students who began elementary school behind grade level did not have access to the time and support they needed to catch up. Additionally, teachers faced the steep challenge of teaching rigorous, grade-level content and meeting each individual student where they were—all while implementing new standards.

Latinx* Students (2017-18) | Black Students (2017-18)

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English Language Learners (2017-18) | Students Receiving Free or Reduced Lunch (2017-18)

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<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>21%</td>
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*“Latinx” is the gender-neutral alternative to “Latino” or “Latina,” meaning a person of Latin American origin or descent. Common pronunciation is “lah-TEEN-ex” or “lah-teen-EX.” ERS chose to study districts with high populations of black, Latinx, and low-income students to highlight school systems that are actively addressing longstanding inequities.*
Fresno Unified: Theory of Action

FUSD leaders didn’t stop after setting the two strategic priorities: First, they identified big changes that schools needed to make to power progress toward the strategic priorities. Then, they identified how the central office needed to support schools to successfully implement those changes. Together, these school-level changes and central office supports formed the district’s theory of action. To power their theory of action, FUSD made a series of resource shifts and process shifts. Going beyond initial strategic priorities by developing and powering this theory of action is what sets FUSD apart.

FUSD’s theory of action was composed of three major parts:

#1
Extend the length of the school day in targeted elementary schools.

Why?
District leaders realized that the school day and year in FUSD did not allow enough time for teachers to invest in their professional learning, and it limited opportunities for students who were far behind to catch up.

#2
Build the capacity of principals and central office staff to serve as instructional leaders for teacher PLCs and student intervention time.

Why?
Because the move to Common Core State Standards required huge shifts in how teachers were asked to teach, schools needed everyone in the district—from the superintendent, to principals, to teachers—to get on the same page about what good instruction looked like to maximize the impact of PLCs for teachers and intervention time for students.

#3
Prioritize professional learning time and content.

Why?
By studying other districts, FUSD learned that many professional learning initiatives fail because districts and schools provide time for collaboration, but don’t support teacher teams in figuring out how to effectively use that time. This meant schools needed to ensure that teacher teams had instructional experts to help facilitate their meetings, training on the new standards, and clear protocols for how to use their time. Schools also needed to figure out how to ensure teacher teams integrated these elements into structures that worked for them.
#1

Extend the length of the school day in targeted elementary schools.

FUSD’s academics and human resources (HR) teams compared the district’s academic schedule to high-performing peer districts across the state and country and discovered that in comparison, the school day for their teachers and students was significantly shorter. For example, kindergarten students in FUSD received approximately five fewer weeks of instruction than a peer district in the region. District leaders concluded that the schedule did not provide sufficient time for teacher collaboration or for students who were behind grade level to catch up, so they decided to extend the teacher and student day in 40 elementary schools with high concentrations of poverty, while ensuring that teachers and community members understood the effects of this change and could track progress over time.

Resource Shifts

Time

In collaboration with the Fresno Teachers Association (FTA), FUSD’s academics and HR teams developed a plan to compensate teachers in the highest-need elementary schools to teach students for 30 extra minutes per day and participate in PLCs for 80 additional hours per year. Teachers received a 10.6 percent salary increase to compensate them for this extra time. The district first funded this in four pilot schools using a federal School Improvement Grant. Based on promising student growth results, the district expanded the program to a total of 40 elementary schools (called Designated Schools) by using approximately $18.9 million (5 percent of their total budget) from California’s Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). LCFF’s requirement to invest funds in low-income students, English language learners (ELL students), and students in foster care provided a transparent way to select schools with the highest-need student populations. FUSD’s targeted spending approach contrasted with the way many other California districts used LCFF funds to pay for across-the-board compensation increases with no change in time or responsibilities, or for programmatic investments that layered onto the existing school day.

Beyond this significant investment in 40 Designated Schools, FUSD also increased all students’ learning time by expanding Pre-K access and changing summer school programming to “opt-out,” rather than “opt-in.”

“I’ve seen how our performance growth has continued. First, we focused on analyzing student data. Then, we focused on grade-level math instruction. Now, we’re bringing in a whole other layer of social-emotional learning and growth mindset. That’s how I see it, it’s adding layer upon layer. We’re not being asked to do more, we’re just being asked to go deeper.”

—Janet Wolf, vice principal
Roles
FUSD’s academics and HR teams worked to ensure that teachers in Designated Schools understood the new expectations for their role and partnered with FTA to embed these new expectations into the bargaining agreement. FTA and district leadership created communications materials to explain the “why and how” around the newly differentiated compensation structure. These materials included information sheets, talking points, and FAQs for principals to use with their staff. Additionally, HR created a preferential annual transfer process for any teacher who wished to transfer from a Designated School to another school within the district. Though few teachers ultimately took advantage of this transfer option, it provided a safe environment for teachers to test out the extended day.

Artifact #1: Explanation of Compensation Structure

Data & Tools
To measure the impact of the extended day and allow for continuous improvement over time, the academics team rolled out the changes in three stages: 10 schools in year one, 20 schools in year two, and 10 more schools in year three. The team collected teacher and family satisfaction data, teacher retention data, and student performance results annually for each cohort of schools.

“I’m definitely approaching my teaching differently. In our team, we’re truly working together. We look at the standards for every lesson. We review student work from the last lesson and talk about what worked and didn’t work about the approaches we have all taken. I’m having more fun, and I can see the results with my kids and the other teachers on my team.” -FUSD teacher
Build the capacity of principals and central office staff to serve as instructional leaders for teacher PLCs and student intervention time.

Because the significant increase in teachers’ professional development time in Designated Schools coincided with the implementation of Common Core State Standards, principals and their supervisors needed to grow their own instructional leadership abilities to better provide teachers with support and direction. FUSD’s central office paid for additional principal training and adjusted job requirements for both principals and school supervisors to ensure leaders could focus their time and attention on the success of the extended-day initiative.

Resource Shifts

Money
To build their content expertise, FUSD’s academics team paid for 16 principals and teachers from the first cohort of Designated Schools to attend Solution Tree’s “Professional Learning Communities at Work” institute. Using the Solution Tree model, leaders of Designated Schools invested their own time and resources each year to build teachers’ capacity. The district also sent teams of teachers and administrators to UnBoundEd’s Standards Institute. The conference helped the district efficiently build a critical mass of leaders and teachers who deeply understood the fundamentals of Common Core-aligned, grade-level instruction, therefore increasing buy-in for additional professional learning time to extend this learning across the district. To keep central office spending sustainable, the academics team only funded the conference for one year per school team but allowed principals to use their own discretionary budget to pay for continued attendance. Four school leadership teams chose to pay independently in subsequent years. Including school and central office budgets, FUSD spent $66,000 on standards-based professional learning during the 2017-18 school year.5

People
To honor the additional time that principals and school supervisors needed to devote to implementing additional professional learning time, FUSD added two types of support staff: (1) The finance team added a full-time position to all Designated Schools’ budgets. This gave schools the flexibility to decide how to best mobilize an additional staff member to help teachers and principals fulfill the additional work of a Designated School. Most schools added a position called “teacher on special assignment” to serve as both an instructional coach and intervention teacher. (2) The central office hired seven additional staff in the School Leadership Department, including a new manager for constituent services to work on community engagement, and six principals/vice principals on special assignment, who took on principal support responsibilities. This expanded staff allowed assistant superintendents to focus solely on providing instructional support to principals in Designated and Non-Designated Schools. As an added benefit, these new staff members also provided more dedicated and responsive services to schools and families in need of logistical or operational support from a central office representative.
**Process Shifts**

### Roles

The School Leadership Department formally **transitioned the title of the assistant superintendent (school support) role to instructional superintendent**, with expectations that the role would focus solely on instruction and content. In many districts, school supervisors spend the majority of their time “putting out fires” at the school level, leaving limited time and attention to help principals lead instructional change. Systems working to increase principal support have two options: hire additional supervisors or narrow the existing supervisors’ role; FUSD chose to narrow the role. As the district **updated the job descriptions**, the instructional superintendents created a new normal by serving as “goalkeepers” for their schools. They requested that other departments channel any requests through them that would ultimately impact student, teacher, or principal time in schools. This process allowed instructional superintendents to give input on whether a given initiative met a school’s needs and aligned with the school’s instructional vision.

In addition, FUSD asked principals and teachers from the first cohort of Designated Schools to serve as mentors for their colleagues in subsequent cohorts. The district held quarterly meetings with Designated Schools to focus on implementation of the extended teacher and student day and to connect mentors with mentees. Mentors then provided one-on-one support to their mentees as needed. FUSD’s central office facilitated cross-school partnerships for teachers and leaders to visit other Designated Schools to see how they functioned.

**Artifact #2: Instructional Superintendent Job Description**

“They really work to make the instructional superintendent [role] be just about instruction. So, when he or she is coming in, we’re really talking about where the students are at, where the teachers are at, what our leadership moves are, and what we need help or support with. It’s been good to have that sole focus with them.”

-Kali Isom-Moore, principal

### Data & Tools

As a first step in supporting both ongoing capacity-building for principals and instructional superintendents—and ensuring alignment at all levels—the academics team **created an Instructional Practice Guide** for ELA and math to serve as a simple yet comprehensive reference document during teacher observations, coaching sessions, and evaluation cycles. Instructional superintendents **took principals on monthly “norming walks,”** where groups of 10-15 leaders observed classrooms together and used the standards-aligned resource to discuss and build consensus about what they observed.

**Artifact #3: Instructional Practice Guide (Literacy)**
#3
Prioritize professional learning time and content.

In many districts, teachers’ professional development is based around one-off workshops, university classes, conferences, and online modules that are disconnected from real-life practice. More job-embedded approaches, such as professional learning communities, can still fall short of supporting teachers’ core work of helping students learn if they lack a clear purpose, support systems, or facilitation plans. As FUSD rolled out the significant expansion of teachers’ professional learning time in schools, district leadership worked with teachers and principals to understand what additional supports would be needed for teacher PLCs to have maximum impact on instruction, especially during the new, daily 30-minute intervention block. Then, they worked to put these new investments, support structures, and norms in place.

Resource Shifts

Money

The district invested in rigorous, standards-aligned curricula. During adoption of the Common Core State Standards, it made sense for the district to purchase externally created curricula that had been independently evaluated for alignment in core subjects across all grade levels. This investment decision was not driven solely by implementation of PLCs, but having these materials available significantly freed up teachers’ time to enable higher-impact, collaborative activities, such as analyzing student data, differentiating materials for student needs, and planning for the use of intervention time. FUSD staggered the curriculum rollout between 2015 and 2018 by beginning with the math curriculum and then introducing ELA. The academics team worked with teachers to create scope-and-sequence documents, and then layered districtwide professional learning onto the job-embedded PLCs already taking place in Designated Schools.

Process Shifts

Roles

FUSD and FTA leadership thought it was crucial to give teachers in Designated Schools ownership over designing the use of time for the purpose of both increasing buy-in and maximizing usefulness, so the district gave teachers flexibility (with support) over use of student intervention time and teacher PLC time.

The district embedded a few core guidelines for use of PLC time within the bargaining agreement with FTA—however, teachers had the authority to decide how to organize their teams (for example, by grade level versus by content area) and how to distribute the 80 hours across the school year. Most teams chose to distribute the time into weekly two-hour collaborative meetings after school, but some teams chose to invest in longer “data days” after student assessments or to allocate days before the school year to focus on goal-setting or school culture. Because the district implemented extended time gradually, teacher teams relied on guidance from the first Designated Schools.

Each grade-level team chose when to situate intervention within the day and which content
area to focus on. Teachers were given the flexibility to control the timing, content focus, and student groupings of each daily 30-minute intervention block. This flexibility allowed teachers to react in real time to the data analysis taking place during their PLCs by tailoring interventions to students’ current needs and adjusting them throughout the year.

Artifact #4: PLC Foundations Guidance
Artifact #5: Designated Schools Use of Time Guidance
Artifact #6: Sample Elementary School PLC Calendar

Data & Tools
Instructional superintendents and principals closely monitored PLC implementation and linked activities to student performance. First, instructional superintendents created a PLC implementation rubric that they used to train teachers and principals on strong PLC behaviors and track results over time. Next, instructional superintendents required principals to create “eight-week action plans” focused on improving a specific dimension of student performance. These plans identified actions for the upcoming weeks that would drive student performance improvement—including PLC and intervention block activities and schoolwide strategies. With both of these data collection structures in place, principals were better able to help teachers prioritize PLC focus areas, and teachers were more likely to see the connection between their work and schoolwide student goals.

Artifact #7: PLC Implementation Rubric
Artifact #8: Sample Eight-Week Action Plan

Mindsets
Instructional superintendents worked to integrate PLC values into broader district culture. To facilitate widespread adoption of the PLC values of continuous improvement and frequent use of data, instructional superintendents updated the structure of weekly professional learning meetings for both themselves and principals to focus on incorporating data analysis into progress monitoring. This practice aligned with the new job description for instructional superintendents, which now included an expectation to “analyze, interpret, and monitor performance management across the district in the areas of academic performance, academic growth, academic completion and retention, social-emotional learning, and culture and climate.” Principals were held accountable for analyzing teacher and student data in parallel to their teacher teams. Central office and school leaders created data walls; during monthly Instructional Leadership Team meetings, principals used these data walls to compare performance data across classrooms, while instructional superintendents and the chief academic officer looked across schools. Additionally, FUSD encouraged district and school leaders to think creatively about qualitative data sources to include in their progress monitoring efforts.

Artifact #9: Data Wall Photos (Elementary School)
**Results: Changes to the Teacher Experience**

Teachers in Designated Schools now participate in 80 additional hours of professional learning time per year and are able to tailor this extra time to meet their school’s unique needs.

Teachers value this investment: during the 2016-17 school year, 99.4 percent of teachers in Designated Schools chose to stay at their school during the district’s internal transfer period (although some may have left the district at the end of the year)—compared to 96.8 percent of teachers in Non-Designated Schools. 

**Results: Changes to the Student Experience**

Students in Designated Schools now participate in 30 minutes of intervention time five days per week—even without including the additional learning students can now access via expanded Pre-K and summer school opportunities. This adds up to 26 additional weeks of core instruction by the end of grade six! During this intervention time, students receive instruction that is more tailored to their learning needs because teachers are able to plan for differentiated instruction during their PLC time.

**Results: Student Performance Outcomes**

FUSD is steadily closing performance gaps with the rest of California. During the last five years, more than half of Designated Schools improved their math performance ranking relative to other schools in the state. Additionally, every year since FUSD began implementation of the extended day, student growth in both math and ELA in Designated Schools has outpaced Non-Designated Schools:

**Increase in Average Scaled Score Points Among Low-Income Students Between 2016-17 and 2017-18:**

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<th>FUSD’s Designated Schools</th>
<th>FUSD’s Non-Designated Schools</th>
<th>Statewide Average</th>
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<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>10.1 points</td>
<td>9.7 points</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Between 2016-17 and 2017-18, 14 Designated Schools in FUSD made significant progress (15+ points) in math and/or ELA.  

**Key:** The California Department of Education defines performance categories as follows...
- <3 points is considered “maintained performance.”
- 3-14 points is considered “increased performance.”
- 15+ points is considered “significantly increased performance.”
What’s Next for Fresno Unified?

The district focused efforts thus far in elementary schools because of the significance of early learning and the greater flexibility around teacher and student scheduling that elementary schools afford. Now, leaders in schools and the central office are focusing on ensuring that students successfully transition to middle and high school.

Sources

1 Email from Bryan Wells, executive officer for the instructional division in Fresno Unified School District; 2017-18 data pulled by his team from the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASP) data portal in 2019.

2 All data from Bryan Wells, executive officer for the instructional division in Fresno Unified School District, sourced from the California Department of Education.

3 Email from Deputy Superintendent and CFO Ruthie Quinto.


5 Email from Deputy Superintendent and CFO Ruthie Quinto.

6 Email from Bryan Wells, executive officer for the instructional division in Fresno Unified School District.

7 Public FUSD Board Presentation on November 8, 2017 (Agenda Item B9).

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Email from Bryan Wells, executive officer for the instructional division in Fresno Unified School District; 2017-18 data pulled by his team from the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASSP) data portal in 2019.

Note: Most of the content featured in this case study comes from interviews and email correspondence with FUSD district and school leaders. Unless otherwise noted, all facts and data points are drawn from this qualitative data set.

Photos courtesy of Fresno Unified School District.

Acknowledgements

This work is the result of collaborative efforts among numerous people, both within and outside of ERS.

We owe our deep thanks to the following staff at Fresno Unified School District for their ongoing willingness to reflect, share their story, and help others learn: Kim Mecum, Bryan Wells, Andre Pecina, Ed Gomes, Katie Russell, Brian Wall, Ruthie Quinto, Maria Maldonado, Paul Idsvoog, Maria Mazzoni, Kimberly Collins, Jonie Difilippo, Kali Isom-Moore, Jennifer Thomas, Tina Rodriguez, Janet Wolf, and Chad Hudson.

We would like to acknowledge the following ERS team members who contributed to this work: Rachel Black, Molly Mullen, Betty Chang, Torrie Mekos, Alyssa Fry, Melissa Galvez, Karen Baroody, and Karen Hawley Miles. We are continually inspired by people in states, districts, and schools across the country who engage in this difficult (yet rewarding) work each day.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supported this work, and we extend a special thanks to Yuri Kim and Kai Kung.
Every school. Every child. Ready for tomorrow.

Education Resource Strategies (ERS) is a national nonprofit that partners with district, school, and state leaders to transform how they use resources—people, time, and money—so that every school prepares every child for tomorrow, no matter their race or income. Learn more at erstrategies.org or on Twitter at @erstrategies.
From the Office of the Superintendent | Date: April 5, 2019
To the Members of the Board of Education
Prepared by: Joe Di Filippo, Vice Principal on Special Assignment | Phone Number: 457-3866
Cabinet Approval ✓
Regarding: **Agreement with Wonder Valley Ranch**

The purpose of this communication is to provide the Board information regarding an agreement with Wonder Valley Ranch for the purpose of hosting outdoor education for Holland Elementary. This agreement will go before the Board for approval on April 10, 2019.

Holland Elementary was scheduled to attend sixth grade camp at Jack L Boyd Outdoor School (Green Meadows) March 5-8, 2019. However, with significant snowfall in the Fish Camp community near Camp Green Meadows, and the resulting difficult road conditions, Holland had to cancel their reservation. Due to impacted camp schedules and site activity and testing calendars, Holland was unable to reschedule with Camp Green Meadows.

Wonder Valley, a three-day, two-night program (same duration as the original camp) can accommodate the site’s size (60 sixth grade students), and Holland’s dates of May 1-3, 2019, which aligns with the site master calendar and assessment schedules.

The cost of Wonder Valley outdoor school is in line with the current list of outdoor school sites. Wonder Valley is an appropriate one-time option. Holland is in the process of reserving dates to return to Camp Green Meadows in 2019/20.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Joe Di Filippo at 457-3866.

Approved by Superintendent:
Robert G. Nelson, Ed.D. Date: 4/5/19
FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD COMMUNICATION

BC Number: SL - 3

From the Office of the Superintendent Date: April 5, 2019
To the Members of the Board of Education
Prepared by: Philip Neufeld, Executive Officer Phone Number: 457-3164
Cabinet Approval:

Regarding: Agreement for Learning Analytics Research Services for Fresno Unified’s Personalized Learning Initiative and Secondary Math

The purpose of this communication is to provide the Board information regarding an agreement with Education Elements for learning analytics research services in support of the Personalized Learning Initiative (PLI) and secondary math. This agreement will go before the Board for approval on April 10, 2019.

Education Elements is a national firm that works with districts on the transformation of instruction from a blended, personalized learning perspective. Education Elements currently works with Fresno Unified on the PLI and with school sites on the design/launch of blended, personalized learning models. Education Elements pulls together funding contributions from other large partner organizations like Microsoft, Khan Academy, and BrightBytes. These partners are contributing $82,250 towards the Fiscal Year 2018/19 project budget of $125,000. The district’s cost is $39,750 and is funded by Instructional Division ($25,000) and Information Technology ($14,750).

Learning analytics help us understand what works where and how, so that exemplar teaching practices and rich learning experiences can be shared across our system. The PLI is one of Fresno Unified’s efforts to drive high quality instruction and transform student learning experiences to better prepare students for their futures. PLI is now in its third year with 650+ teachers and 26 school sites engaged in an 18-month design/launch of blended learning. PLI gave rise to a research collaborative to better understand how and where PLI was making a difference with data about professional learning, student use and experience with digital learning, and student outcomes. These past two years of research included qualitative research and rigorous statistical analysis based on a multi-factor data model. Learning Analytics Models and Partnerships (LAMP) is recognized nationally as an innovative use of learning analytics and data partnerships to inform instruction and transform learning experiences.

The published reports from LAMP show the efficacy of experiential, professional learning to shift adult perceptions and practices in their design for learning and classroom practices. Learn more at https://www.edsurge.com/news/2018-09-30-personalized-learning-teachers-unleashed-and-a-learning-analytics-partnership-the-story-of-fresno-unified. For more details, see the attached report “Enabling Analytics for Improvement: Lessons from Year 2 of Fresno’s Personalized Learning Initiative.” This report shows, in 2017/18, statistically significant performance for students in PLI classrooms based on SBAC scores in ELA and Math. PLI also had a statistically significant effect upon student groups including African-American, Hispanic, and Asian students.
In year 3, this research collaborative, LAMP, includes multiple research partners (see attached LAMP Brief). The plan for this research cycle includes exploration of blended learning with PLI teachers in elementary and middle schools as well as exploration of secondary math practices and students use of digital tools.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Philip Neufeld at 457-3164.
Enabling Analytics for Improvement: Lessons from Year 2 of Fresno’s Personalized Learning Initiative
September 2018
About

Digital Promise
Accelerating Innovation in Education

global.digitalpromise.org

Microsoft

microsoft.com/education

Fresno Unified School District

fresnounified.org

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

hmhco.com

Date of Publication: September 2018

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Introduction

Fresno Unified School District embarked on a Personalized Learning Initiative (PLI) in 2016. Now having completed its second full year of implementation, we have clear evidence that the initiative is succeeding in helping teachers and students develop the skills, competencies and mindsets essential for “as yet imagined” futures. A unique aspect of Fresno’s PLI is its analytics partnership between Fresno Unified, Microsoft Education, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and Digital Promise. This partnership uses learning analytics to see where and how the initiative is working, and how we can improve the initiative for greater impact.

This paper describes the early success of the PLI on students’ learning outcomes, evidence on what elements of the implementation are working, and the process and principles of our analytics partnership. The aim of the paper is to share with other education systems what we have learned on this journey.
PLI is based on a pedagogical model designed to foster a collaborative learning culture where teachers and students take ownership over their own learning.

Pedagogical shifts toward the PLI model start with teachers participating in targeted professional development activities in which teachers are introduced to digital tools for designing new learning experiences that emphasize student voice, choice and collaboration. Teachers engage in professional learning through collaborative, practice-based learning sessions and ongoing communities of practice. They also have access to a broad range of support structures for designing lessons that leverage the digital learning tools available in Fresno’s schools.

From its inception, PLI leaders wanted to ensure a focus on continuous improvement, not just among students and teachers, but among school and district leaders. This focus led to Fresno developing a partnership with Microsoft Education, Digital Promise, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt to 1) leverage the data that personalized learning enables, 2) provide insights into how the PLI was being implemented in classrooms, and 3) see what impact the initiative was having on students. Year 1 PLI Report presented early analytics results, examining instructional practices, effective use of digital tools, and student learning outcomes. Data showed Year 1 PLI teachers used more collaborative learning in their classrooms, more use of technology for giving students rapid feedback and formative assessments, and greater overall use of digital applications to design learning activities. Additionally, an addendum to the Year 1 report provided evidence of PLI’s association with enhanced learning outcomes on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) tests for English language arts and mathematics. Also described in the addendum are exploratory analyses of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) math software that has been used districtwide in some grades.

This report shares findings from Year 2 of PLI based on analytics from the 2017–18 school year. It is a story of successes at multiple layers of Fresno’s education system, but also...
of clear opportunities for further deepening and broadening PLI’s impact on student learning. As one of the highest poverty districts in the US, with historic challenges in raising achievement levels, Fresno’s demonstration of improvement through the PLI offers important lessons for large urban systems across the US and the world. At the same time, we acknowledge that this is only the beginning of the PLI story. Expanding this initiative’s impact to all 71,000 students in Fresno Unified remains a daunting, yet exciting, prospect. Below we share evidence on how the PLI is helping students, particularly historically disadvantaged students, gain the competencies and confidence to succeed in their own “as yet imagined” futures. The District’s Graduate Profile grounds student success in these competencies: responsible and ethical decision maker, creative and adaptable learner, skilled communicator and collaborator, adaptable and productive problem solver, and digitally literate citizen. We also share how the PLI’s professional development elements were aligned with the district’s goals, standards, and curricula to effectively drive changes in teaching practices at scale. Finally, we share the account of how we created our analytics partnership, what we have learned about leveraging data effectively for continuous improvement, and where we are going next.
Year 2 Impacts of PLI Implementation

Since its first year of implementation, Fresno’s PLI has grown in both size and scope. In its first year, 220 teachers and 12,000 students were touched by the PLI; in Year 2 this number increased to 362 teachers and 17,045 students. PLI teachers applied to the program from schools across the district and were selected randomly within that application pool.¹

To more deeply catalyze the implementation of PLI principles within schools, Fresno Unified started the PLI Partner Site Schools in 2017-18. Schools engaged PLI Partner status which required having a minimum of 4 PLI teachers. Partner schools received PLI professional development from the district as well as 1:1 devices for PLI classrooms. In Year 2, Fresno Unified added a second PLI Cohort to continue expanding the work at elementary sites, and in many cases, layering PLI experiences for students. Fresno leadership also designated a subset of PLI teachers as “Exemplars” of PLI teaching based on growth of SBAC scores from years 1-2 of the initiative. In addition to being recognized by school leadership as being exemplary, PLI teachers routinely shared their instructional practices and were open to classroom visits from those wanting a closer look at their pedagogical approach.

Data analyses for Year 2 show strong evidence that the PLI’s positive impact on learning in Year 1 continued in Year 2, based on state-wide standardized assessment outcomes (SBAC) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, and on PLI students’ level of digital collaboration. Figures 1 and 2 show the increase in ELA and math 2018 SBAC Scores for PLI students relative to non-PLI students after adjusting for prior 2017 SBAC scores, ethnicity, gender, ELL status, low income, homelessness, special education status, parent education, grade and attendance rates as well as variation in school climate between schools. As the figures show, PLI students outscored their non-PLI peers on these assessments in grades 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 on ELA assessments, and in grades 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8, on math assessments (SBAC assessments are not given for grades 9, 10, and 12, and thus grade 11 SBAC scores could not be adjusted for prior achievement.)

¹ Researchers conducted two mixed-effects regression analyses to test for selection bias among grades 4-6 teachers who signed up for PLI in 2016-17 using students’ test scores from 2014-15 and 2015-16 for both ELA and Math. Results indicated that, on average, PLI teachers were quantitatively similar to their non-PLI peers prior to signing up for and being selected to participate in PLI.
² Prior performance was imputed with 2017 interim scores for those students missing a 2017 SBAC score to increase statistical power in the analytic models.
Figure 1.
ELA preliminary 2018 SBAC† scores for PLI and non-PLI students, by grade

* Statistically significant relationship
† Preliminary SBAC data, rescaled to 100 points

Figure 2.
Math preliminary 2018 SBAC† scores for PLI and non-PLI students, by grade

* Statistically significant relationship
† Preliminary SBAC data, rescaled to 100 points
Evidence for PLI by Ethnicity

Enhancing learning outcomes for student groups that historically achieve at lower levels under conventional instructional approaches is an important goal of PLI.

The Year 1 report addendum presented some encouraging data with respect to the PLI influence on Hispanic, African American, and low-income students’ SBAC scores. We return to this issue using Year 2 SBAC assessment data. Figures 3 and 4 shows spring 2018 English language arts and mathematics assessment scores for elementary school students, by ethnicity. Again, the scores have been adjusted for previous standardized test scores, ethnicity, gender, ELL status, low income, homelessness, special education status, parent education, grade and attendance rates as well as variation in school climate between schools. The PLI is associated with positive gains for African American and Hispanic students as well as for Asian students, and it did not have a negative impact on any ethnic group. These same patterns were also apparent in analyses for middle school grades.

Traditional achievement measures like the SBAC are important metrics but do not capture all of the competencies the PLI seeks to promote. Equally important, though harder to measure, are competencies such as...
as the ability to collaborate and to take responsibility for one’s own learning. The data collected automatically as students use digital tools enabled analysts to examine objective evidence of student collaboration. As in Year 1’s analysis, PLI students are digitally collaborating significantly more than non-PLI students with the same level of technology access. Such digital collaboration also had a small but statistically significant association with higher ELA and mathematics scores on SBAC in Year 2.

Having such clear and consistent evidence of the PLI’s impact on student learning in its second year of implementation is a strong validation for the program. A great many interventions in education systems—when implemented on a large scale—cannot demonstrate such outcomes as they expand. Many evaluations of interventions (e.g., The New Teacher Project, 2015) that focus on teacher professional development, for example, have shown no impact of such efforts on student learning. Thus, it is worth understanding in more depth the elements of the professional learning program provided by the PLI that are resulting in these outcomes.
Considerable research has been undertaken in the last decades to understand the elements of effective professional development (PD). A recent meta-analysis of studies (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017) over the last three decades identified elements that effective professional development often includes:

- **Content focused**: PD that focuses on teaching strategies associated with specific curriculum content supports teacher learning within teachers’ classroom contexts. This element includes an intentional focus on discipline-specific curriculum development and pedagogies in areas such as mathematics, science, or literacy.

- **Incorporation of active learning**: Active learning engages teachers directly in designing and trying out teaching strategies, providing them an opportunity to engage in the same style of learning they are designing for their students. Such PD uses authentic artifacts, interactive activities, and other strategies to provide deeply embedded, highly contextualized professional learning. This approach moves away from traditional learning models and environments that are lecture based and have no direct connection to teachers’ classrooms and students.

- **Supports for collaboration**: High-quality PD creates space for teachers to share ideas and collaborate in their learning, often in job-embedded contexts. By working collaboratively, teachers can create communities that positively change the culture and instruction of their entire grade level, department, school and/or district.

- **Use of models of effective practice**: Curricular models and modeling of instruction provide teachers with a clear vision of what best practices look like. Teachers may view models that include lesson plans, unit plans, sample student work, observations of peer teachers, and video or written cases of teaching.

- **Coaching and expert support**: Coaching and expert support involve the sharing of expertise about content and evidence-based practices, focused directly on teachers’ individual needs.

- **Feedback and reflection**: High-quality professional learning frequently provides built-in time for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make changes to their practice by facilitating reflection and soliciting feedback. Feedback and reflection both help teachers to thoughtfully move toward the expert visions of practice.

- **Sustained duration**: Effective PD provides teachers with adequate time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect on new strategies that facilitate changes in their practice.
By going deeper into the HMH data, we have also been able to see which type of usage of the HMH tools leads to the strongest improvement in gains in math. Among the variety of features in HMH’s Personal Math Trainer (e.g. homework, tests and quizzes, daily interventions, and teacher-created assignments, etc.), the “teacher-created” math assignments have the strongest association with higher achievement. In these assignments, teachers customize the math content in HMH to best meet their students’ needs. This insight enables the PLI to focus its HMH Personal Math Trainer professional learning in coming years specifically on this type of tool usage (see Figure 6).

3 The sample size for 7th grade was 674; 353 fewer than the next smallest sample.
Incorporation of active learning. Since its inception, the face-to-face PLI professional learning courses have focused on teachers collaboratively developing learning tasks that model the pedagogical approach and which incorporate specific digital tools intended for these tasks. Titles of professional learning course directly reflect this focus. Course names include “Utilizing Digital Adoption Tools to Conduct Formative Assessments” and “Personalized Learning Initiative Camp: Microsoft Teams.” Focused and active learning has resulted in a clear association between taking even one or two PLI professional learning courses and student learning outcomes. Figures 7 and 8 show that students whose teachers attended PLI professional development sessions gained more than students whose teachers did not, and that gains were larger for students of teachers who attended two sessions than for those whose teachers attended one session.

Figure 6.
Impact of teacher-created HMH assignments on students’ math SBAC scores

Figure 7.
Effects of number of PD classes taken by PLI teachers on students’ ELA SBAC scores

* Statistically significant relationship
† Preliminary SBAC data, rescaled to 100 points
Figure 8.
Effects of number of PD classes taken by PLI teachers on students’ math SBAC scores

Supports for collaboration. Early designers of the PLI professional learning knew the importance of having teachers in the PLI participate in an ongoing community of practice. They leveraged the district’s existing practice of “Accountable Communities” (Fresno’s version of Professional Learning Communities) within and across schools to operationalize small communities of PLI teachers who could collaborate frequently. They also used a digital collaboration platform, Microsoft Teams, to provide a persistent storage location for all PLI training content used at the face-to-face courses, and an ongoing conversation stream among teachers in their subject and grade-specific accountable communities. As seen in Figure 9 on page 13, PLI teachers have indeed used the collaborative platform of Microsoft Teams frequently and consistently. More than two-thirds of PLI teachers used Teams daily in the 2017-18 school year.

Use of models of effective practice. When teachers participate in a PLI professional learning course, they do not experience the usual technology professional development approach of introducing new digital tools and then showing teachers how to apply those tools in their classrooms. Rather, the conversation begins with a discussion of a teaching approach at the core of the PLI pedagogical model. For example, teachers may discuss the importance of student goal-setting and self-reflection, or how to use formative assessment to provide rapid feedback or to personalize instruction. Course leaders introduce digital tools as part of those conversations, asking teachers to use the Conversation pane in Microsoft Teams, for example, to describe how they ask students to set goals and self-reflect, or having teachers answer a set of questions in a Microsoft Form to conduct a group assessment of their confidence in using digital tools. This incorporation of the digital tools directly into the flow of professional learning activities gives participants an immediate sense of how to use such tools. The tools are not the focus of the discussion, but they are used to enable it. The conversation naturally flows into how teachers can use the tools in their
own teaching practice. The immediacy and ease of use of the new tools experienced by the teachers as they themselves are learning increases their confidence that they can use the tools with their students.

**Coaching and expert support.** After in-person PLI professional learning courses, PLI support staff shared their knowledge by becoming mentors to new PLI teachers in cohort 2. In addition, in Year 2 the PLI content managers and instructional coaches began collaborating with the PLI team to deepen and expand their repertoire of effective instructional practices. The PLI “Exemplar” teachers provided further support by allowing their classroom teaching to be videotaped so they could be viewed and discussed by peers for professional learning. The opportunity to view a PLI classroom in this way provides less experienced teachers with concrete examples of what the PLI can look like and opened a forum for meaningful exchange.

**Feedback and reflection.** The PLI employs a range of approaches for encouraging teachers to elicit and reflect on feedback about their instructional practice. For example, teachers used the Teaching Channel—and more recently Microsoft Teams—to contribute to collaborative documents to share the “whys” of their instructional decisions. Taking the time to thoughtfully reflect in this way has resulted in more meaningful and insightful group discussions during PD sessions. The PLI also encourages teachers to use feedback and to reflect on their practice through the extensive use of digital formative assessment tools. The use of such tools was observed in site visits by Digital Promise researchers, who found PLI classrooms exhibiting:

- **Formative use of assessment tools and data.** As Figure 10 shows, PLI teachers are using learning system data to differentiate instruction for students with different competency profiles.
- **Faster, more frequent feedback for students.** PLI students get more consistent and rapid feedback when technology is used.
- **Student ownership/knowledge of their own learning.** Teachers reported that students take more responsibility for their own learning.
Our data analytics also shows a significantly higher usage of these formative assessment tools, such as Forms and Teams, among PLI students than among non-PLI students and provides evidence that practices promoted in PD are getting implemented in classrooms. Teachers using these tools have immediate information on whether their teaching approach is working, what areas students are struggling with, and whether specific students need specific supports. Using this data gives teachers rapid feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching practice and can lead to broader self-reflection on how one approaches teaching.

**Sustained duration.** PLI leaders design opportunities for teachers to participate in the PLI over the long term. Teachers who began in the first cohort are invited to continue to attend courses, to participate in both online and local school communities, and they continue to receive support as they implement digital tools in new ways in their classrooms. They are asked to share their experiences—both the classroom wins and the challenges they’ve experienced—with teachers who are newer to the initiative.

One teacher who was in the very first cohort of PLI teachers expressed how this ongoing, sustained support from the PLI was what made this professional learning experience different from any other she has participated in: "It’s the PLI leaders’ commitment to keeping it ongoing. From day 1 they knew my name, and they respond to all my calls for help. They know exactly where I am in my development and help me take the next step, through all my tears. The ongoing nature of the community of practice is what has made the difference. I’m beginning year 3 of my involvement."
Teaching and Learning in PLI Classrooms

To provide deeper understanding of how PLI was being implemented at Fresno Unified, a team of Digital Promise researchers visited four elementary schools in spring 2018.\(^4\)

The site visits aimed to gain insight into the culture of learning in classrooms participating in PLI. Investigations of interest included students’ learning tasks, providing students with feedback, collaborative learning, activities with cultural or real-world relevance, and involvement in creativity or knowledge construction. One of the findings from those observations was that students were actively engaging with rigorous, standards-aligned tasks, including extensive alignment with grade-level standards. PLI teachers also reported their instruction has become more student-centered, which the above data on teacher-created assignments confirms.

A major element of the PLI teacher professional learning is using digital tools that support the pedagogical model in classrooms and learning tasks. Teachers often state their motivation to begin using digital tools as “to engage my students” or “to ensure my students are digitally competent.” While those are important ends, the PLI emphasizes using digital tools more intentionally for specific purposes that are designed to achieve specific learning outcomes. Many education systems provide digital tools to their teachers and students, but those tools are not always used in classrooms, implemented with intentional pedagogical purposes, or measured in relation to learning outcomes. Through our PLI analytics partnership, we can examine these aspects of digital tools adoption and use in Fresno.

First, we can see in Figure 11 below that PLI teachers’ students are in fact using digital tools aligned with the specific intentions of the PLI implementation. Those intentional uses include using Microsoft Teams to digitize the assignment workflow, improve student collaboration and personalize instruction; using Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s Personal Math Trainer within Go Math; using formative assessment tools such as Illuminate and Microsoft Forms; and using the collaboration features of Microsoft Word and PowerPoint.

Figure 11 shows the percent of non-PLI students (faded versions of icons) and of PLI students (darker icons) using these tools along the bottom or x-axis, and the average number of school days that students used them along the left or y-axis. As the figure shows, more PLI students are using the digital tools, and using them more frequently, than students who have the same level of technology access but whose teachers are not in the PLI. Students’ use of these applications was confirmed through direct observations of PLI classrooms by researchers from Digital Promise, who reported increased technology integration by both teachers and students.

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\(^4\) Of these visits, two were PLI Partner schools and two were non-Partner schools. In each of the four schools, researchers sought to observe classrooms at the 4-6th grade levels that were engaged in PLI activities, as well as to interview PLI teachers and hold a focus group with students. Altogether, researchers conducted 11 classroom observations, 9 teacher interviews, and 4 student focus groups (one per school). Researchers summarized the information gleaned from each visit in a standard debriefing form.
The positive impact of students’ use of technology is further evidenced by their test scores. Figure 12, below, shows the relationship between PLI students who used these tools for a one-month period and their outcome scores on SBAC math and English language arts tests. These charts show the difference in SBAC scores for those PLI students who did and did not use each digital tool for a month within different grades and subject areas. (Data are shown only for the digital tool with the strongest association with SBAC scores for that grade and subject.)
Figure 12.
Statistically significant effect of 1 month of top Microsoft Edu app on PLI students’ SBAC ELA scores, by grade

* SBAC preliminary data; PLI n = 7,487

Figure 13.
Statistically significant effect of 1 month of top Microsoft Edu app on PLI students’ SBAC math scores, by grade

* SBAC preliminary data; PLI n = 6,428
Analyses of both SBAC scores and district interim assessments over a two-year period suggest that students with a PLI teacher are making larger achievement gains than they would have otherwise. To further improve achievement and do so reliably at every grade level and for every school, we need to deepen our understanding of the specific practices responsible for the gains. One approach is to examine the average student learning outcome measure for each teacher after controlling for students’ level of achievement the prior year. This analysis was conducted for PLI exemplar teachers, PLI teachers in partner schools, PLI teachers in non-partner schools, and non-PLI Teachers.

The chart in Figure 14 shows the average deviation from the mean mathematics gain score for these teacher groupings in grades 2-6. The horizontal line in each box shows the median gain for each teacher group, and the boxes represent the range for 50% of teachers in that group (the 25% of teachers in the quartile above the median and the 25% in the quartile below). The vertical lines denote the range for the top and bottom teacher quartiles, excluding what are known as “outliers.” Outliers are extreme data points that are well outside the first and third quartile of other values, either very low or very high. The green dots above the vertical dotted line represent individual teachers whose students “beat the odds” by gaining higher student achievement than students in other classes. (Note that there was at least one outlier teacher in every group.) Next year, we hope to examine in detail the practices of these “positive outlier” teachers to derive insights to inform future professional learning activities.

The box plots in Figure 14 suggest that achievement gains were highest for PLI Exemplar teachers, followed by PLI teachers in non-partner schools. Gains for students of teachers in PLI Partner schools were not higher than those of non PLI teachers districtwide. Only a minority of teachers in these Partner schools were PLI teachers, and Exemplar teachers in these Partner schools were included in the “Exemplar” group (thus lowering the range of non-Exemplar teachers). Given this finding, deeper engagement with and supports for PLI Partner schools will be explored in 2018-19. One factor we know from our data is that in Year 2, Partner school teachers experienced fewer PD opportunities led by PLI staff than other PLI teachers last year, so PD will be expanded to Partner schools in Year 3.

**Figure 14.**

Teachers’ 2016-17 and 2017-18 achievement gains based on interim math spring SBAC in grades 2-6
The PLI Partnership – Enabling Analytics for Improvement

**Why the partnership works.** In addition to its influences on teacher professional learning, classroom practice, and student achievement, Fresno’s PLI is valuable as an example of how school districts, technology providers, and external researchers can work together in multi-stakeholder partnerships to address the challenges that school systems face. Three aspects of the collaboration among Fresno Unified School District, Microsoft Education, Digital Promise and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt are particularly noteworthy.

First, all four organizations share a common goal—to enhance deeper learning outcomes for all of Fresno’s students by providing teachers and schools with a well-defined and innovative pedagogical model, high impact professional learning opportunities, technology tools aligned to these approaches, and learning from improvement analytics. Our mutual commitment is demonstrated through our shared focus and work on defining and developing the kind of learning that matters for students, teachers’ capacity and digital tools aligned to that learning, and the imperative for equity in implementation and impact.

Second, the partnership has been enabled by an explicit approach to data governance, data science and using learning analytics for improvement. The technical, data security and privacy compliance elements of setting up an analytics partnership of this scale is highly complex. All partners collaborated extensively in developing our governance approaches that serve as the foundation for the analytics work. Our first step was to develop a legal agreement defining the interests and goals, data management process and intellectual property terms for the analytics project, ensuring that the work met the highest standards of student data privacy protections.

**Data Governance:** No personally identifiable information is shared between the partners as part of the analytics process. All data is de-identified by Fresno Unified before going into the Microsoft Azure SQL database, a secure data repository. This database is hosted on Fresno’s own Azure subscription, and all data
stays within the ‘boundaries’ of this private cloud environment. The Microsoft Education team developed an Education common data model for analytics that enables the variety of data to be joined and analyzed across the many different data sources identified for the project, including student information system data (class rosters, student and teacher demographics, attendance, behavior, GPA); assessment data (including interim assessments and SBAC); survey data (including school climate and social emotional surveys); technology usage data (including Microsoft Teams, Forms, OneNote, and other O365 app data; device login data; Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Personal Math Trainer data; and Illuminate data) and PLI-specific data (teachers and students participating, professional learning activities). A virtual machine was also set up within Fresno’s secure Azure environment to manage the identity and network access, and to provide data science tools. Finally, PowerBI is joined with the data model and visualized for district leaders through PowerBI reports and visualizations.

**Data Science:** Microsoft, Digital Promise and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt analyst teams access the data, conduct data exploration and run analytics on the de-identified data through the virtual machine, with identity and network access controlled by Fresno’s IT team. Experienced education researchers from Digital Promise guide the analytics to ensure high standards of research are implemented. All learning outcome data have controls applied for: ethnicity, gender, ELL status, low income, homelessness, special education, parent education, attendance percent, and prior scores as well as grade and variation among schools’ climate.

**Learning Analytics for Improvement:** From the beginning, the focus of the analytics work has been to use an “improvement science” approach, rather than seeing the work as evaluation or research (Bryk et al., 2015). This means that we seek to use analytics primarily to determine what in the PLI intervention is working and what is not, to use that as feedback to improve the intervention, and to build further measures and analysis of the most effective practices. Digital Promise researchers have provided detail on the processes for establishing and implementing this kind of collaborative, data-intensive improvement effort in a recent book (see Krumm, Means, & Bienkowski, 2018). Data-intensive research “can be useful for inspiring ideas for change. But these data products are merely a means to that end; they are not the same thing as changing what and how teachers teach and students learn” (p. 161). We have found that teams from every partner organization have important knowledge and insights to contribute, especially on what data to examine and how to interpret data patterns. We do not believe that any of the partners by themselves could accomplish what we have done together.

Finally, **the third aspect of our partnership is Trust.** The shared values and approaches described above foster mutual trust, one of the most important elements for a successful partnership (Bryk & Schneider, 2004). Only with a high level of trust can district teachers and leaders, technology partners, and researchers work side-by-side and willingly share their respective uncertainties so that everyone can learn. Trust is what fundamentally enables the multi-stakeholder approach to learn collaboratively. We have found that this trust is built over time and is just as much about personal relationships, accountability for specific team responsibilities, and respect and appreciation of each partner’s expertise as it is about the data.
Conclusion and Future Directions

For those reading this paper, the value of Fresno’s PLI story is perhaps not that personalized learning or well-designed professional learning experiences are having a clear impact on learning outcomes. The success of the initiative in its first two years is validating, but the value of the story lies in the insights about its implementation.

Which elements of its teacher professional learning, digital tools, analytics and its partnership are driving progress? Other systems embarking on similar initiatives can learn from these implementation lessons. Every system seeking to drive improvement will pull together elements of their own implementation based on the unique contextual factors of their schools and systems. As Fresno’s CIO Kurt Madden has said, “The goal of this work isn’t just to capture what the PLI is at Fresno Unified, but to be used as a tool to inspire other districts and to show what a true public/private partnership looks like.”

We are far from done in the work of our partnership. While the first two years of the PLI has shown clear evidence of progress, we believe that the PLI’s impact on student learning can and should be deepened and broadened. Our goals for the coming years of the partnership include:

**Deepening the Improvement:**

1. Develop more detailed understanding of high-impact teaching practices and learning activities being used in the most successful PLI classrooms, and co-construct with teachers the best ways of measuring and expanding those practices.

2. Create a process for identifying exemplary learning activities and sharing them within and across schools via the collaboration platform.

3. Experiment with enhancing standards-based content with real-world activities that draw on students’ interests and cultures.

**Broadening the Impact:**

4. Investigate and develop more targeted PLI approaches relevant for the increased maturity of high school students, with initial focus on improving high school math.

5. As the PLI expands to 25 “partner site” schools in 2018-19, explore how work at the whole-school level can be improved through expanded professional learning opportunities, specific types of leadership involvement, and using learning analytics as part of the school improvement work. Fresno Unified is partnering with Education Elements for the design and implementation of this work in ways that align to the district’s instructional foundations while fitting the local school context.

Finally, we would like to encourage other schools and systems working on personalized learning and improvement approaches to learn from and with us. For example, we have learned the importance of designing the PLI as a coherent ecosystem that includes standards, curriculum, assessments, and teacher PD. Even with a holistic design approach, we have learned that it is challenging to spread the PLI when partner schools have only a few participating teachers and receive less district-provided PD. As we have described here, an essential part of the success of the PLI in Fresno has been our multi-stakeholder partnership between Fresno Unified, Microsoft Education, Digital Promise, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

We encourage other education leaders to embark on such partnerships which can expand the resources, expertise, and gravitas of your own initiatives in ways that deepen all stakeholders’ commitment to success.
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Learning Analytics Models & Partnerships (LAMP)

Overview: LAMP is a unique partnership developed by Fresno Unified School District and several partners with the explicit goal of using quantitative and qualitative data to better understand high quality instructional practices and the effectiveness and impact of personalized learning. Born out of a belief that we must use data to drive continuous improvement in our school systems, this research collaborative is entering its 3rd year of carefully studying the impact of professional development, instructional strategies, tools and technologies, and facilitating conditions necessary to personalize learning. Just as the number of teachers and students has grown each year, so have the partners, with 6 committed in 2019.

PLI in Fresno Unified School District: In 2016-17, Fresno Unified piloted PLI (Personalized Learning Initiative) with 200+ teachers. Encouraged by early signals, the program grew from a teacher opt-in initiative to include school-level commitments with 10 partner sites and 360 teachers in 2017-18 to 26 partner sites and 650+ teachers in 2018-19. Each year the program has evolved as the district’s understanding of the needs of teachers and students deepened.

For Fresno, personalized learning is about maintaining a focus on Tier 1 instruction and rigor while recognizing two main things: 1) students are better served when their individual strengths, areas for growth, and interests are known by their teachers and 2) students learn best when they have more ownership of their learning and this can only occur if teachers make shifts to their current teaching practice.

Since year one, the impact of personalized learning has been clear. Five of six grades showed significant performance for PLI students on the state assessment; and traditionally marginalized groups participated in these gains. The district is committed to determining how to move from early gains to scalable successes across the district.

The Data Model and Role of Partners
The data model is designed to integrate and enable analytics across disparate data sets of education, including tech usage data. Driven by a set of research questions focused on improvement and using a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to analytics (both traditional and new measures), this data yields rich and actionable results that translate directly into shifts in how the district makes decisions around support and commitments for systemic success.
Microsoft was the first partner working with FUSD to understand the impact of the tools students were using. With a commitment to tools transforming education, Microsoft wanted to ensure that Teams and Forms were increasing peer collaboration, formative feedback, and student voice. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt has also been involved in the partnership and both provides data (from products like GoMath) and uses the results of the analysis to improve its offerings. Digital Promise, an international education research firm, provided the structure and conducted the analyses to date. All student data is protected through de-identification and rigorous data science protocols.

This year additional partners have joined the work. In 2018-19, Fresno began to work with Education Elements to focus on the necessary shifts in pedagogy as well as the transformations at the site and district level. Dedicated to understanding the impact of its support, and how to improve it, Education Elements contributes qualitative data based on classroom walkthroughs as well as a strategic perspective on the work. Khan Academy, used primarily for secondary math, is also engaged, providing data and insight so the district can better understand what is most effective to improve student learning, down to the group level. BrightBytes is contributing its DataSense technology to help with data interoperability while testing their models within LAMP.

LAMP is meant to be a flashlight within the district, a lighthouse beyond the district, and a catalyst for ed tech ecosystems. It is about more than personalized learning, more than technology, and more than Fresno. LAMP has the potential to support the advancement of systems that improve learning.

Together the collaborative is committed to helping district, school leaders, and teachers understand what works to drive system improvement. That understanding will be used to make adjustments to professional development, online and offline curriculum and tools, pedagogy practices, and learning experiences based on what we learn, so every child is in a classroom where ownership is encouraged, rigor expected, and personalization available.

About Digital Promise
Digital Promise is a nonprofit organization that builds powerful networks and takes on grand challenges by working at the intersection of researchers, entrepreneurs, and educators. Our vision is that all people, at every stage of their lives, have access to learning experiences that help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to thrive and continuously learn in an ever-changing world. For more information, visit Digital Promise website.

About Education Elements
Education Elements works with districts to build and support dynamic school systems that meet the needs of every learner, today and tomorrow. They take the time to understand the unique challenges school leaders face, and then customize the Education Elements approach for each district. Ed Elements brings deep expertise, design thinking, expert facilitation and the spirit of collaboration, along with their extensive toolkit of resources and technology, to deliver sustainable results.

About Fresno Unified School District
Fresno Unified School District serves more than 74,000 students, from preschool through grade 12, preparing career ready graduates through high-quality instruction, district programs and services, and resources.

About Microsoft
At Microsoft we believe all students have the potential to grow and learn in amazing ways. That is why we are passionate about supporting educators all over the globe to help students develop the skills they will need to solve the problems that inspire them.