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BRIEFLY

- » Despite recent increases in California's state funding for K–12 education, cost increases in many school districts are outpacing revenues.
- » A series of WestEd reports identifies this period of fiscal challenges as a "Silent Recession" that is not unique to California.
- » Many budget leaders are finding strategies to navigate the Silent Recession by focusing on improving both cost-effectiveness and student outcomes.

School District Budget Leaders Speak Out on the SILENT RECESSION

Parents of students in the San Jose Unified School District were understandably pleased when the amount of state aid began increasing five years ago as a result of California's new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Still, it didn't take long for disappointment to set in.

"One thing parents really wanted to know was why San Jose Unified wasn't using that money to reduce class sizes," recalls Stephen McMahon, the district's deputy superintendent and chief business officer. At the time, the average class size stood at 30—even in kindergarten—a figure McMahon says was higher than in neighboring districts and needed to be considered. Yet, even with the spike in state revenue, district officials could not improve on that number because "our cost-per-employee was going up at a faster rate than our revenue," says McMahon.

This dynamic is not unique to San Jose. Two recent reports from WestEd researchers identify a "Silent Recession" in which costs are rising so dramatically that many districts are experiencing the increased funding as being woefully inadequate.

Silent Recession: Why California School Districts Are Underwater Despite Increases in Funding, lays out the often bleak conditions of costs outpacing revenues. Although this dynamic forces districts to face what McMahon calls "increasingly severe budgetary challenges," there are silver linings as well. The second report, *Education Budget Strategies for Challenging Times: How California School Districts Are Addressing the Silent Recession*, reveals that some budget leaders are responding to the Silent Recession not simply by cutting back but

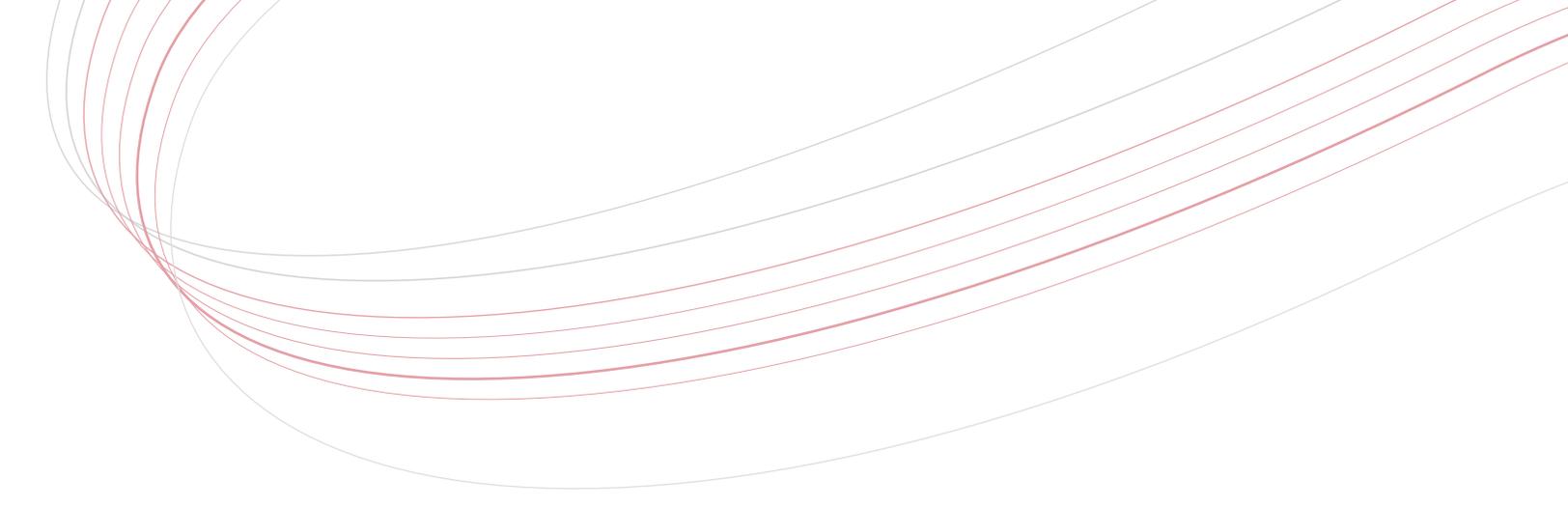
by focusing on cost-effective ways to *improve* education in their districts. A third report, on state-level strategies for addressing the Silent Recession, is in development.

A SILENT RECESSION HAMPERS RECOVERY

WestEd developed the reports as part of the Smarter School Spending project, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The project aims to help school districts prioritize spending in ways that will increase student achievement. Between February 2016 and June 2018, WestEd convened budget and education services leaders from a number of California school districts and county offices of education for a series of group discussions. One-on-one, follow-up interviews examined financial challenges and how the leaders were responding. WestEd researchers also interviewed chief business officers (CBOs) from additional districts and another county office of education to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the diversity of California's school districts. Lastly, researchers analyzed the 2017 budgets of 25 school districts and statewide financial data.

From this process, the reports' authors learned that scenarios like that of San Jose have been playing out across California and the nation for almost a decade. Budget leaders throughout California described facing similar





challenges even as they have welcomed the additional state aid designed to help their districts reach pre-recession funding levels. Residents of Oakland, for example, were unhappy when they learned their district was closing a number of schools to balance its 2012 budget, and they were newly devastated to learn that many more such closings loomed — despite the annual increase in state aid their district was getting with the LCFF.

“These districts have gone through round after round of budget cuts in the past, but now, because of LCFF, there’s a sense that the schools finally have the resources to do more,” says Kelsey Krausen, a senior research associate with WestEd’s Comprehensive School Assistance Program. “What we came to realize was how little awareness there was of the actual budget constraints under which districts are working. In reality, their purchasing power has decreased.”

“THERE’S NOTHING LEFT TO CUT”

WestEd’s first Silent Recession report notes that districts began experiencing serious budget shortfalls in 2008 in the wake of state revenue decreases due to the Great Recession. In response, they were forced to make painful decisions to cut programs, curtail services, and reduce staffing. “As a result, in our interviews with CBOs we heard over and over again that ‘We’ve already cut costs everywhere we possibly could; there’s nothing left to cut,’” says Krausen, the lead author on both reports. Indeed, she notes, despite the LCFF legislation that saw state aid jump back up beginning in 2013, costs rose even faster. Between 2012 and 2017, for example, overall expenditures increased by 21 percent for teachers’

salaries, 49 percent for employee benefits, and 75 percent for books and supplies. In many districts, costs have also been rising for maintenance or replacement of aging school buildings.

Districts with declining enrollment — resulting in fewer students to educate — have not seen commensurate declines in costs, according to Krausen. “You often can’t reduce staff based directly on the number of students you lose, because you never lose, say, an entire class of seventh graders.” Nor can districts reduce most utility or maintenance costs when enrollment declines. What’s more, because state funding formulas are calculated on a per-pupil basis, declining enrollment packs a double punch by reducing revenue.

The problem is not confined to California. “We know from our work in other states that there’s a general trend toward increasing state revenue to restore school revenue to pre-recession levels,” says Krausen, noting that funding still has not typically reached pre-recession levels. Meanwhile, all over the country school districts have been facing steep cost increases in areas such as employee pensions, special education services, and deferred maintenance. The WestEd reports point to research indicating the high cost of replacing teachers, which ranges from \$10,000 to \$20,000 per teacher and totals \$8 billion nationally.

FROM CHALLENGE SPRINGS OPPORTUNITY

Seeing a budget shortfall in a positive light may be difficult, especially as WestEd’s first report on this topic predicts that the “Silent Recession will continue to constrain

We know it can be incredibly difficult to cut programs . . . but when you use data to back up your decisions, the end result can be a new program that works better.

district budgets into the foreseeable future.” However, Krausen and colleagues urge school officials to make the most of a difficult situation.

“We see this as an opportunity to really maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of school district operations, even if you’re motivated by necessity,” says Ruthie Caparas, a WestEd research assistant who — along with Jason Willis, director of strategy and performance for the Comprehensive School Assistance Program — co-authored the Silent Recession report. “Often, one of the outcomes can be the adoption of best practices that you and your districts will benefit from long into the future,” even when the economic context is stronger.

In that spirit, WestEd’s second report describes school leaders’ efforts to find new ways of “creating the type of education system that all children deserve,” spelling out strategies that budget leaders have used to improve education with increasingly limited dollars. Caparas praises the CBOs’ efforts. “We’ve found their ability to come up with strategies that improve both cost-effectiveness *and* student outcomes — and to share their ideas with each other — very encouraging,” she says.

STRATEGIES THAT WORK

One school district, for example, set up a robust teacher evaluation system as a way of ensuring that its largest expenditure — teacher salaries — was in fact being used to employ highly qualified teachers. The move, created in partnership with the local teachers’ union, became a central point of the district’s school improvement process. Ultimately, it not only boosted student

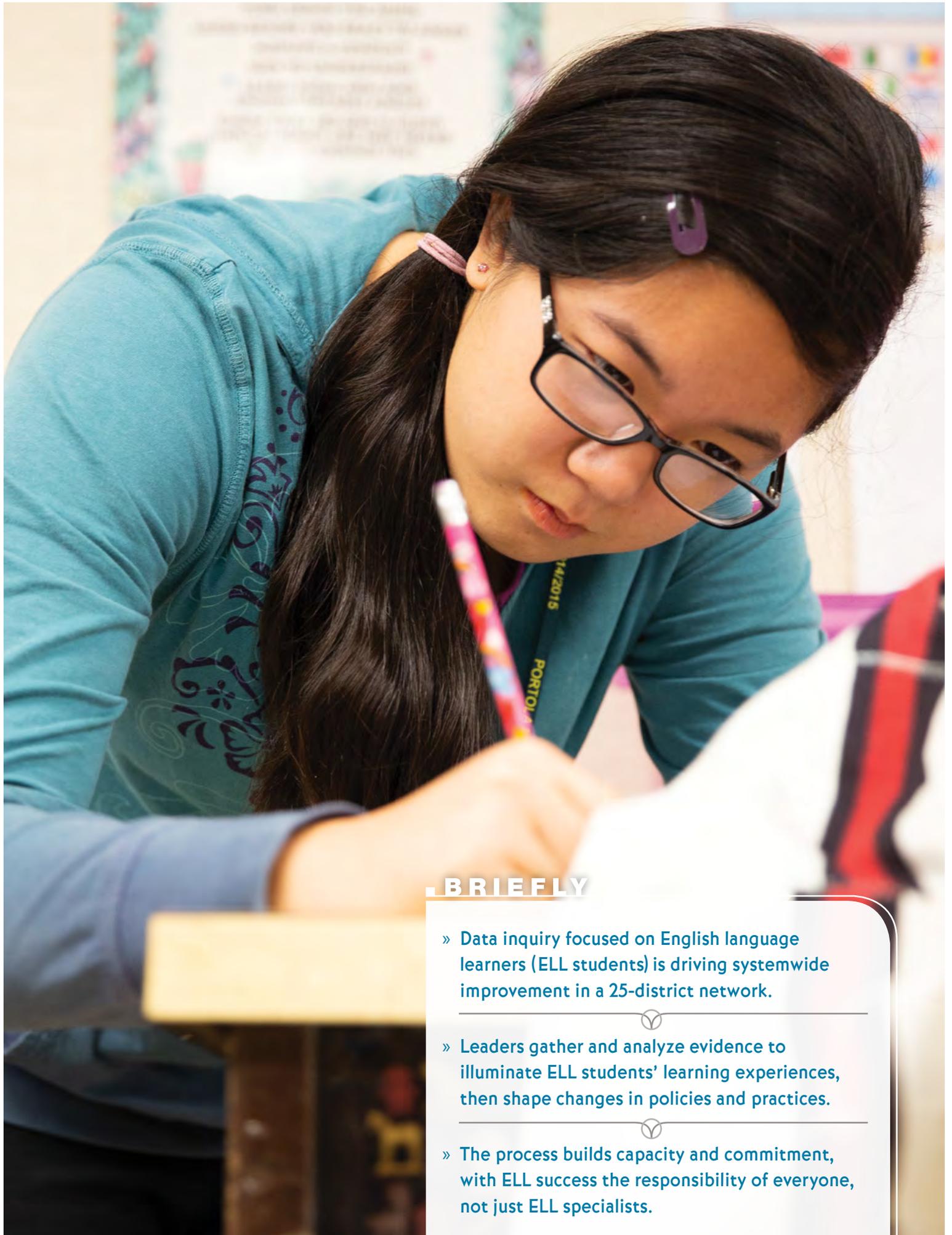
achievement but also engaged the union in the district’s long-term decision-making.

Another strategy designed to increase efficiency is to put greater reliance on data to inform the budget process. “We know it can be incredibly difficult, for example, to cut programs, which always have their proponents,” points out Krausen. “But when you use data to back up your decisions, the end result can be a new program that works better.”

A number of districts have worked to improve student attendance rates, which has great potential for increasing revenue under state funding formulas. For example, according to research cited in the second Silent Recession report, if every student in the Los Angeles Unified School District had attended one more day of school during the 2016/17 school year, the district would have received an additional \$30 million in revenue. Perhaps even more important is the strong, widely recognized link between increased attendance and higher student achievement.

Budget leaders also described a variety of smaller but creative ways to boost revenue or decrease costs. Some have generated income from leasing space to communication companies that place cell phone towers on school campuses. Others have lowered costs by ensuring that water for tasks like watering football fields is not billed at the higher rate charged for drinking water.

Lastly, WestEd’s research also identified strategies that strengthen communication between the district and its stakeholders — school board members, staff, unions, taxpayers — as a key way of effectively managing budget



BRIEFLY

- » Data inquiry focused on English language learners (ELL students) is driving systemwide improvement in a 25-district network.

- » Leaders gather and analyze evidence to illuminate ELL students' learning experiences, then shape changes in policies and practices.

- » The process builds capacity and commitment, with ELL success the responsibility of everyone, not just ELL specialists.

English Learners at the Center of System Change

A Multidistrict Network Takes Improvement to the △△△ **Next Level**

Educators in a group of school districts in New York State are zeroing in on a major challenge to the academic growth of English language learners (ELL students): Typically, only 2 to 3 percent of ELL students' total class time involves engaging in productive listening, speaking, reading, or writing in English for academic subject matter learning.

"That's a real problem — how few opportunities there are for ELL students to be stretched in using English to carry out academic practices in their regular classes every day," says Robert Linqanti, former project director and senior researcher with WestEd's California Comprehensive Center and Comprehensive School Assistance Program (CSAP). "Having data that quantify that experience helps increase the sense of urgency around the problem and raises awareness among teachers and administrators for the need to integrate language and content development for ELL students into all their lessons."

Equipping district leaders with the tools they need to collect these kinds of data is central to a three-year initiative WestEd has led in collaboration with the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and Stanford University. The goal of the ELL initiative is to build the capacity of district and school leaders to make systemic improvements that boost the achievement of ELL students, better preparing them for college and careers. Funded last year by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the initiative builds on WestEd's successful earlier work with individual districts elsewhere. In New York, WestEd and Stanford provide technical assistance to the NYSED and a network of 25 districts throughout the state.

ADDRESSING OPPORTUNITY AND PERFORMANCE GAPS

According to the NYSED, just over 80 percent of all freshmen who entered New York high schools in 2013 went on to graduate in four years, whereas ELL students in the same cohort fared much worse. The four-year graduation rate for ELL students (which includes relative newcomers and longer-term ELL students) was just 27 percent, even lower than it had been a few years earlier (34 percent). Although many ELL students who fail to graduate in four years do remain in school and eventually earn diplomas, the dropout rate for ELL students is a disconcerting 30 percent in New York. There's no denying that too often ELL students' lack of support with advanced academic language and literacy significantly impacts their ability to engage successfully with academic content.

Faced with such challenges, education leaders tend to look to ELL teachers and specialists to raise ELL achievement. But New York State's 25-district initiative treats ELL achievement as a systemwide issue — the responsibility of everyone, not just ELL specialists.

Over the 2017/18 school year, leaders from each participating district came together in a networked learning community during three face-to-face institutes designed



ELL-focused work is “a contrast dye that helps illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of the entire system.”

by WestEd and Stanford. The leaders included assistant superintendents, chief academic officers, budget and curriculum directors, and instructional specialists. Institute sessions focused on strengthening participants' understanding of quality ELL instruction, teaching participants to use data analysis tools designed to evaluate ELL students' linguistic and academic development, and generating urgency and commitment to develop plans for improving ELL instructional practices and program leadership.

In addition to participating in face-to-face institutes, the leaders also carried out a series of application tasks back in their home districts, such as examining course-taking patterns, analyzing the effects of district policies on ELLs, shadowing students, and carrying out classroom observations focusing on ELL students' learning experiences. In a series of six interactive, online working sessions, participating leaders reported on their takeaways from the application tasks and had further opportunities to network with peers from other districts.

One of the tools that WestEd shared with network participants is a student-shadowing protocol designed to document exactly how ELL students experience the school day. Under the protocol, an educator shadows a student for a three-hour period, regularly recording how many minutes the student engages in academic speaking, listening, writing, or reading in English. Data are also gathered on how much time, if any, students spend interacting in their home language.

Such an exercise “paints a quick portrait of students' qualitative experiences,” says María Santos, engagement director of School and District Services with the CSAP. And, she notes, the data aggregated from the tool often confirm that ELL students “are not afforded opportunities

to engage in academic, grade-level practices.” In addition, institute participants learn how to conduct classroom observations focused on students' opportunities to engage in language and content learning simultaneously, leverage their linguistic and cultural assets, and build autonomy as learners. The data gathered are then analyzed and used to gauge the quality of ELL instruction.

“It's all about building the leaders' capacity to transform their systems and then coaching them as they go about the work,” says Santos. “We bring them together to ask, ‘How are you using your budgets? How are you using your time?’ We want them to recognize that they, and not just the ELL specialists, have a role to play when it comes to defining and enacting a vision of ELL success.”

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY, NETWORKING LEAD TO SUCCESS

The importance of shifting responsibility for ELL students' success from the sole purview of ELL teachers to that of virtually everyone working in a school district is one of the key lessons emerging from WestEd's work, according to Santos and Linquanti.

“For example, math or science teachers traditionally might not have thought about integrating language development into their lessons,” says Santos. She describes changing that focus as a “huge mind shift.” Adds Linquanti, “It's critical to take a systemic approach so that ELL-focused work is not done in isolation and everyone is mutually accountable for shifting policies and practices in ways that transform the system.” That's one reason initiative participants include not only ELL staffers, but educators from a range of disciplines.

Because the initiative involves a network of districts and NYSED leaders, participants have support from the state and their peers to help them uncover, analyze, and respond to common problems of policy and practice, and to cultivate leadership around such issues. “Structures are in place so that you can have big conversations and that everything that happens — all the decisions that are made — are made in tandem [with] and in support of deepening the work that has to happen in the classroom,” says Angelica Infante-Green, an NYSED deputy commissioner.

Lisette Colon-Collins, an NYSED assistant commissioner, sees the initiative’s networking capacity as a way to develop a “common language among leaders” when it comes to creating a sustainable language development approach for ELL instruction and building future leadership capacity. District leaders say they value opportunities to use protocols that help uncover challenges and root causes, share data on practices and outcomes, and collaboratively prioritize and enact strategic improvements. The data help guide the districts’ work to identify and begin to address the diverse strengths and needs of ELL students *and* their educators.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

The initiative has sparked considerable interest. After the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) invited WestEd and New York State to present their learnings at a CCSSO event last year, another 25 states expressed interest in starting similar initiatives. A cross-state network focused on building state-level leadership for district ELL improvements is now underway. Other evidence of the initiative’s impact, particularly in its systemwide focus, can be found in changes to several New York state policies and practices, including recognizing

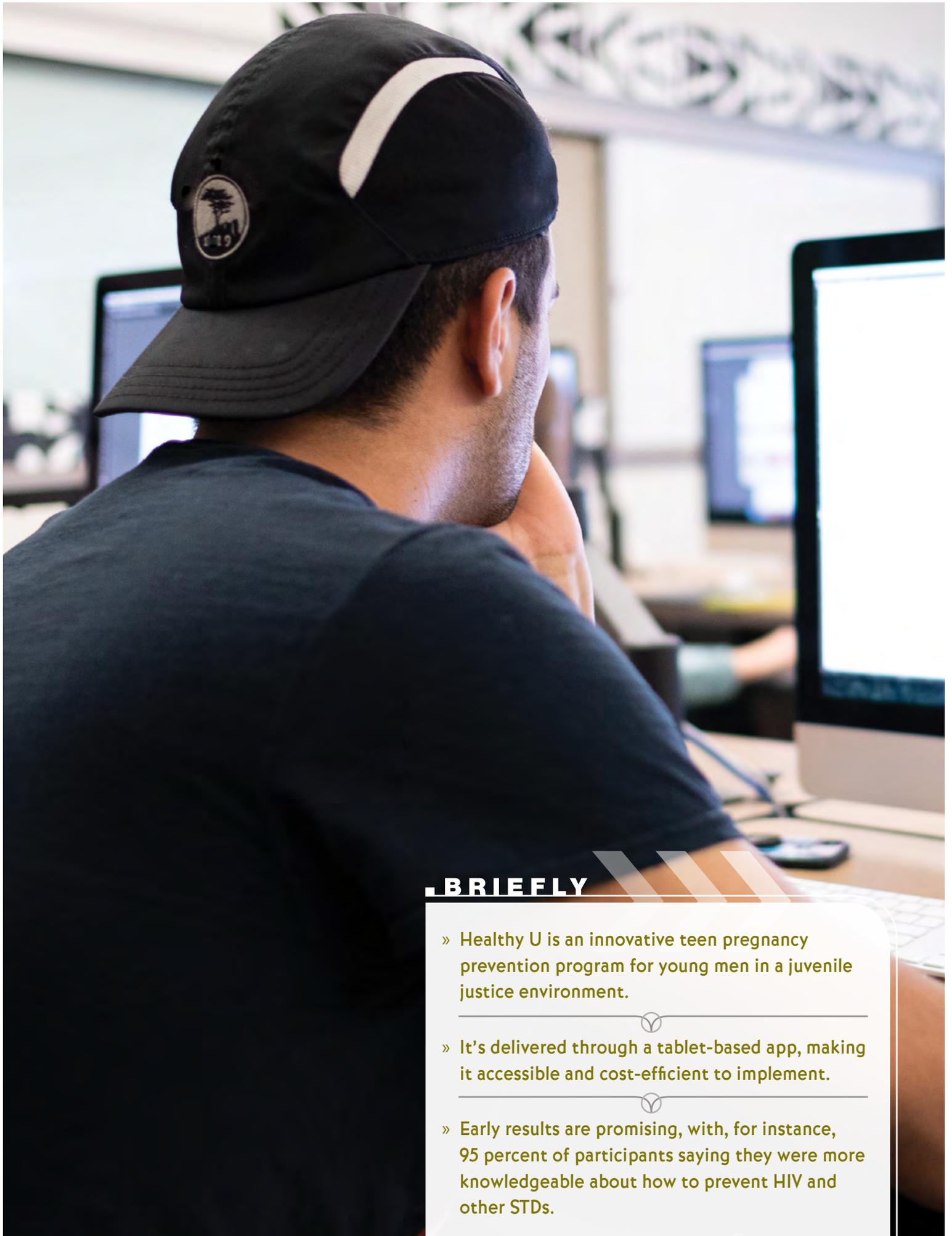
more native-language content assessments in graduation requirements, calculating five- and six-year ELL graduation rates, and prioritizing district improvement plans to address dropout prevention. At the local level, the initiative’s districts are paying more attention to boosting attendance for ELL students and improving their access to college-prep coursework and timely, responsive counseling.

Linquanti describes ELL-focused work as “a contrast dye that helps illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of the entire system. What is effective with ELL students is likely to be effective for all students.” He and Santos are encouraged that district leaders in the initiative are taking a system-level look at their instructional and administrative practices, using both quantitative and qualitative data, with an eye toward improving teaching and learning across the board. “It’s a coherent, interlocking approach grounded in key principles of effective ELL instruction,” says Linquanti.

Looking ahead, the NYSED is working to secure funding for the initiative’s work over the next two years, during which leaders from each participating district will develop and implement a Systemic Improvement Plan for ELL Success. Based on the early promise of NYSED’s ELL initiative, Linquanti sees great potential for replicating its approach elsewhere. “What we have developed,” he says, “is a conceptual framework and set of tools that can be used to engage educators at different levels of the system to really understand what it means to build capacity around ELL instruction systemically and to take the steps necessary to carry it out.”



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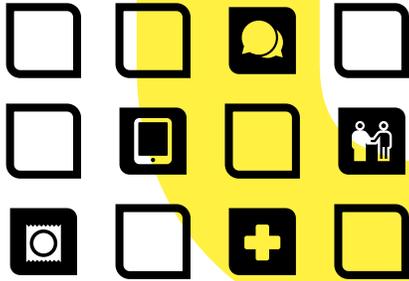


■ BRIEFLY

- » Healthy U is an innovative teen pregnancy prevention program for young men in a juvenile justice environment.

- » It's delivered through a tablet-based app, making it accessible and cost-efficient to implement.

- » Early results are promising, with, for instance, 95 percent of participants saying they were more knowledgeable about how to prevent HIV and other STDs.



Healthy U

How a New App Provides Sexual Health Education to Incarcerated Youth

"Healthy U changed my life. If I had taken Healthy U when I was 14 years old, I wouldn't be a teen father today."

This is the earnest voice of a young man who recently participated in an innovative teen pregnancy prevention program — the first of its kind, designed specifically for young males in a juvenile justice environment.

Developed through funding by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Healthy U* is delivered through a tablet-based app, making it an accessible and cost-efficient way to deliver sexual health education. The program is a collaboration between the WestEd Justice & Prevention Research Center; the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA), known for its rehabilitation model in juvenile justice; and Efficacy, a health education company with a history of building media, games, and technology for underserved and high-need populations. WestEd helped develop the app and is studying its impact through a five-year cluster randomized controlled trial. The study focuses on young males at five OYA facilities and compares changes in sexual health knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of those who participate in the *Healthy U* program with those who do not.

"Based on OYA youth and staff feedback, we've learned that this is really the first time that most of these young men have had any sort of systematic approach to sexual health education," says Staci Wendt, a senior research associate at WestEd who is leading the project with Anthony Petrosino, director of the WestEd Justice & Prevention Research Center. In fact, only 1 in 10 young men participating in a pilot focus group at OYA reported having any previous sexual health education. "These youth are really starved for this information," says Wendt.

Although the study's final findings are not yet available, surveys and focus groups have revealed some significant changes in youths' attitudes and knowledge. For instance, after participating in *Healthy U*:

- » 95 percent of the young men indicated that they were more knowledgeable about how to prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- » 77 percent were more likely to use a condom in the coming year.
- » 11 percent were more likely to abstain from sexual intercourse in the next year.

And in focus groups, says Wendt, many youth say they now feel more prepared to have conversations about these topics with their partners.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO EDUCATE YOUNG MEN IN A JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

"A lot of sexual health education is aimed at females," says Wendt. "We're looking at how we can appropriately target this information to young men and increase their knowledge and engagement." Educating men in their teenage years is critically important, she notes, partly because children born to teen parents face more challenges and teen parents are at greater risk for dropping out of school and ending up on public assistance.



This is really the first time that most of these young men have had any sort of systematic approach to sexual health education.

The need for sexual health education is great, especially among males who end up in juvenile justice systems, notes Wendt. As of the project's start in 2015, about 12 percent of youth entering OYA reported already being a father. These youth are also at greater risk for HIV and other STDs, says Wendt.

Survey data gathered through the study confirm the need for increased access to sexual health education. Before participating in *Healthy U*, a significant percentage of youth reported not previously receiving information about: how to resist pressures to have sex (60 percent); pregnancy or birth (52 percent); methods of birth control (37 percent); how to say no to sex (36 percent); and STDs (27 percent).

Reaching males in a juvenile justice system. The young men participating in the *Healthy U* study are between the ages of 14 and 19 and within three months of being released from an OYA facility. This timing allows for a reliable assessment of their sexual behavior once they are back in the community. Each living unit — the cluster that young men reside in at their OYA facility — is assigned to either the treatment or control group, a step designed to prevent interaction and skewing of results.

OYA staff help facilitate the intervention by passing out tablets and answering any questions youth have about their *Healthy U* experience. "The app has prompted many conversations that probably wouldn't have happened otherwise," says Michael Lambert, OYA Case Coordinator at Rogue Valley Youth Correctional Facility in Southern Oregon. "They're all very grateful for the information, but wish they'd had access to it sooner."

Using a tech-based approach. The program is self-directed and self-paced — designed to take only three to four hours to complete — and the tablets don't require a lot of staff training to implement, says Wendt. "This makes them easier and less costly to use, and more accessible for remote and rural populations such as those living in OYA facilities."

At OYA facilities, the tablets are novel, and "they really engage this age group," says Lambert. Privacy is also a plus. Teaching sexual education in a group environment that requires open discussion can discourage youth from asking questions, notes Lambert. "But because they are learning in private with the tablets, they feel more comfortable coming to ask follow-up questions or to seek verification from a trusted adult."

CREATING AN ENGAGING PLATFORM

Currently, 254 youth are enrolled in the study, and 85 percent of those in the treatment arm have completed the *Healthy U* program. In addition to strong acceptance of the technology, several other factors may contribute to the high completion rate, says Wendt, such as youth involvement in the development of the program as well as the comprehensiveness and reinforcement of the sexual health messages.

Youth input. The development of the *Healthy U* app was informed from the beginning by youth, including a youth advisory board, focus groups, and pilots with young men in OYA's care. For example, two stories included in *Healthy U* videos were developed using input from young men in an OYA facility who worked with Efficacy to storyboard a video segment incorporating their personal

experiences. Getting early input, says Wendt, “helped us to really tailor the information to this population.”

Multiple modules. Aligned to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Health Education Standards, the program includes seven modules: puberty in males and females, birth control, pregnancy, STDs, HIV, healthy relationships, and condom negotiation. “The program is extremely in-depth,” says Lambert. “It corrects a lot of misinformation youth have picked up along the way, mostly from their peers.”

The app also provides new information. Lambert says he sees the program’s real impact when the young men repeatedly come to him and ask with alarm, “Is this really true? Why do some condoms not protect me from STDs?” In focus groups, the teens have repeatedly applauded the healthy relationship module – information they hadn’t received before, adds Wendt. “That module provides detailed information about how to talk with a partner about buying and using birth control, and about the effects of birth control on the body,” says Wendt. Another real eye-opener for the teens? “The costs of unplanned teen fatherhood,” she says.

Reinforced messages. The app uses a public health approach, says Wendt, with different formats reinforcing the same message. For example, messages about birth control are delivered through an interactive game, a video of two teens conversing, and a teen speaking directly to the camera about his experience negotiating birth control use with his partner.

All formats are popular, says Lambert: “The teens are silently glued to the screen the whole time.” Although

they have up to three weeks to complete the program, he says, most go through material within a few days. “Can I do it again?” is often the first thing they say upon completing it, Lambert says.

NEXT STEPS

Heading into year five of the research study, Wendt and her colleagues are finishing up data collection and assessing the impact of the app on behavioral outcomes, such as increases in condom use and birth control use and decreases in unplanned teen fatherhood. The team will share results in journals and present at conferences.

While the study’s final results are still pending, Wendt is pleased with the app’s progress to this point. “*Healthy U* is providing critical information to a high-risk, high-need population at a formative juncture in their lives – and that’s really the aim of all this work.”



For more information about WestEd’s work with *Healthy U*, contact Staci Wendt at 562.799.5432 or swendt@WestEd.org. For more information about *Healthy U*, contact Beth Wachter at www.healthycampus.org.

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Healthy U is supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Funding was made possible under contract TP2AH000029-01-01 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, Office of Adolescent Health.

A woman with dark curly hair, wearing glasses and a leopard print scarf, is shown in profile, listening intently. Her hands are clasped together, and she is wearing a white smartwatch. The background is bright and out of focus.

BRIEFLY

» WestEd's Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) model engages families in their children's learning.



» Teachers provide families with targeted strategies and resources to use with their children to reinforce academic goals.



» To help boost student learning, Georgia is expanding APTT throughout the state.

Engaging Families to Boost Student Learning

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams in Georgia

Susan Holcomb was a 3rd grade teacher in Georgia when she was introduced to a variation on the traditional parent-teacher conference — one she soon came to see as a powerful way to boost student achievement by turning parents into active participants in their children's education.

"We were bringing parents together to show them how their children were performing and to identify the specific skills the students needed to improve," says Holcomb. "We then taught parents how to work on those skills with their children at home."

Holcomb quickly became a convert to the new approach, known as Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT). Currently being implemented in schools and districts in 24 states, APTT was developed a decade ago by Maria Paredes, now a senior engagement manager at WestEd. Building on over forty years of research indicating that family engagement is one of the strongest predictors of students' academic success, WestEd's APTT model takes a more focused and academically oriented approach than most traditional family participation events in schools. APTT gives families concrete information on their children's academic progress and provides them with strategies and resources to use at home with their children to reinforce targeted grade-level learning goals.

Today, Holcomb works for the Georgia Department of Education as a family engagement specialist tasked with replicating APTT statewide in Title I schools. "We've seen how effective APTT can be when it comes to helping students meet their learning goals," says Amy Song, manager of the Georgia Department of Education's Family-School

Partnership Program and Holcomb's colleague, "and we want to expand its reach across Georgia."

Over the last few years, WestEd has been collaborating with Georgia to infuse APTT throughout the state by training cohorts of district and school personnel who, in turn, train other educators in their regions. Paredes says that the goal of this "train-the-trainer" approach is sustainability — to build Georgia's capacity to train its personnel in APTT independently of WestEd within five years. As of the end of the 2018/19 school year, approximately 60 schools in 18 different school districts throughout Georgia are using APTT.

A NEW WAY TO ENGAGE PARENTS

Over the course of the academic year, the APTT model features three 75-minute team meetings between the teacher and the parents of all the students in the teacher's class, along with one 30-minute individual parent-teacher meeting. "One of the most important things we've learned over the years is how important it is for parents to build relationships with their children's teacher and with other parents," says Paredes. "APTT enables teachers to create a parent-centered environment, where parents' voices, ideas, experiences, and feedback contribute to



We've seen how effective APTT can be when it comes to helping students meet their learning goals, and we want to expand its reach across Georgia.

creating a collaborative and respectful place to learn. It's about building a team."

SHARING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA

During the first APTT group meeting of the year, teachers discuss their grade-level expectations for students in various disciplines and then share data with parents showing how close each child in the class is to meeting those expectations. Although teachers protect student privacy by identifying individual students with a random number known only by their parents, it can still be a shock for parents to learn their child is performing far below classroom peers. Diane Bresson, principal of County Line Elementary School in Winder, Georgia, which began implementing APTT two years ago, remembers one such case. "Until the mother saw the actual data, she believed her son was doing fine," says Bresson. "But he wasn't. We can't assume that parents know how their children are performing. We need to show them exactly where their children are."

Holcomb recalls that, when she shared achievement data with parents, she was typically greeted with "a moment of silence" from those whose children were struggling academically. "In such cases," she explained, "you try to be positive and point out that learning is like any other developmental skill, that children are on their own timeline, and that, with support and practice, they can succeed."

EMPOWERING PARENTS TO HELP THEIR CHILDREN SUCCEED

After reviewing the data, teachers then help parents set specific, individualized, short-term learning goals

for their children and the teachers demonstrate activities that help develop the skills needed to meet those goals. Parents get a chance to practice the activities with the teacher and each other, and leave the meeting with the materials they need to work with their children on the activities at home at least three times a week for 20 minutes at a time. The idea, says Paredes, is to "encourage parents to spend quality time with their children in a way that's engaging and fun, but also substantive and productive." Notes Holcomb, "Even though teachers teach to all of the required standards, children need lots of opportunities to practice, practice, practice in order to master learning."

Bresson says that the APTT approach transcends traditional, one-on-one parent-teacher conferences and other family participation events. "With APTT, parents learn exactly how to help their children," she says, "and that knowledge motivates them to do so." She says that APTT meets the needs of both those students struggling to meet expectations who need extra support and those exceeding expectations who need to be challenged. Explains Bresson, "We show parents how to change up the activities to make them easier or more difficult, as needed."

MONITORING STUDENTS' PROGRESS

In subsequent meetings, parents are shown bar graphs that depict, through concrete data, exactly how much progress their children have made. "That's what drives them to come back," says Bresson. "We put the chart right up there, and they can see each child's growth. Usually the bars all go up, and we celebrate that. It's very empowering, especially for parents who in the past

may not have known how to help their children.” Indeed, one such bar graph showed that 23 of 27 students in a 3rd grade class at Screven Elementary School in Wayne County, Georgia, where APTT is in place, demonstrated growth over the school year in multiplication.

FOSTERING CAMARADERIE AMONG PARENTS

APTT practitioners are quick to describe the program’s merits, crediting it first and foremost with strengthening family engagement. Says Bresson, “To have parents feel comfortable talking with each other about math and language arts is huge. And very exciting for teachers.” Holcomb points out that, by enabling parents to connect not only with their child’s teacher but also with each other, APTT creates camaraderie: “Parents really enjoy coming together, and before long they are encouraging each other and sharing ideas on ways to help children.” Asked to describe what they liked best about attending APTT meetings, parents from County Line Elementary talked about “seeing the academic progress of my child,” “being assured by my child’s teacher that he could be successful,” “helping me understand my child’s performance and how I can help,” and “the learning materials and games we received.”

Proponents of APTT also see the model as a way to level the field for minority or low-income students whose parents may not have traditionally enjoyed strong connections to their children’s schools. According to Paredes, APTT is an excellent way for Title I schools to meet legal mandates to engage with families around academics. “With APTT, you’re bringing parents into schools to focus on content, which builds their capacity to support their kids with confidence.”

SCALING UP IN GEORGIA AND BEYOND

At the Department of Education, Song oversees a staff of three family engagement specialists who are leading the effort to expand APTT across Georgia. This year, all four of them were part of a cohort of 13 Georgia educators who participated in a series of professional development sessions provided by WestEd that culminated in May with their certification as APTT trainers. That designation will allow them to train and coach their peers working in Georgia schools interested in adopting the model.

Paredes is encouraged by Georgia’s progress when it comes to scaling up APTT — “Never before have I seen this kind of support at the state level” — and anticipates that it will lead to similar initiatives in other states. Already underway, for instance, is a WestEd-led project in the Philadelphia School District funded by the William Penn Foundation that is bringing APTT to nine schools. Paredes is cognizant that such efforts require strong commitment on the part of school personnel. “We know that APTT involves a lot of work: planning meetings, figuring out what data to use, developing the right activities, personal outreach to families,” she says. “After all, we’re asking schools to embrace a completely new way of partnering with families.”

“But the more that families are engaged with teachers and empowered to support their children’s learning,” says Paredes, “the more successful all students will be.”



For more information on WestEd’s Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) model, contact Maria Paredes at 480.823.9425 or mparede@WestEd.org. For information about APTT in Georgia, contact Amy Song at 404.463.1956 or asong@doe.k12.ga.us.



Math in Common Summative Evaluation Reports (Series of six reports)

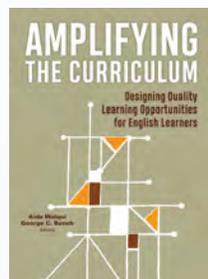
By WestEd

The Math in Common (MiC) initiative was launched in 2013 by the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation. The initiative provided generous funding to 10 diverse California school districts, gathering teams of administrators from each district to share strategies for implementing the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics in grades K–8, discuss their successes and challenges, and collaboratively work toward improving Common Core math implementation.

The learning in MiC was about improving standards-aligned mathematics instruction, but MiC was more than just a math initiative — it was about understanding and addressing district systems changes required to improve classroom instruction. WestEd served as the project’s evaluator, publishing 14 formative evaluation reports throughout the initiative, culminating with this suite of six summative evaluation reports.



PDFs | Free | WestEd [WestEd.org/mic-summative-evaluation-reports](https://www.wested.org/mic-summative-evaluation-reports)



Amplifying the Curriculum: Designing Quality Learning Opportunities for English Learners

Aida Walqui and George C. Bunch

Amplifying the Curriculum presents an ambitious model for how educators

can design high-quality, challenging, and supportive learning opportunities for English learners and other students identified to be in need of language and literacy support.

Starting with the premise that conceptual, analytic, and language practices develop simultaneously as students engage in disciplinary learning, the authors in this edited volume argue for instruction that amplifies — rather than simplifies — expectations, concepts, texts, and learning tasks. The authors offer clear guidance for designing lessons and units and provide examples that demonstrate the approach in various subject areas, including math, science, English, and social studies.

[WestEd.org/resources/amplifying-the-curriculum](https://www.wested.org/resources/amplifying-the-curriculum)

ISBN: 978-0-8077-6119-9 | \$29.95 | Trade Paper | 256 pages | Teachers College Press and WestEd | 2019



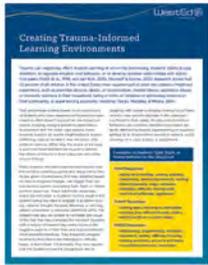
Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools: An Updated Research Review

Trevor Fronius, Sean Darling-Hammond, Hannah Persson, Sarah Guckenburg, Nancy Hurley, and Anthony Petrosino

This report, developed with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, summarizes information from a comprehensive review of the research on restorative justice in U.S. schools, covering literature from 1999–2018. The review documents the current breadth of evidence on restorative justice; provides a comprehensive picture of how restorative practices are implemented in schools; and lays the groundwork for future research, implementation, and policy.

[WestEd.org/restorative-justice-in-schools-updated](https://www.wested.org/restorative-justice-in-schools-updated)

PDF | 51 pages | WestEd | 2019



Creating Trauma-Informed Learning Environments

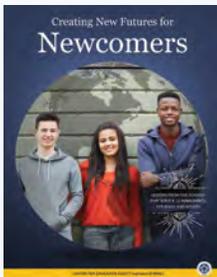
Sarah Nadiv and Julie Nicholson

Research shows that 45 percent of all children in the United States have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience, such as parental divorce, death, or incarceration; mental illness, substance abuse, or domestic violence in their household; being a victim of violence or witnessing violence in their community; or experiencing economic hardship.

Trauma can negatively affect student learning at school by decreasing students' ability to pay attention, regulate emotion and behavior, and develop positive relationships with adults and peers. What can educators do to support students with trauma in their history? This brief offers five important actions teachers can take to design trauma-sensitive learning environments.

[WestEd.org/resources/trauma-informed-learning-environments](https://www.wested.org/resources/trauma-informed-learning-environments)

PDF | 2 pages | Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center at WestEd | 2019



Creating New Futures for Newcomers: Lessons from Five Schools that Serve K-12 Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylees

BethAnn Berliner

More than 44 million immigrants resided in the United States in 2017. As the immigrant population continues to grow, an increasing number of newcomer students are attending K-12 schools. These students bring with them a wealth of culturally diverse experiences and knowledge, but they face myriad challenges to adapt and succeed in their new home and schools – learning how to navigate socially within a new culture; mastering a new language; and adjusting to a new, and most likely different, educational system.

This report highlights “bright spots” – schools that are using promising and effective strategies for supporting newcomer students in K-12 classrooms. The report includes:

- Eight promising practices that support newcomer students
- Five profiles of schools that serve newcomer students in Kentucky, Maine, New York, and Vermont
- A list of resources that inform promising practices for newcomer schools and students

[WestEd.org/resources/creating-new-futures-for-newcomers](https://www.wested.org/resources/creating-new-futures-for-newcomers)

PDF | 78 pages | Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC) | 2019

R&D ALERT

R&D Alert covers issues affecting schools, communities, and human development professionals throughout the United States. Current and previous issues are available at [WestEd.org/R&DAlert](https://www.wested.org/R&DAlert). Your comments are welcomed. Please address them to Ricky Herzog at rherzog@wested.org.

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continued
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shortfalls. "We're hoping school districts come to see these stakeholders as partners who are given a full financial picture of the district and in turn come to understand the difficult choices districts are being forced to make."

McMahon says San Jose has benefitted from such an approach. "Because we've been very open from the beginning about the budget situation, it has become a

problem we all work on together, and we get relatively little pushback from parents or employees. When you share information, you also share responsibility for solving the problems."



For more information about the Silent Recession reports, contact Kelsey Krausen at 510.409.7278 or kkrause@WestEd.org.



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