

Improving Equity and Access in Fresno

LESSONS FROM A K12–HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

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Forewords

The Regents of the University of California intentionally located its 10th campus in the San Joaquin Valley, a region of the state that is rich in land and ethnic diversity but with high poverty and low college attainment rates. Even before the University of California Merced's (UC Merced) campus opened in 2005, the university had staff working with K–12 students, teachers, and school administrators throughout the San Joaquin Valley to increase postsecondary opportunities, especially for disadvantaged students.

UC Merced's locus for this work was, and still is, our Center for Educational Partnerships (CEP) under the leadership of Associate Vice Chancellor Jorge Aguilar. CEP was established in 2002 to house all of our P–16 partnership efforts with the goal of increasing access to higher education for Valley students. Thus, CEP's primary mission is to ensure that all of the students we work with have an equal opportunity to graduate from high school with the greatest number of postsecondary choices from the widest array of options.

As part of UC Merced's efforts to serve an underserved region—as well as to support excellence in research, public service, and teaching—we partnered with Fresno Unified School District (FUSD) in 2009 to establish a unique, groundbreaking body of work focused on equity and access for all students. Equity and Access is not an isolated or stand-alone initiative for FUSD or UC Merced—**it is the backbone of our joint work**. From its inception, this partnership was designed to penetrate every aspect of the school district beyond UC Merced's involvement. For that reason, UC Merced Associate Vice Chancellor Jorge Aguilar was granted a leave of absence from UC Merced to serve as Associate Superintendent for Equity and Access and Special Assistant to Superintendent Michael E. Hanson. Today, we have seven full-time UC Merced employees working side-by-side with FUSD staff members to advance this partnership.

The partnership forged just six years ago between UC Merced and FUSD is a testament to both institutions' understanding of the symbiotic relationship between K–12 and higher education, especially for educationally disadvantaged youth. Given the complexity of the challenge, neither K–12 nor higher education by itself can make the necessary changes that will result in increased postsecondary opportunities for students. To make these partnerships a success, however, it is incumbent upon the higher education community to better understand the culture of K–12 and to bring our research expertise and ability to use and analyze data to our colleagues in K–12 so that collaboratively we can develop programs for students, staff, and teachers that will increase postsecondary opportunities for more and more students, especially those who have been previously underrepresented in colleges and universities.

I am very proud of the partnership and all of the work that has been achieved between UC Merced and FUSD. I hope the models and programs that have been developed and that are described in this publication will assist other districts both within the San Joaquin Valley and beyond.

I want to thank the FUSD Board of Trustees and Superintendent Hanson for being such committed and collaborative partners in this important work as well as the staff in CEP for their creativity, dedication, and passion for providing postsecondary opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students. Much remains to be accomplished, and I look forward to UC Merced's continued involvement and leadership in providing access and opportunity for students in the San Joaquin Valley and throughout California.

Dorothy J. Leland

Chancellor, University of California, Merced

Imagine a student dreaming of the best K–12 public education possible. Imagine this student having support from both parents and the necessary resources to make her dream possible. She can travel across town if necessary to take the classes required or hire a tutor if struggling in a specific subject. Now, imagine there is a second student with the same dream in the same city. The difference is that this second student does not have the support from his single mother, who is rarely at home because she is working two jobs to support her family. Not only does this student have no way to travel across town if necessary, but he has never left the neighborhood he lives in—not once. To top things off, this student has not had anything to eat in two days. Although this student is smart, vibrant, well-mannered, and willing to succeed, the circumstances he is dealing with hold him back. Therein steps Equity and Access.

As Superintendent of Fresno Unified School District (FUSD), the fourth largest district in California, I can attest to the challenges, inequities, and lack of access students in our public education system face—challenges such as not knowing if or when they will have their next meal, where they will sleep tonight, or whether they are safe. Our students struggle every day with some of the most basic elements of life that most individuals take for granted. For this reason, coupled with others, I used a grading scandal in 2009 as a platform to begin a partnership with the University of California Merced's Center for Educational Partnerships to establish an Equity and Access unit to help alleviate inequities in our district.

Although the work began as a way to examine grading practices across high schools in the district, the vision was greater and sought a way to provide all students with better choices and options while in FUSD. Evidenced by the Equity and Access guiding principle, “To provide all students with an equal opportunity to graduate with the greatest number of postsecondary choices from the widest array of options,” one can see how monumental and transformational this work will be. The following are a few of the major changes that have taken place in FUSD as a result of some of the Equity and Access work:

- Increased four-year cohort graduation rate from 69 percent in 2009–10 to 79 percent in 2013–14
- Increased A–G eligibility in Career Technical Education courses from 4 percent to 48 percent
- Increased 12th-grade students’ A–G completion rates from 32 percent to 48 percent, giving them greater postsecondary choices from a wider array of options

Equity and Access in FUSD is not just a unit, department, or division. It has become a way of thinking, embedded in the way we run our daily operations. It is a way of doing business, always looking for opportunities to give our students an equal opportunity to succeed. I am grateful to American Institutes for Research for documenting this work and our journey in the hope that it will help other institutions learn from our mistakes. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to the University of California, Merced, for their continued support in helping this work come to life.

Michael E. Hanson

Superintendent, Fresno Unified School District

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Chapter 1. Introduction

For decades, policymakers and education reformers across the nation have been struggling to increase high school graduation rates and give all students an equal opportunity for economic and personal success as they enter adulthood. In some schools and communities, this has meant an ever-frustrating search for the silver bullet that will quickly produce the desired results—whether this solution be small schools, new governance structures, or new teacher evaluation systems. By contrast, other communities and school systems have taken a more measured and comprehensive approach—one that is focused on culture change and steady improvement in the daily work of many actors to alter the circumstances of individual students while creating the conditions to sustain improvements over the long haul. The Equity and Access work in Fresno, California, is an example of the latter approach and the focus of this book.

Fresno is a city and school district with deep poverty, widespread unemployment, and persistently low student performance in a broader context in which postsecondary education is increasingly required for job opportunities. Fresno Unified School District’s (FUSD’s) Equity and Access initiative strives to provide the “widest array of options” for its students through a powerful K12–higher education partnership. Central to this partnership is a strong, cross-sector commitment to improve students’ access to educational opportunities and, ultimately, their education and labor market outcomes. The manifestations of this commitment are embedded in the daily work of counselors, central office personnel, and (increasingly) principals and other school-level staff through the tools and processes created over time to facilitate continuous district improvement.

The story of the Equity and Access partnership between FUSD and the University of California, Merced (UC Merced), demonstrates the potential of K12–higher education collaboration for improving students’ postsecondary opportunities and suggests lessons for other communities wishing to engage in similar activities. Indeed, Fresno, one of the largest and most disadvantaged school districts in California, has made dramatic gains in college readiness, gains that local participants attribute in part to the work of the Equity and Access team. Despite the promise of Fresno’s approach, however, two mitigating factors should be kept in mind. First, contextual conditions in the district and the region during this period—the opening of UC Merced, a change in FUSD leadership, a shared district–university commitment to improving students’ opportunities, and a growing emphasis on processes of continuous improvement—created a particularly ripe opportunity for the focus on equity and access to take hold. Other jurisdictions should consider their own readiness conditions for taking up a similar approach. Second, as every respondent emphasized, the work in Fresno is still in progress. Academic performance challenges and gaps in educational attainment persist. Neither the activities described here nor any other

approach will produce a “quick fix” to erase these long-standing disparities. But Fresno’s continuing journey suggests that if gains can be made in this depressed agricultural heartland, they can also be made elsewhere in the state and in the nation—with sufficient commitment, appropriate data, and processes to direct attention and action where they are most needed.

Fresno Context

With a population of just under 510,000, Fresno is the fifth largest city in California and the largest city in the state’s fertile but poor Central Valley.¹ FUSD serves a high-minority, high-poverty student population. Almost 90 percent of students in the district are racial/ethnic minorities (66 percent Hispanic, 14 percent Asian and Pacific Islander, and 9 percent African American in 2013–2014), 84 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and about a quarter of students in the district are designated English learners (ELs).²

FUSD has one of the highest childhood poverty rates in California; in 2010, nearly one in two children live in poverty.³ This concentrated disadvantage in FUSD is much higher than other similarly sized large California school districts: Long Beach, Oakland, Sacramento, and San Francisco Unified School Districts have child poverty rates of 26 percent, 26 percent, 32 percent, and 14 percent, respectively. And Los Angeles Unified School District, the largest district in the state and one of the largest districts in the nation, has a child poverty rate of 31 percent.⁴ The city of Fresno has almost two times as many people in poverty as does the state (29 percent versus 16 percent, respectively). Fresno also has lower educational attainment, higher unemployment, and lower household income than the state as a whole (Exhibit 1), and Fresno County’s unemployment rate is one of the worst of any metropolitan areas in the country.

Exhibit 1. Education and Economic Indicators for Fresno and California^{5, 6, 7}

	Fresno City	Fresno County	California
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2009 to 2013 ^a	75.0	73.1	81.2
Bachelor’s degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2009 to 2013 ^a	20.3	19.6	30.7
Unemployment rate (%), April 2015 ^b	10.1	9.5	6.3
Median household income, 2009 to 2013 ^a	\$42,015	\$45,563	\$61,094
Percent of persons below the poverty level, 2009 to 2013 ^a	28.9	26	15.9

Source: (a) U.S. Census QuickFacts; (b) U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Ironically, while the unemployment rate hovers around 10 percent in Fresno, there are thousands of job openings in the city and region.⁸ The underlying problem is a mismatch between the available jobs and the skills and education levels of the unemployed. This problem is not unique to Fresno. The Public Policy Institute of California projects that by 2025, California will face a significant shortage of workers with postsecondary education—from 1 million workers with bachelor’s degrees to 1.5 million for jobs that require at least “some college.”⁹ Although level of education, employment opportunities, and earnings are not perfectly correlated, such workforce projections demonstrate the increased importance of postsecondary education for economic opportunity in California and throughout the nation.¹⁰

College and Career Readiness

It is therefore not surprising that throughout the past decade much of the discourse about the goals of high school has focused on “college for all” as a way to increase equity in student opportunities and outcomes. More recently, policy talk has shifted to “college *and* career readiness” and “some form of postsecondary education or training for all.” The shift away from emphasizing a bachelor’s degree is in large part due to the high costs of four-year college, low rates of on-time and overall degree completion, and the recognition that although jobs increasingly require some form of postsecondary education or training, they do not necessarily demand a bachelor’s degree. “Middle-skill” fields typically require an associate’s degree or industry certificate or credential and have average annual wages above \$50,000 (e.g., electricians, construction managers, and dental hygienists), differentiating these occupations from lower-skill, lower-wage vocational fields such as health aides and food service workers.¹¹

In California, more than 60 percent of high school graduates enroll in some form of postsecondary education within a year after graduation, with about 35 percent of these students attending a two-year college and 25 percent enrolling in a four-year institution of higher education (IHE).¹² Community colleges are seen as the gateway to higher education for underprepared students and students who cannot afford to attend a four-year university, yet only about one in 10 community college students actually transfers to a four-year IHE. Moreover, once admitted, students’ completion rates are uneven across public four-year IHEs in the state: roughly half of California State University (CSU) students graduate within six years, compared with a six-year graduation

rate of 80 percent for the more competitive University of California (UC) system. Challenges associated with access and completion in higher education in California parallel those nationally, and national data reveal persistent gaps in high school graduation, college enrollment, and degree attainment for minority students and students from low-income households relative to their peers.^{13, 14} These are the very students who predominate in Fresno schools.

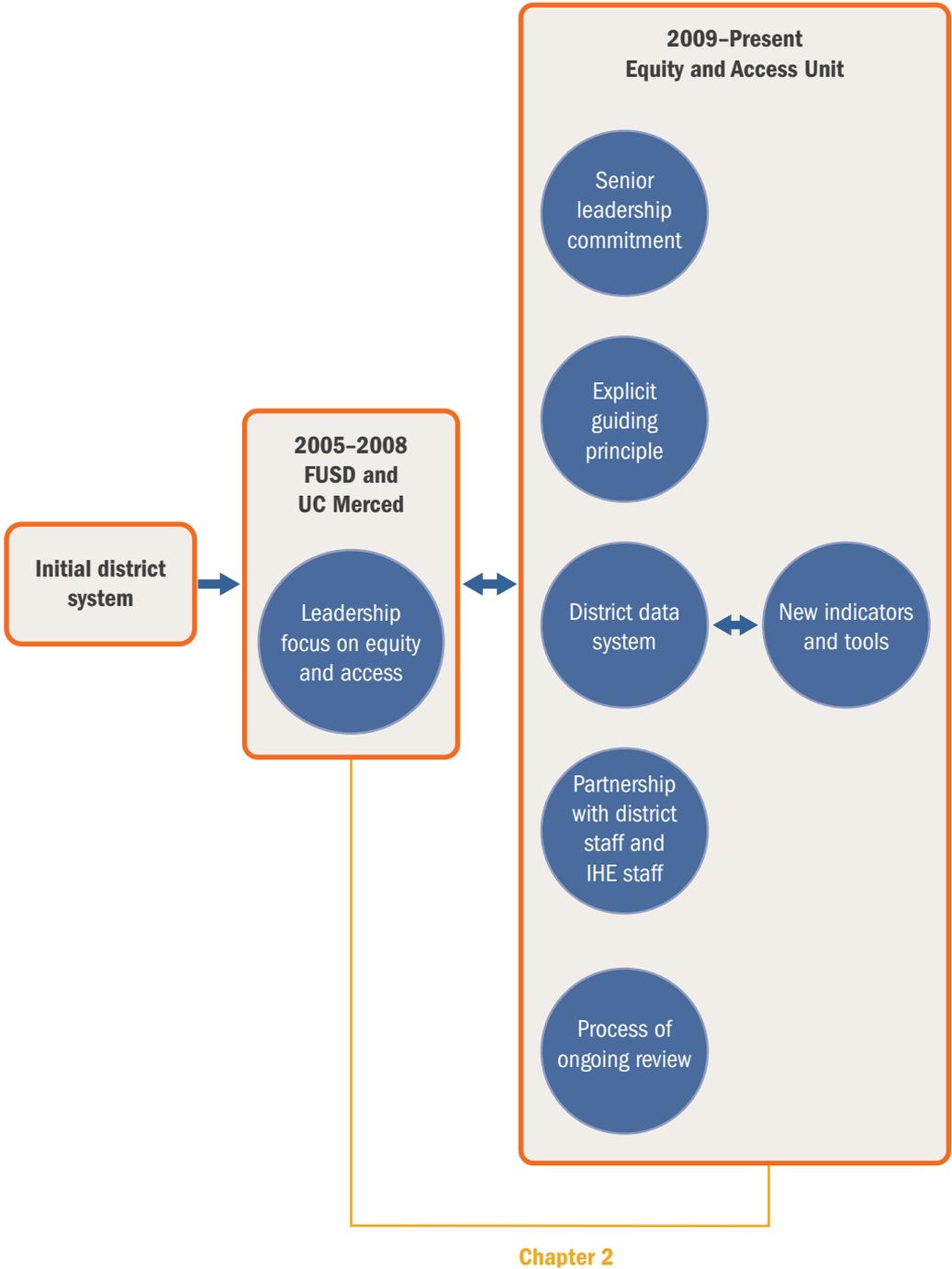
Equity and Access

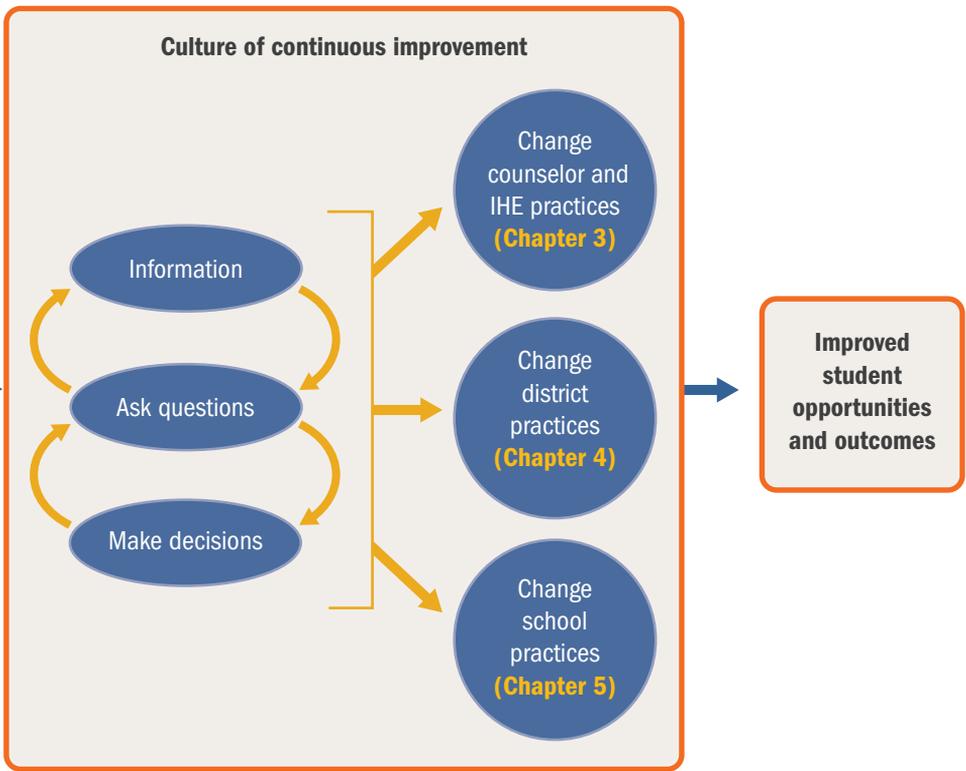
Equity and Access in Fresno is about giving students the greatest number of postsecondary choices from the widest array of options upon graduation.¹⁵ District efforts from 2005 to 2008 began to focus on increasing the equity of students' opportunities throughout the district system, and the establishment of the Equity and Access unit in the district in 2009 formalized and advanced this focus. The unit's staff is dedicated to increasing students' access to educational opportunities; postsecondary options; and social, emotional, and behavioral support services. The unit partners with other district departments, schools, and IHE staff to create data systems and indicators and to implement processes of ongoing review that help staff ask questions, make decisions, change practices, and build a culture of continuous improvement.

The Equity and Access work in FUSD will not solve college completion challenges, but it aims to put students on a path to postsecondary education and prepare them to make a successful postsecondary transition after high school graduation. FUSD recognizes the local mismatch between educational attainment and economic opportunity and is committed to improving students' preparation to be "career ready graduates." FUSD remains a low-performing district, but it has made impressive gains in students' postsecondary preparation and access to higher education through its Equity and Access work, and this work has expanded over time to include broader and deeper efforts throughout the district.

This book describes FUSD's Equity and Access journey. It is based on more than 40 interviews and follow-up conversations with district and IHE staff in 2014–15 as well as observations of district presentations, demonstrations of various features of the Beta Tool, and a review of district documents and data. Exhibit 2 presents the conceptual framework for the Equity and Access work in FUSD, developed by the authors to illustrate the evolution and ongoing processes of this work.

Exhibit 2. Conceptual Framework for FUSD's Equity and Access Work





The organization of this book reflects this framework and the chronology of the Equity and Access work as it has developed over time. Chapter 2 begins on the left side of the diagram, with the precursor conditions and early actions of the two institutions that would form the core Equity and Access partnership—FUSD and UC Merced. As Exhibit 2 shows, early in Superintendent Michael E. Hanson’s tenure (2005–2008), the district began to build a focus on equity and access, while at the same time UC Merced was initiating actions toward a similar goal. The Equity and Access unit, created jointly in 2009, has enhanced and expanded these early efforts. Chapter 2 outlines this brief history and then describes three central key components of the Equity and Access unit and its activities:

- **Senior leadership commitment** of the FUSD Superintendent and Board, the UC Merced Chancellor, and senior administrators at California State University, Fresno (Fresno State), and the State Center Community College District.
- **Actionable data:** Equity and Access team members work in partnership with district and IHE staff in an iterative process to create new indicators and tools with real-time, actionable data relevant to their decision making and practices.
- **Processes of ongoing review:** Equity and Access team members collaborate with district and IHE staff to use these data on a regular basis to examine staff and student needs, pose questions relevant to those needs, make decisions to guide their actions, and examine changes in staff practices and student outcomes.

Of course, capacity building and steady work among many departments and levels throughout the system is required for these elements to result in better opportunities and options for all students. Chapters 3–5 provide a more detailed chronicling of the implementation of the Equity and Access approach as it has evolved from an initial focus on changing the practices of high school counselors and IHE administrators (Chapter 3) to more recent partnerships between the Equity and Access unit and other FUSD departments (Chapter 4) and finally to the emerging application of the data and processes to improve site-level planning in each of the district’s schools (Chapter 5). The long-term goal, as depicted on the right side of Exhibit 2, is to create a culture of continuous improvement that results in universal access to educational opportunities and, ultimately, to better and more equitable outcomes for all students.

The development and extensions of the Equity and Access work described in Chapters 3–5 demonstrate both the potential and the challenges of applying success in one domain (counseling and students’ college preparation) to other domains to broaden and deepen impact across the district and IHEs. Chapter 6 concludes our exploration of Fresno’s journey by presenting lessons learned thus far, identifying remaining challenges in the work as it continues to evolve, and suggesting considerations for other districts and IHEs interested in pursuing a similar approach.

Chapter 2. The Pursuit of Equity and Access in FUSD: History and Progress

The combination of concentrated disadvantage in Fresno and a history of bureaucratic inertia in the district created a need for deep and lasting systemic change for all FUSD students to have equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities and the positive outcomes they can provide. When Hanson became FUSD Superintendent in 2005, he entered a system with persistently low student achievement, high student need, poor data systems, and financial challenges that placed the district on the verge of bankruptcy and a state takeover. As one central office administrator recalled, “We’d had revolving superintendents for several decades. It was complete dysfunction.” Hanson agreed, stating, “There were no systems at work at all.”

Hanson grew up in Dos Palos, a small town in California’s Central Valley about an hour away from Fresno. He attended college at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where he worked in agriculture to pay his way through college. He recalled being impressed by the work ethic, generosity, and family and community strength of migrant laborers and said that he has since been attuned to inequities and challenges faced by students at the lower end of the economic continuum. He attended graduate school at Syracuse University and spent his early career as a teacher and administrator in New York. He moved back to California in 1996, working in Elk Grove and rising to associate superintendent in 2000. He describes focusing his administrative career on reform issues of time use (e.g., scheduling), leadership development, and teacher development. He was recruited to FUSD and explained that he accepted the position because, “The organizational challenges were daunting, but the categories that were screaming for leadership were the ones I said I cared about. I couldn’t walk away.”

When Hanson came to FUSD, he and the Board began to identify and address inequities in students’ access to educational opportunities, with the goal of improving not only K–12 outcomes but also the long-term success of Fresno students after graduation and into adulthood. The formation of the partnership with UC Merced and the development of the Equity and Access unit in the central office have become a cornerstone of this focus.

Senior Leadership Commitment

Commitment of senior leaders in the district and UC Merced has been critical to this partnership.

FUSD Superintendent and Board Commitment

When Hanson became Superintendent of FUSD in 2005, his immediate actions were guided by the work of the interim superintendent’s Advisory Task Force and its resulting *Choosing Our Future* report. In July 2004, Walter Buster, Ed.D., was appointed interim superintendent and

convened a group of nine prominent local business and community leaders to conduct an independent assessment of the district. Drawing on a review of the district's academic performance and finances, lessons from eight California school districts that best matched Fresno in size and demographics, and consultations with district staff and education organizations, the Advisory Task Force wrote an initial report in December 2004. Then, they held a series of town hall meetings and discussion sessions with district staff, accepted written feedback, and incorporated this input into the final report in January 2005. Overall, the Advisory Task Force found a broken financial system that required immediate and serious intervention to balance the budget and an ineffective educational system that required consensus on academic performance goals to direct resources to improve student achievement. As the final report states,

In a school district where over 50% of the schools are in the bottom “decile” (lowest 10%) of the State in terms of academic performance, it is imperative that all resources be directed to improvement in student achievement. That, after all, is the mission of the District; and the obligation of the Board and Superintendent is to ensure that all resources, human and capital, are aligned in support of this objective.¹⁶

The final report made recommendations regarding student achievement goals and success indicators, instructional and operational strategies, human resources policies and organizational approaches, budget and financial management strategies, and district stakeholder and community engagement strategies. Community leaders were calling out the dysfunction and ineffectiveness in FUSD and set the stage for a reform-minded leader to take charge of the district.

Hanson described an intensive interview process with the FUSD Board in which he asked for a shared commitment from the Board to advance reforms in the school district. He expressed a desire to “get the Board to 7–0 votes” and a commitment to understand and try to address any board member concerns or questions to get them to vote in favor of specific issues. Hanson and the Board also committed to their own continuous growth and improvement, using data and implementing processes to identify areas of need, monitor progress, and make changes necessary to improve students' opportunities and outcomes. Hanson and the Board took the following actions together when he began as Superintendent:

- ***School Board elections:*** The district reformed Board elections from at-large seats to a system in which each Board member represents a geographic region of the city. The purpose of this change was to ensure equal representation from different constituencies so the Board is making decisions on behalf of and accountable to all students and families in the district.
- ***Reform Governance in Action training:*** FUSD was one of four urban districts in the country selected by the Broad Foundation in 2006 to participate in training provided by the Center for the Reform of School Systems (CRSS)¹⁷ for the Superintendent, Board, and senior leadership team. This training provided the FUSD leadership team with shared professional learning and coaching on policy development, financial planning, and effective management.
- ***Board policies:*** One of the outcomes of the RGA training was the creation of a set of Board policies that articulated the Board goals, core beliefs, commitments, theory of action, and specific policies relating to management oversight, constituent services, and Board operations. Three additional Board policies concerning professional learning, accountability, and data dashboards were adopted in 2008.
- ***District data dashboard and cycles of review:*** Vincent Harris joined the cabinet team in 2006 as Executive Director of District and School Accountability and Improvement. He created a district data dashboard and piloted a cycle of review process at the central office to review data, ask questions, and make decisions focused on improving overall district performance. These cycles of review began in 2008 and were conducted quarterly through 2012.

In Hanson's early tenure from 2005 to 2008, the district took a number of major actions, many of which align with the recommendations identified in the *Choosing Our Future* report. These actions included the following:

- ***Financial management:*** Hanson hired Ruth Quinto as Chief Financial Officer and the district took measures to bring the district back into fiscal solvency. Among these measures were a collective bargaining agreement with the teachers union that ameliorated high district health care costs and restructuring the district central office (described below).

- **Human resources management:** Hanson hired Kim Mecum as Associate Superintendent for Human Resources and Labor Relations and the district took measures to strengthen human capital. These included firing ineffective principals, offering early retirement options, and creating a leadership pipeline in the district. FUSD partnered with Fresno State to create an administrator credentialing program aligned to the FUSD Leadership Standards developed and adopted in 2005.
- **District restructuring:** Central office leadership positions were restructured and reduced to allocate more resources to school sites. More than 70 percent of the district organizational chart was changed in this process.
- **Community engagement:** In 2006, FUSD convened a workshop with more than 130 community members and employees to solicit broader community input in developing the district's vision in the five key areas from the *Choosing Our Future* report. After the workshop, FUSD staff developed strategies in each of the focus areas, a process that included soliciting feedback from more than 3,000 community members and employees. The district also established partnerships with the housing authority, Economic Opportunity Commission, and local IHEs to create ongoing relationships and shared accountability for student success. Finally, the district established a Constituent and Family Services Office in 2008 as a centralized place to handle all family complaints and questions to allow the School Board to focus on governance and policy issues.
- **Family engagement:** The district created Parent University (Parent U) to improve parent engagement and empower parents to be advocates for their children's education. Parent U is an eight-week course that teaches parents information about the school district structure and processes (e.g., various district offices, services available to their children and who to contact about those services, processes for enrolling in kindergarten or changing schools), curriculum and standards, and how to effectively advocate on behalf of their children (e.g., talking to a teacher about the child's performance, talking to the principal about school climate). Parent U has graduated more than 16,000 parents throughout its four-year history and won a Golden Bell Award from the California School Board Association.

These wide-ranging policies and initiatives demonstrate the district's commitment to equity and access and the approach of using data in a process of continuous improvement to create new practices and structures to identify and address inequities across the district system. This early policy and organizational groundwork laid the basis for aligning resources in support of student achievement at the district level. It also piloted the ideas of equity and access as a guiding principle in the district among a small number of staff, primarily at the district office. But the reach of equity and access needed to be broadened for real progress to be attained.

UC Merced Commitment

As Hanson was implementing important changes in FUSD, he established a relationship with Jorge Aguilar, Associate Vice Chancellor for Educational and Community Partnerships and Special Assistant to the Chancellor at UC Merced. These two leaders shared a commitment to increase students' access to educational opportunities and, specifically, to higher education, and they began to strategize together about ways to make a bigger impact in their respective areas of work.

The University of California Regents appointed the first Chancellor, Carol Tomlinson-Keasy, in 1998, and when it opened in 2005, UC Merced was the first American research university to be built in the 21st century and the first UC campus in California's Central Valley. As a new university, UC Merced did not have the staff or resources of other UC campuses, but top leaders since its inception—including the current Chancellor, Dorothy Leland, past and current Vice Chancellors for Student Affairs (Jane Fiori Lawrence followed by Charles Nies), and Associate Vice Chancellor (Jorge Aguilar)—have expressed a strong commitment to serving students in the Central Valley. They created a Center for Educational Partnerships (CEP) to facilitate relationships with and support for K–12 schools and districts in the Valley.

Many IHEs have outreach programs—state programs such as the Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) as well as national programs such as AVID, GEAR UP, and Upward Bound—but these are all grant-funded programs that work in schools to provide direct services to students and are often managed as discrete programs on campus. Like other UC campuses, UC Merced's CEP houses its academic preparation and access and community outreach programs, but Merced is among the few campuses whose center is not associated with the admissions office. UC Merced envisioned their outreach work to be broader, exposing students to all segments of higher education and not being tied directly to recruitment for its own institution. As founding Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Lawrence, explained,

Other campuses, for the most part, have their outreach programs attached to their Admissions Office and to their Enrollment Management units. UC Merced made the intentional decision, at the very beginning, that this was not going to happen. Our goal from 2002 on was equity and access for Valley students. Get as many of them CSU/UC eligible to give them the most opportunity and options possible. If nobody in their family had ever even gone to a community college, it was a gigantic achievement to help them get ready for a community college.

CEP manages programs at local high schools in Fresno and other Central Valley towns and counties, working directly with students one-on-one and in small groups to help expose them to and prepare them for college eligibility, including UC Merced and other IHEs. As Orquidea Largo, the current CEP Director said,

Where we really differ from other centers is that we expose [students] broadly. We don't just expose them to our campus because we recognize that one size doesn't fit all. Our campus may not be the best choice for a student, so we have to cater to what their needs are and expose them to campuses that might meet those needs as well.

Aguilar, Largo, and other UC Merced and CEP staff recognized the importance of the CEP work for improving individual students' preparation for and access to higher education, but Aguilar and his colleagues described his frustration with the limitations of making an impact in students' college preparation as an *external partner*, without the authority, resources, or knowledge to make *systemic change*. As Lawrence said,

"To really make systemic change, you have to get inside of a school district. You have to be part of the system."

Jane Fiori Lawrence,
Founding Vice Chancellor for
Student Affairs, UC Merced

I think what Jorge realized as we went on is [that] to really make systemic change, you have to get inside of a school district because it's one thing to come in and do programs for students and pull them out of classes, to do an in-service for a faculty, for teachers. If you really are going to change what happens for students, you have to be part of the system, and you've got to get the system to think about what it does, and make decisions about it, and make decisions to make changes because, unfortunately, it's too easy to track students; it's too easy to, maybe not even intentionally, shut out opportunities, expectations.

A Partnership Is Born: The Equity and Access Unit

While searching for an opportunity to partner with UC Merced and advance the district's equity and access work, Hanson was faced with a grading scandal that brought considerable negative media attention to the district. The district contracted with an external organization to conduct an investigation of its practices, and the investigation revealed evidence of chronic absence problems, a culture of giving all students passing grades, poor district data systems, and a lack of accountability structures in the district. Hanson explained that he used the grading scandal as an opportunity to ask the Board for (1) "a position that would be in charge of making sure these practices were reigned in, tightened, and articulated with one another, that we would start to squeeze out those inequities in the system by becoming more systematized" and (2) a student information system (SIS) to provide a basic data and security foundation to guide district improvement and accountability. The Board agreed to both.

Thus, the district contracted with Microsoft to build a SIS and it partnered with UC Merced to establish the Equity and Access unit in 2009 within FUSD with Aguilar at the helm as Associate Superintendent and Special Assistant to the Superintendent. The guiding principle of the Equity and Access unit and its work is to "provide all students with the opportunity to graduate with the greatest number of postsecondary choices from the widest array of options."

The Equity and Access guiding principle is to "provide all students with the opportunity to graduate with the greatest number of postsecondary choices from the widest array of options."

Aguilar immediately contracted with UC Merced to bring Rei Suryana, a programmer from UC Merced's CEP, to support him while he maintained a dual role in the university and in the district. The initial focus was on college access, leveraging the expertise of Aguilar and the UC Merced partnership, and demonstrating what can be done at the secondary level to increase students' college-going opportunities. The Equity and Access team developed an A–G tool that borrowed features from the University of California's Transcript Evaluation Service to identify, monitor, and reduce inequities related to A–G courses. In California, students must satisfy the "A to G" requirements to be eligible for admission to a public four-year university. The A–G requirements specify the number of years of coursework required in each of seven subject categories to meet minimum eligibility requirements for admission to the CSU and UC systems.¹⁸ High school courses must be approved by the UC system and appear on the institution's A–G course list. UC-transferable college courses or satisfactory scores on SAT Subject, AP, or IB exams can also be used to satisfy the A–G subject requirements.

From this beginning focus, the work has evolved and expanded over time. As Hanson stated, “Over time, the Equity and Access unit and its work have become the means to achieve the district’s goals, but we did not know where it would go when it began.” Hanson and Aguilar describe the Equity and Access unit as a nonprofit organization working within the district. The ultimate goal is to reach a point when a stand-alone unit dedicated to equity and access would not be needed in the district. As Hanson said,

Equity and access will become a permanent philosophy. We’re not near the end of the run yet, but I think that there is a time when Equity and Access is not sitting with a person at the table because school leadership, the Chief Academic Officer, Human Resources, everybody else is acting in such a way that the tools are used, that it’s a cultural norm and expectation.

The “Beta Tool”: An Equity and Access Data System

Data are a necessary but not sufficient condition for system improvement. As described above, the district’s student information system (called ATLAS) was developed at the same time as the Equity and Access unit was created. Alongside this districtwide information system, the Equity and Access unit began working on a set of more nimble and focused indicators to address particular identified equity challenges. The resulting “Beta Tool,” as it is referred to in the district, is now an overarching suite of data tools created by Equity and Access in collaboration with other FUSD educators. The name is taken from a computer science term for an application that is in development, often called a “beta version.” The tools developed by Equity and Access are all constantly being refined, with indicators and functions being added to meet staff needs, and specific versions of the tool developed for district departments and schools with indicators most relevant to their work. These indicators and associated processes are largely separate from ATLAS, the district data system of record, although some pieces of the Beta Tool have been incorporated into ATLAS over time.

The capacity and freedom of the Equity and Access staff to *create new indicators* in the Beta Tool is a key feature that distinguishes this work from the district data system and other data dashboards and early warning systems. Rather than relying only on available data—often accountability measures such as attendance, suspensions, course grades, and standardized exam performance—the Equity and Access team collaborates closely with district staff to create indicators relevant to staff work. As one district administrator said,

Our student information system is like a large cruise ship. It's really hard to make a left- or a right-hand turn. It takes a lot of time, and the programming is very difficult because it affects the entire district who's utilizing this system. Equity and Access is like a little speedboat because you can make changes in the Beta Tool. Programmers can work on it much more quickly. Then once you've got it all down, getting input from people, utilizing the tools, making sure that they work effectively and efficiently for them, and then you're able to apply that to the larger cruise ship. The student information system has different security features [that affect] how it gets distributed and how decisions get made. The Beta Tool allows us to give individuals access that then allows them to utilize the tool and realize how they can use it in their day-to-day work.

The Equity and Access team works in an iterative process with district staff to understand their daily work and pose questions relevant to that work. The team then creates indicators as necessary to answer staff questions and monitor staff practices and student progress. The Equity and Access team creates three types of indicators in the Beta Tool:

- ***Student performance indicators:*** These provide data on student progress, achievement, and needs (e.g., A–G completion, grades, student eligibility to apply for various segments of the California public higher education system, test scores, attendance, behavior).
- ***Student procedure indicators:*** These provide data on students' completion of various tasks (e.g., college applications; FAFSA completion; college entrance exam taking; college placement exam taking; college registration; college matriculation; selection of a career area of focus; and attendance at a required conference based on social, emotional, or behavior risk factors).
- ***Staff practice indicators:*** These provide data on staff actions, which are specified based on students' performance and procedure indicators (e.g., number of students seen by a counselor, social worker, or other support staff based on referrals for various risk factors, number of eligible students applying to college and opt out reasons for eligible students who have not applied).

In addition, the Beta Tool provides *real-time data* to users on a regular basis rather than only at the end of a marking period or the end of a school year. The real-time nature of the data makes them more relevant and actionable for staff members' daily work. The Equity and Access team

has worked with district staff to articulate processes to focus on particular indicators at particular times throughout the school year and to make decisions and change practices based on those indicators. As several district officials noted, “We’re not just looking at the end-of-year data and saying, ‘Oh, what are we going to do different next year, next time around?’ We’re able to look at data and react in real time and make an impact and a change.” Hanson describes this as “changing conditions in the present”—using an ongoing review process to change practices during the school year to address inequities in students’ educational opportunities and improve student outcomes.

Ongoing Review Processes

How staff use the Beta Tool is important, and implementation of Equity and Access data and processes is detailed in Chapters 3–5 for specific district and IHE staff and bodies of work. Overall, once department-specific indicators are created in the iterative process described above, the Equity and Access staff work in partnership with district and IHE staff to establish processes and accountability for using Beta Tool data on a regular basis to drive decisions and practices. As one former district administrator and current principal said,

None of this solves anything. In fact, it creates more problems, in a good way. It creates more recognition of gaps. It’s kind of a pain, right? Just when you think you’re getting good at something, you realize you’re not. That challenge has always been there. It just wasn’t brought to light. Equity and Access gets us to a place where we can’t get comfortable, which I think is important.

As a result of their close collaboration with the Equity and Access team, some district units have made significant progress toward developing a culture of continuous improvement focused on using data to identify and address inequities. But the district overall has a nascent data culture, and the Equity and Access unit is still in the early stages of reaching across the central office and down into all district schools. As Hanson explained, timely information at key points during the year are important for making data relevant to the daily work of staff, but FUSD educators also need to develop capacity and a culture for using data to ask and answer meaningful questions and to act on the available indicators to improve staff practice and student outcomes. Over time, the goal is to create a districtwide culture of continuous improvement, processes of ongoing review, and systems to use data to inform the daily work of staff, with a focus on equity and access to improve all students’ opportunities and outcomes.

“Changing Conditions in the Present When Conditions Are Ever-Changing”

Equity and Access has been and will continue to be part of a coherent—and evolving—district reform strategy. Within FUSD, several concurrent reforms have provided the context for and an extension of the work of the Equity and Access unit since its creation in 2009. These include a multiyear initiative to build the capacity of teachers and leaders, the creation of professional learning communities across district schools (called “accountable communities” in FUSD), efforts to understand the relationship between academic and social and emotional data, and a restorative practices approach to reforming the district’s behavioral and disciplinary practices. FUSD has received grant funding to support each of these bodies of work.

In addition, major statewide policy changes and programs have been implemented in the past several years, influencing Equity and Access and all aspects of FUSD work. These include:

- ***Common Core State Standards:*** The district and state began implementing the Common Core in 2012–13, including teacher training on the standards, curricula alignment with the new standards, ongoing professional development, and a shift to a new aligned state assessment in mathematics and English language arts, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) tests. FUSD was one of many districts statewide to officially pilot the Smarter Balanced assessments in 2013–14, and when the former state standardized exam, the California Standards Tests (CST), was phased out that same year, administration of Smarter Balanced was expanded across the district. The first official administration of Smarter Balanced took place in spring 2015, and districts are still receiving the final results of those assessments as this book goes to press.
- ***Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF):*** LCFF was first implemented in 2013–14 after a two-year development and feedback process in which FUSD leaders took part. LCFF provides a base per-pupil allocation to local education agencies determined by their average daily attendance and additional per-pupil funds for students in grades K–3 and 9–12. To help foster greater equity across the state, the LCFF formula also includes supplemental grants to districts based on unduplicated counts of targeted disadvantaged students (ELs, students eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and foster youth) as well as concentration grants to districts whose targeted student groups exceed 55 percent of total enrollment.¹⁹

- **California Career Pathways Trust:** The California State Assembly allocated \$500 million in one-time competitive grants in 2014 and 2015 to school districts, county superintendents, charter schools, regional centers or programs, and community college districts to develop and implement career pathways in kindergarten through Grade 14. FUSD was a 2015 grantee.

Finally, the Equity and Access work has also helped the district to secure a federal waiver from Title I accountability provisions in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act as part of the California Office to Reform Education (CORE). This waiver has helped to frame the most recent Equity and Access work (Chapter 5).

- **NCLB Waiver and the School Quality Improvement Index (SQII):** FUSD is one of 10 partner districts in CORE. Eight of these districts applied for and received a waiver from the accountability requirements of Title I of the federal NCLB Act. Six districts, including FUSD, have renewed this waiver, which establishes a new set of accountability requirements agreed on by the districts and the U.S. Department of Education. A key element in the CORE waiver is the SQII. The SQII includes a set of indicators designed by CORE to determine which schools are progressing and which require intervention. The SQII includes five domains—academic performance, academic growth, academic completion and retention, social and emotional, and school culture and climate. Some indicators are common across CORE districts, and there is some flexibility for districts to select additional indicators under each domain.

“This is about kids and their choices and options downstream. It’s about eliminating every single gap that we possibly can while we have them in our care. It’s never easy. But I am here to say that for anybody who says it can’t or shouldn’t be done because of changing conditions, I’m living proof in a very, very difficult place to do business, that it can and should be done.”

Michael E. Hanson, Superintendent,
Fresno Unified School District

Overall, the California state context and the local conditions in Fresno have presented both major challenges and unique opportunities, but the district has sustained its commitment to and pursuit of equity and access throughout the six years of the Equity and Access unit and the 10 years of Hanson’s tenure as Superintendent. Hanson describes the imperative of “changing conditions in the present when conditions are ever-changing.” He explains the importance of changing conditions for students in real time and notes that this work requires commitment in the face of competing pressures that are ever-present. As Hanson stated,

There are many reasons that many people want to walk away from [Equity and Access] work—because other things have to be done first. Common Core, LCFF has to be figured out, School Quality Improvement Index, the new accountability model—whatever you want to put in there. They use it as reasons to hold off or to forestall doing this. I would argue—and put us up as a shining example of—it’s exactly the time that you should be exploring, trying to implement [Equity and Access], when things are in flux in a period of change so that you can actually root this work in the DNA of the district, in the way they operate going forward. I would argue that the period of change is exactly the time that you should be leaning in to try to establish very firmly that this is about kids and their choices and options downstream. It’s about eliminating every single gap that we possibly can while we have them in our care because that’s what we’re getting paid for. It’s never easy. But I am here to say that for anybody who says it can’t or shouldn’t be done because of changing conditions, I’m living proof in a very, very difficult place to do business, that it can and should be done.

Substantial Gains, but a Work in Progress

FUSD has made major gains in high school graduation and college readiness indicators throughout the course of its Equity and Access work. However, the Superintendent, the Equity and Access team members, and other district staff were quick to point out that the district still has a long way to go to become a high-performing system. FUSD has made slower progress with improving students’ academic achievement than it has in graduation and postsecondary access, and persistent challenges with performance for English learner (EL), special education, and minority students remain.

High School Graduation

High school graduation rates have been increasing across the United States, but FUSD is fast closing its graduation gap with both the state and nation. In 2010, Fresno’s cohort graduation rate—a measure of graduates in a given year divided by the number of ninth-grade students four years earlier—was approximately 9 percentage points lower than that of the nation and about 6 percentage points lower than California’s graduation rate. By 2014, however, the district had gained considerable ground, increasing its graduation rate by 10 percentage points, compared with a 6 percent gain in the state and only a 3 percent increase in the nation as a whole (see Exhibit 3).

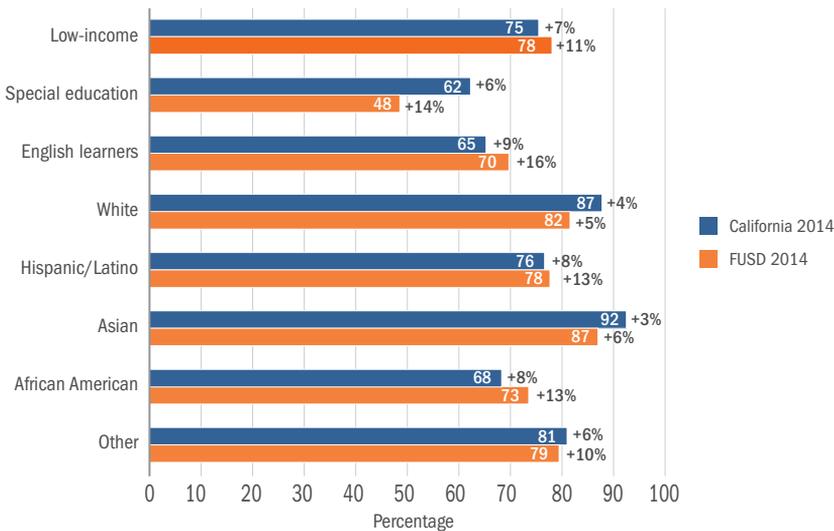
Exhibit 3. FUSD, California, and U.S. Cohort Graduation Rates, 2010–2014

	2010 (%)	2011 (%)	2012 (%)	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2010-2014 Difference (% Points)
FUSD ^a	69.2	73.4	75.0	76.2	79.3	10.1
California ^b	74.7	77.1	78.9	80.4	80.8	6.1
U.S. ^c	78 ^d	79	80	81	n/a	3

Source: (a) DataQuest, Graduation Data, Cohort Outcome Summary Report (ACGR), Fresno Unified School District; (b) DataQuest, Graduation Data, Cohort Outcome Summary Report (ACGR), State Level; (c) National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data, Public high school four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) for the United States, the 50 states, and the District of Columbia: School years 2010–11 to 2012–13; (d) NCES CCD, Public high school four-year adjusted freshman graduation rate (AFGR) for the United States, the 50 states, and the District of Columbia.

Fresno’s graduation rate has also improved across student subgroups, with Hispanic/Latino students and students from low-income households now approaching the district’s overall rate (Exhibit 4). There is still considerable progress to be made, however—particularly with EL and special education students, who in 2014 graduated from high school at rates 10 and 30 percentage points lower, respectively, than those for the district overall.²⁰ Comparatively, FUSD’s rates for three subgroups (Hispanic/Latino students, students from low-income households, and ELs) are similar to or higher than the state graduation rates for these students. But Fresno lags substantially behind the state in graduating special education students (48 percent compared to 62 percent for California).

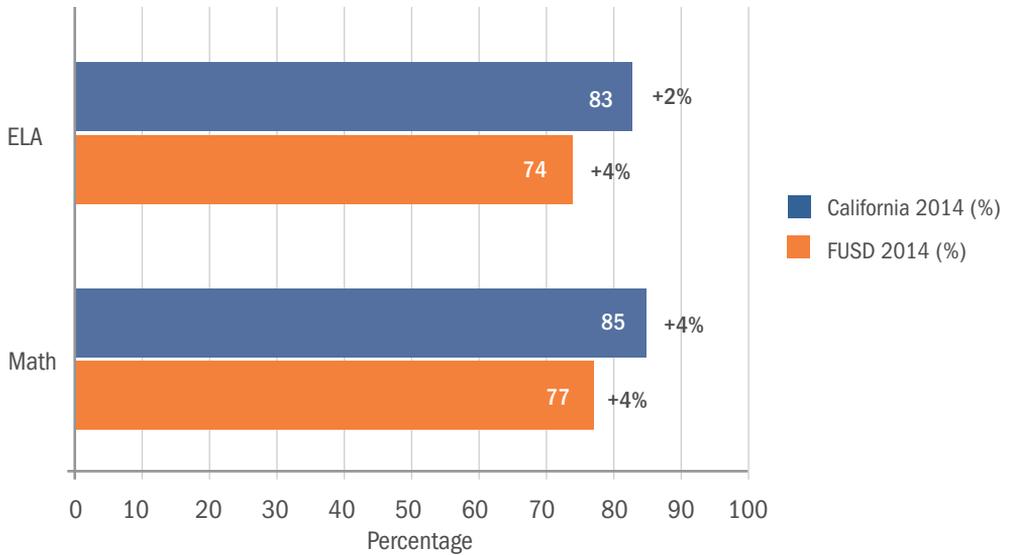
Exhibit 4. FUSD and California Cohort Graduation Rates by Ethnicity and Program, 2010–2014



Source: Dataquest, Graduation Data, Cohort Outcome Summary Report by Race/Ethnicity and Program, Fresno Unified School District and California, 2010 to 2014. Note: Change from 2010 to 2014 is presented next to each bar. Low-income is defined as students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Students' first-time pass rates on the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) have also increased over this period (Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5. FUSD and California First-Time CAHSEE Pass Rates in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics (Math), 2010-2014



Source: Dataquest, CAHSEE Pass Rate, Combined, Grade 10, Fresno Unified School District and California, 2010 to 2014.
 Note: Change from 2010 to 2014 is presented next to each bar.

A-G Completion and Postsecondary Education

Aguilar argues that “A–G completion is the litmus test of the Equity and Access guiding principle.” The percentage of students completing A–G requirements for admission to California public universities has increased from 32 percent in 2010 to 48 percent in 2014 (Exhibit 6). Fresno now has an A–G completion rate 15 percentage points higher than that of the state; in 2014, 33 percent of California graduates met A–G requirements. The district has also seen increases in the percentage of 12th-grade students applying to an IHE and completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) (see Exhibit 6). It is important to note that the measures in Exhibit 6 have different denominators. The district tracks A–G completion and IHE applications for all 12th-grade students and FAFSA applications only for students who have applied to an IHE.

The percentage of students completing A–G requirements for admission to California public universities has increased from 32 percent in 2010 to 48 percent in 2014. Fresno now has an A–G completion rate 15 percentage points higher than the state.

Exhibit 6. FUSD Student Outcomes on Postsecondary Readiness Indicators, 2010–2015

School Year	A–G Completion (%)	IHE Applications (%)	FAFSA Applications (%)
2009–10	32.1	n/a	81.8
2010–11	31.1	68.0	67.2
2011–12	36.8	73.2	65.5
2012–13	40.9	83.0	73.5
2013–14	47.8	84.0	87.7
2014–15	n/a	83.1	93.7

Source: FUSD local databases. Note: The denominator for A–G completion and IHE applications is all 12th-grade students in the district. The denominator for FAFSA applications is all 12th-grade students who applied to an IHE. “n/a” indicates that data were not available.

College applications for FUSD students to the State Center Community College District (largely, Fresno City College) and to Fresno State have increased substantially from 2010 to 2014. As Exhibit 7 shows, community college applications have increased by 12 percent, and CSU applications have increased by about 16 percent during this period. Data for UC and private college applications are more limited, but UC applications have remained steady for the two years for which we have data, while applications to private IHEs decreased slightly.

Exhibit 7. FUSD College Applications, by System, 2010–2014

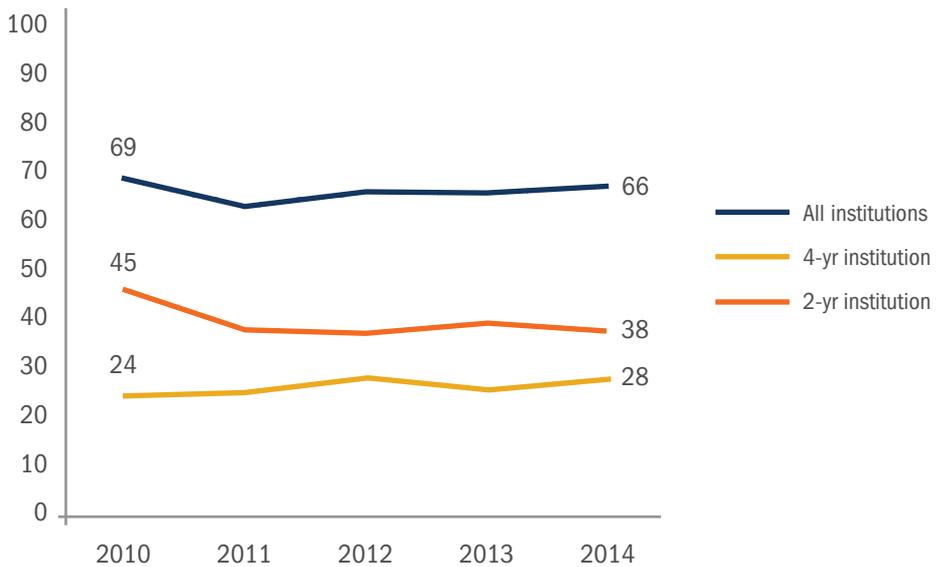
School Year	Community College (%)	CSU (%)	UC (%)	Private (%)
2009–10	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2010–11	61.9	34.6	n/a	n/a
2011–12	66.9	36.4	n/a	n/a
2012–13	75.3	42.7	16.3	11.4
2013–14	75.9	50.9	16.3	9.6

Source: FUSD local databases. Note: “Community College” means the State Center Community College District, “CSU” means Fresno State, and “UC” means UC Merced; these data are made available to FUSD through data sharing agreements with each IHE. “n/a” indicates that data were not available yet in FUSD’s data sharing agreements.

Enrollment in postsecondary institutions has also undergone substantial changes over the past four years. In fall 2010, 45 percent of Fresno graduates enrolled in two-year colleges while 24 percent matriculated in a four-year institution. By fall 2014, these numbers had shifted to 38 percent and 28 percent, respectively (Exhibit 8). This relative increase in enrollment in four-year colleges could be important in the long run. Although any postsecondary education is beneficial, completion rates at four-year institutions are typically higher than those at two-year institutions, and transfer rates from two- to four-year IHEs tend to be low. These patterns suggest that more

FUSD students in the class of 2014 may actually complete a postsecondary degree than did students in the class of 2010. Moderating this optimistic prediction, of course, is another pattern in the data: Total college enrollment in the fall immediately following graduation has actually decreased slightly, from 69 percent in 2010 to 66 percent in 2014. We do not know why this decrease has occurred or what it will mean down the road. To address these questions, FUSD and its partner IHEs will be incorporating college persistence and completion information into their data sharing agreements and into Equity and Access analyses. Long-term effects on students' postsecondary attainment remain to be seen.

Exhibit 8. Percentage of FUSD Students Enrolled in College in the Fall Immediately After High School, Overall and by Institution Level, 2010–2014



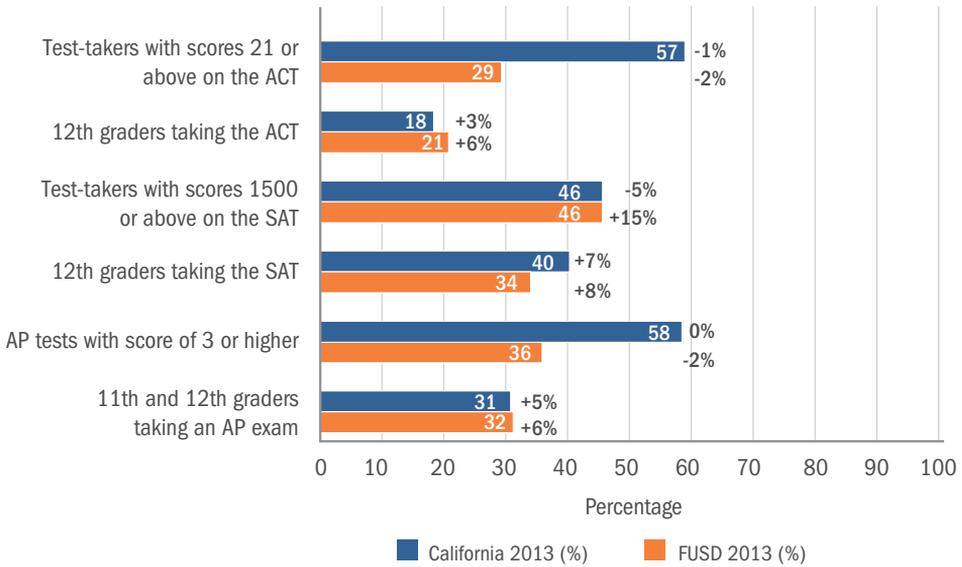
Source: National Student Clearinghouse.

Academic Performance

High school students' academic performance in FUSD has also improved, but the district still has a long way to go to prepare all students academically for postsecondary education. Advanced Placement (AP) and college entrance exam participation and performance are additional college preparation indicators beyond graduation and CAHSEE pass rates. These participation and performance data are mixed but overall show that FUSD students lag significantly behind their California peers in academic achievement (Exhibit 9). For example, while FUSD has similar AP

exam-taking rates as the state, the percentage of FUSD AP exams that “pass” (earn a score of 3 or higher) is substantially lower than statewide AP exam passage. Meanwhile, FUSD students take the SAT at lower rates than students statewide, but among those who take the SAT, FUSD and California students have similar performance, and FUSD’s performance has increased 15 percentage points from 2010 to 2013. Finally, on the ACT, FUSD students participate at higher rates than students statewide but score lower than their peers across the state.

Exhibit 9. FUSD and California Participation and Performance in AP and College Entrance Exams, 2010–2013



Source: Dataquest, AP Exam Results and SAT and ACT Scores, Fresno Unified School District and California, 2010 to 2013.
 Note: Change from 2010 to 2013 is presented next to each bar.

Summary

FUSD began its Equity and Access work under the leadership of Hanson and the Board to address the district's historical low academic performance and to improve opportunities and outcomes for its highly disadvantaged student population. The district established a K12–higher education partnership and an Equity and Access unit to advance this work. Under the leadership of Aguilar from UC Merced, the unit started with a focus on A–G completion and college readiness to fulfill its guiding principle to “provide all students with the opportunity to graduate with the greatest number of postsecondary choices from the widest array of options.” The capacity and freedom of the Equity and Access staff to *create new indicators* in the Beta Tool is a key feature that distinguishes this tool and work from the district data system and other data dashboards and early warning systems. The *real-time data* in the Beta Tool and the *ongoing review process* the Equity and Access team provides for using it together help change organizational practices and improve students' opportunities and outcomes.

The commitment to equity and access has persisted in a changing policy context, and the focus has contributed to gains in graduation and A–G completion. The fact that FUSD, one of the most disadvantaged and largest districts in the state, now outperforms the state on A–G is particularly noteworthy. However, the district still struggles with improving students' academic performance.

In the next three chapters, we delve into the work of the Equity and Access unit in greater detail, following its chronological origins and expansion. Chapter 3 describes the evolution of Equity and Access work with high school counselors and the district's IHE partners, while Chapters 4 and 5 explore the district's ongoing journey to create a culture of continuous improvement in other domains.

Chapter 3. Increasing Students' Access to Higher Education: High School Counselors and IHE Partners

School guidance counselors are gatekeepers and traffic directors for students. They are in a key position to either enhance students' aspirations, preparation, and access postsecondary opportunities or to perpetuate long-standing disparities in students' readiness, awareness, information, and access to more advanced coursework and higher education. Students from low-income households, minority students, and first-generation college students often report that their high school counselor played a role in their personal stories—either by validating their capabilities, encouraging their college aspirations, and providing them with advice about how to access college or by discounting their capabilities and discouraging college ambitions. Because counselors work directly with students, they can “change conditions in the present” to help “provide all students the opportunity to graduate with the greatest number of postsecondary choices from the widest array of options.”

One FUSD principal who was raised in Fresno recalled his personal experience as a student many years ago with both types of guidance counselors and explained how the Equity and Access work speaks personally to him as a result:

When I was in high school, I was a good student, a 3.0 student. I think I never got anything lower than a 3.0 on a semester grade report card. I played sports. When I went my senior year to check out with my counselor, my counselor says, “Oh, you’re ready to go. Thank you for a great high school experience. Good luck to you.” I said, “Don’t I have to fill out some college applications or anything?” She said, “Oh, you want go to college?” The counselor laughed at me. Then she went over my transcript again. She found that I did not meet the requirement to apply for CSU or UC, even though I had been going through this UC Santa Barbara early outreach program. She goes, “Oh, you’ve never taken a fine art.” I took three years of French. What un-college-going kid is going to take French for three years? I said, “You told me that my French counted as a fine art.” She said, “Yeah, but that’s for graduation requirements.” I said, “What? I could’ve taken art and been A–G?” Luckily, as I was walking out dejected, the counselor that was next door—Miss Hall, I’ll never forget her—she says, “Come here. What’d she tell you?” So I said, “She told me I can’t go to college because I don’t

have a year of fine art.” Miss Hall goes, “That’s just ridiculous.” She helped me get enrolled in a continuation class. I was a good kid. I never got in trouble. I played two sports, and I had to go to continuation high school after graduation, in the summer for eight weeks, and take art so I could satisfy my Fresno State requirement. My counselor missed me. That’s unforgivable. This [Equity and Access] work makes my situation as a student almost impossible. We have a system in place that makes kids visible. Now, it’s not left to variability.

In order to have more counselors like Miss Hall who play the more positive role in students’ lives, FUSD has put in place several processes to “make kids visible” and to establish clear and higher expectations for counselors’ role in guiding students through the college preparation and application process. Information is one element. Processes of ongoing review and systems for using data to inform counselors’ daily work are additional factors. FUSD leaders have also sought to develop a mindset that all students deserve the opportunity to pursue the widest array of postsecondary options and to create a culture of continuous improvement to strive for that guiding principle.

This chapter describes how the Equity and Access team has worked with high school counselors to provide them with information, processes, and systems to change their guidance practices. It also describes the team’s work with the district’s higher education partners, using data in a process of ongoing review in a strong collaboration to change IHE practices to best serve students.

Changing the Role and Expectations of High School Counselors

Counselors were the first partners for the Equity and Access team, and the actions and systems they developed with and for the counselors created the basis for all of the unit’s subsequent efforts in the district.

Counselor Indicators and Tools

The Equity and Access team has developed a variety of data tools over time to provide counselors with actionable information relevant to their daily work with students. They began with indicators of students’ A–G course completion and have expanded the work in partnership with local IHEs to include indicators of students’ applications to college, FAFSA completion, and the steps from college

admission through matriculation at the partner IHEs. The Equity and Access team developed two data tools that are now central to counselor work in the district—the Student Profile Tool and the A–G Course Monitoring Tool. In addition, as the size and sophistication of the Equity and Access tools increased, the Equity and Access team worked with the district counseling department to create a calendar of counselor activities. This calendar establishes expectations for counselor activities with students throughout the school year and helps the counseling staff to know which data from the tools are important when and what actions they should take based on the those data. This section describes the two counselor tools and the calendar, including key features that distinguish the Equity and Access work to drive changes in practice.

The Student Profile Tool provides counselors with student-level information to inform their guidance meetings and work with students. It allows counselors to track and view individual students’ progress toward high school graduation and, in 12th grade, their college application and decision information. The Student Profile Tool has the following key features:

- ***Academic information:*** contains indicators (green/red) to gauge each student’s progress in meeting high school graduation requirements and A–G course requirements, a place to log supports offered to address any red indicators, and presents students’ overall grade point average (GPA) and A–G GPA.
- ***Institution of higher education checklist:*** gauges each 12th grade student’s progress in meeting application and matriculation requirements for each California higher education sector (community college, CSU, UC, private). The district has worked with Fresno State to determine the criteria for placement exam exemptions based on students’ course taking, grades, and SAT and ACT test scores. FUSD created indicators for whether students have satisfied the placement criteria or need to take the placement exams in mathematics and English. FUSD also tracks whether students have taken and passed the required placement exams, attended orientation, and completed registration. Similarly, for students who are only eligible to attend community college, counselors use the Student Profile Tool to track whether students have taken the required placement exams, attended orientation, and completed registration for the State Center Community College District.

- ***Institution of higher education applications:*** This tool documents whether 12th grade students have been admitted to each IHE to which they applied and their decision to enroll or opt-out reason (e.g., enlist in military). Data from UC Merced, Fresno State, and the State Center Community College District is automatically uploaded into the Beta Tool; applications, admission, and enrollment beyond the district's partner IHEs are self-reported by students and hand entered by counselors. Color coding helps counselors zero in on gaps in students' application actions.

Exhibit 10 illustrates the Student Profile Tool with example data for Gabrielle.²¹ The data indicate that Gabrielle completed the A–G course requirements and applied and was accepted to Fresno State. She did not complete matriculation steps such as attending orientation, registering for classes, or registering for placement exams because she chose to enlist in the U.S. military. This student graduated college ready with several postsecondary education options. Exhibit 10 illustrates how the Student Profile Tool provides a snapshot of students' A–G status, college applications, FAFSA completion, admissions, placement exam exemptions, placement exam participation, registration, orientation, and opt-out decisions. This tool is the result of a long process of the Equity and Access team deconstructing the application and matriculation process for each segment of the California higher education system and the specific requirements at each of the district's three IHE partners, demonstrating the strength and depth of the FUSD–IHE partnership.

The A–G Course Monitoring Tool (A–G Tool) (Exhibit 11) provides counselors and other staff with both individual and aggregated information on students' A–G progress and completion. It has the following key features:

- It calculates students' progress in each of the A–G subject areas.
- It calculates students' A–G GPA for the CSU and UC systems.
- It allows staff to run queries and export data using various criteria, including high school, grade level, schedule, unit deficiency range, GPA range, credit range, and other filters.

Exhibit 10. Student Profile Tool, Sample View

STUDENT INFORMATION

BO , **A** **J** ID **49** | DOB **/ /** |
 Gender **M**
BULLARD HIGH (90) | Grade **13** | Graduation Year **2014**
 Ethnicity **Filipino** | Home Language **Pilipino (Tagalog)** | 55 | | Special Ed
NO
 Enrolled in District **08/20/2001** Country Origin

GRADUATION DASHBOARD

Subject Requirement	Req	Ernd	Need	Prgs	Support	Offering(s)	Not
1000 English Language Arts	40.0	40.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2010 American Government	5.0	5.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2020 U.S. History	10.0	10.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2030 Modern World History	10.0	10.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3010 Biological Science	10.0	20.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3020 Physical Science	10.0	10.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3090 Biological/Physical Science	10.0	5.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4010 Algebra I	10.0	10.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4020 Geometry	10.0	10.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4030 Mathematics	10.0	30.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5000 Physical Education	20.0	20.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7000 World Languages/Arts	10.0	40.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8000 Economics	5.0	5.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9000 Electives	70.0	40.00	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total	230	255	0				

COLLEGE READINESS DASHBOARD



Community College

Applied NO

Online Orientation NO

SCCCD Advising Survey NO Interest : -

Exempt from Math Placement Exam? NO

Exempt from English Placement Exam? NO

Applied FAFSA? NO - FAFSA not matched or not completed

Register for Classes? NO

Completed Placement Test NO

SCCCD ID #

SCCCD Email Activated NO -

[IHE Segment Opt Out Reason\(s\)](#)
 Enlisting in military DEL



California State University

Applied YES

GPA Greater than 3.0? YES

SAT/ACT? YES

Eligible? YES - Meet minimum requirement

Exempt from ELM? NOT EXEMPT

Exempt from EPT? NOT EXEMPT

Early Start Program? [Register Early Start Program](#)

Admitted? YES

Applied FAFSA? NO - FAFSA not matched or not completed

SIR? YES

Register for Dog Days? NO

CSU ID # 442163

[IHE Segment Opt Out Reason\(s\)](#)
 Enlisting in military DEL

INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION APPLICATIONS

Click here to add | [IHE Monitoring Tool](#) |

Senior Survey A Senior Survey B Senior Survey C

Registered Date	CDS CODE	School	School Type	Major	Admitted	Denied	SIR	Enrolled	Fee Waiver Eligible
106260	106260	California State University, Fresno	CSU	Pre-Nursing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12/15/2013	0		Military		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ACADEMIC INFORMATION

UC/CSU Ontrack :



UC/CSU GPA : **3.15**

A-G GPA : **3.43**

A-G Unit Taken : **18.5**

A-G Unit Missing : **0.0**



University of California

Private

Applied NO
 GPA Greater than 3.0? YES
 SAT/ACT? YES
 Eligible? YES - Meet minimum requirement
 Admitted NO
 Exempt from AWPE? NO
 Register for AWPE? NO [Need to register](#)
 Applied FAFSA? NO - FAFSA not matched or not completed
 SIR? NO

Applied NO
 Admitted NO
 SIR NO

[IHE Segment Opt Out Reason\(s\)](#)

Applied to and accepted to different IHE segment(s) (indicate other segment(s))

[IHE Segment Opt Out Reason\(s\)](#)

Applied to and accepted to different IHE segment(s) (indicate other segment(s))

[IHE Master Opt Out Reason\(s\)](#)

Fee Waiver Communication Communication Data

Received	Method	Date	Source
<input type="radio"/>			IHE Upload <input type="button" value="EDIT"/>
<input type="radio"/>		12/15/2013	<input type="button" value="EDIT"/> <input type="button" value="DEL"/>

Exhibit 11. Home View of the A-G Course Monitoring Tool



A-G Course Monitoring Tool

View by Missing A-G Unit and Subject Area | View All Students (All Grades)

High School [Dropdown]	Grade Level 12 [Dropdown]	Current Schedule Term: ---All--- Period: ---All--- Course: ---All--- Teacher: ---All--- Room: ---All---	Unit Deficiency From [] To []	UC/CSU GPA From [] To []
			AG GPA From [] To []	Cum. GPA From [] To []
			HS Credit From [] To []	

More Filters: Add New Filter []

Apply Filter

Graduation Year : 2015
Average A-G GPA : 2.61
Average UC/CSU GPA : 2.6
Average UC Unit Taken : 16.31
Average HS Credit: 222.59

Total Students : 4158	
OFF-TRACK 2606 62.67%	ON-TRACK 1549 No.Data (3) 37.25%

Search Students |
 Export IAPs to PDF |
 Export Student to Excel
 Date Snapshots |
 View by Grade/Semester/Deficiency |
 Blank IAP

					A-G Minimum Requirement	
A	History/Social Science	2014-2015	OFF-TRACK 1215 29.22%	ON-TRACK 2943 70.78%	Other a-g (elective)	
					Visual & Performing Art	
B	English	2014-2015	OFF-TRACK 2049 49.28%	ON-TRACK 2109 50.72%	History/Social Science	
					History/Social Science	
C	Math	2014-2015	OFF-TRACK 1548 37.23%	ON-TRACK 2610 62.77%	Language – Non-English	
					Language – Non-English	
D	Lab Science	2014-2015	OFF-TRACK 1611 38.74%	ON-TRACK 2547 61.26%	Lab Science	
					Lab Science	
E	Language-Non-English	2014-2015	OFF-TRACK 1411 33.93%	ON-TRACK 2747 66.07%	Math (Algebra 2)	
					Math (Geometry)	
F	Visual & Performing Art	2014-2015	OFF-TRACK 700 16.84%	ON-TRACK 3458 83.16%	Math (Algebra 1)	
					English	
G	Elective / Other A-G	2014-2015	OFF-TRACK 313 7.53%	ON-TRACK 3845 92.47%	English	
					English	
					12 th grade & Graduates	

Exhibit 11 shows the various filters on which staff can search in the A–G Tool. It also illustrates (in red and blue) the total number of students who are off-track and on-track in each A–G subject category. These summary views provide staff with aggregate snapshots of school- or district-level A–G performance. When staff select a school- or grade-level view, every student is listed with his or her individual indicators—on-track overall and by subject area, A–G GPA, overall GPA, and other academic indicators.

The counselor calendar specifies college preparation activities across the year, by month, for grade levels 10 and 12 (Appendix A). The calendar includes timelines and deadlines for course registration and credit recovery, schedule and transcript reviews, at-risk student conferences, college entrance exam registration and administration, university presentations, parent nights, college application deadlines, college and career fairs, trainings and conferences, and other activities.

Together, the Student Profile Tool, the A–G Tool, and the calendar provide counselors with information on key measures of students’ academic preparation for and applications to college. This information is easily accessible at the student level and at various levels of aggregation. Because of data-sharing agreements with the district’s three IHE partners (UC Merced, Fresno State, and State Center Community College) and the skill of the Equity and Access programmers, the data are automatically uploaded into the Beta Tool on a regular basis, so they provide timely and actionable information for counselors. The counselor tools reduce some of the time-intensive, manual data entry that is typical for counselors in other districts. One counselor explained,

When I talk to [people in other districts], it’s like, “You don’t know which kids are on A–G track and which kids are not, and you have to do transcript analysis?” I don’t. I just push a button, and it pulls it up for me and tells me which kids, which classes, under which category. They’re like, “Yeah, that takes us hours.” I’m like, “It takes me five minutes.” I can do it by high school; I can do it by district; I can do it by foster youth; I can do it by whatever I want. They’ve seen it, and everybody that I’ve shown a few of the tools to are extremely jealous because they’re like, “You don’t understand how many hours and hours and hours we have to spend manually.”

Process of Ongoing Review and Systems for Using Data

The counselor tools within the Beta Tool fulfill a need for information, but as Aguilar emphasizes, “Equity and Access is not about the tool.” As one Equity and Access team member reflected, “If you build it [a data tool], they won’t necessarily come.” In addition to creating a robust data tool, Equity and Access team members worked with the Director of Counseling to create and implement processes of ongoing review and systems for counselors to use the tools in their daily work. These processes are critical components of the district’s success with increasing A–G completion and students’ access to higher education.

Leadership in this, as in all aspects of the Equity and Access work, is critical. The district hired Christina Espinosa to be the Director of Counseling. Espinosa had experience providing college access supports to students in Fresno high schools as a UC Merced CEP program manager, and she also led transcript review trainings based on the A–G tool for several CORE waiver districts. When Espinosa came to the district, she led trainings for all high school counselors to explain the Beta Tool to them and provide support to help counselors integrate the tools into their daily practice. She led counselor meetings every two weeks to create processes and accountability for using the tools. As counselor questions emerged and deepened, she worked with the Equity and Access team to create new indicators and refine the tools to better inform counselors’ work. She also worked with counselors to create the calendar described above to help them make decisions about how to focus their work on particular indicators at particular points in the school year to “change conditions in the present” for students.

The expectation that counselors will discuss their work in counselor meetings in terms of indicators in the Beta Tool and actions based on the data has changed counselor practices. As one head counselor explained, the tools provide her with more information to discuss as a counseling team and strategize about how to address areas of concern together to best serve students:

As head counselor, if my report shows I have so many kids dropping out of my AP class at the end of first semester, we’re going to come together and we’re going to talk. What is it that they’re dropping, what can we do as a team to make sure that they stay, and should we all have the same talking points when we talk to parents and students? That way they can understand why kids are in an AP class [and] if I have 50 percent of my kids eligible for four-year colleges and my report shows that they’re not applying, I’m going to want to know why they’re not applying, and what can we do as a team to encourage them to apply?

Conversations like those described above, led by the head counselor with the high school counseling team, make use of *student performance indicators* (e.g., college eligibility) and *student procedure indicators* (e.g., college applications) to inform staff practices. By tracking how many eligible students apply to college and the “fit” between their eligibility and applications in the Beta Tool, counselors can dig deeper into the data to discuss and implement strategies to best support students.

The combination of performance and procedure data allows counselors to track students’ applications to each system they are eligible to attend and to create the expectation that this is part of a counselor’s work with individual students. Specifically, counselors encourage students who meet A–G requirements to at minimum apply to Fresno State and students who do not meet A–G requirements to apply to Fresno City College—unless the students decide to apply elsewhere or not to apply, in which case counselors are responsible for documenting these decisions. Counselors also look for mismatches between students’ qualifications and applications—in particular, students who do not apply to any system and students who “undermatch,”²² which means that they apply to less selective IHEs than those for which they are eligible. Counselors can then ask students specifically about these mismatches to understand students’ decisions and to provide them with supports needed to access the greatest number of postsecondary options.

Equity and Access also tracks whether each student who has been accepted to an IHE takes the placement exam, participates in orientation, and completes registration at that institution. By making explicit the steps required from application through matriculation in procedure indicators, Equity and Access has created a set of explicit recommendations for counselors to help more students to enroll in higher education after high school graduation. The district commitment to support students through matriculation helps decrease “summer melt,”²³ a known problem in higher education in which accepted students do not show up to campus in the fall; this benefits both students and IHEs. The district has committed to doing everything in its power to support students “while they are in our care.” Thus, the Equity and Access information and processes guide the counseling department to make decisions and change practices as necessary to reduce inequities and improve students’ college preparation and access.

Counselors explained that when they first started using the tool, they felt that it was “computer work, desk work away from kids,” and several counselors expressed challenges and frustrations with being required to use two separate data systems—the Beta Tool (the A–G Tool and Student Profile Tool) and the district’s ATLAS data system. As one counselor explained, counselors at her school document student meetings in ATLAS because it is the system of record for the district.

These meeting data are then transferred to the Beta Tool, but counselors must work across two data systems because some data exist only in the Beta Tool, such as students' college application and enrollment indicators. Despite these shortcomings, the Director of Counseling, the Director of College and Career Readiness (CCR), and several counselors explained that the depth of the information provided by the Equity and Access team and the systems for using that information have generally earned counselors' buy-in.

Equity and Access data have also been used to get Board approval to hire more counselors at the high school and middle school levels. The CCR Director described how the counselor tools have helped to provide her with data to report to the Board about how many times counselors are meeting with students, what they are meeting about, and what their impact is on students' A–G completion, college applications, and college enrollment. She said, “We’re able to speak to the counselors’ work completely differently.” The resulting new hires have reduced student caseloads for all high school counselors to 350 students (compared with the state average of more than 500 students per counselor), and there is now one counselor at every middle school. Decreasing caseloads through new hires has also provided the counselors more time to spend with individual students. High school counselor assignment was also standardized across the district; each counselor is assigned students in either Grades 9 and 11 or Grades 10 and 12 so they more evenly distribute tasks and supports associated with college preparation and applications.

In addition, in 2014–15, the head counselor at each high school did not have a student caseload, so this person had time to manage the counseling team and maintain the focus on equity in students' postsecondary readiness and access. This time allocation may not continue long-term, but it helped the head counselors to build their own capacity and the capacity of their counseling teams to use the tools and data in an ongoing review process focused on continuous improvement. As the Director of Counseling stated,

What’s refreshing to me is as we’ve hired new counselors [and] they’re like, “Oh my gosh, this data is so great. I mean, this makes my job so much easier.” It means higher expectations for the quality of that work, but it also means we can go a little bit deeper.

Making System-Level Changes in the District to Increase Students' College Preparation Opportunities

As a cabinet-level district official, Aguilar represents the Equity and Access unit in the district's weekly cabinet meetings, which include this work as a standing agenda item. This cabinet-level representation is a manifestation of the value that district leadership places on the Equity and Access team's work to inform and drive district decisions and practices through a cabinet-level process of ongoing review.

Specifically, Aguilar's team has presented A–G data to identify inequities in students' course opportunities across the district. The district has acted on this information to remove barriers to A–G completion, including all of the following:

- ***Middle school foreign language:*** When the Equity and Access team analyzed A–G completion by school, they realized that while some students were entering high school already having accumulated A–G foreign language credits, not all middle schools offered this opportunity. Uncovering this disparity led FUSD to add foreign language classes at every middle school in the district.
- ***A–G–approved foreign language course:*** When the Equity and Access team analyzed A–G completion by student subgroups, they realized that English learners were disproportionately missing the needed foreign language credits. Further, foreign language was frequently the only deficiency for these students to complete their A–G requirements. This discovery led FUSD to create a UC–approved Spanish for native speakers course as one avenue to meet the A–G foreign language requirement.
- ***AP course offerings:*** When the Equity and Access team analyzed A–G completion rates by school, they found inequities in AP course offerings and student access to AP courses across high schools in the district. This led FUSD to expand AP offerings and provide teacher training at all high schools to reduce student barriers to AP course entry. In mathematics, staff created a Grade 7–12 course sequence flowchart that specifies students' eligibility for AP mathematics courses based on prior courses taken and grades earned.
- ***Credit recovery:*** The Equity and Access team realized that one reason students were not completing A–G requirements was that they took A–G courses but did not earn a grade of C or better. This led FUSD to redesign its summer school program, including explicit

criteria for student course placement based on prioritizing A–G course deficiencies and automatically enrolling students who earned below a C so they could recover their A–G course credit. In many other districts, students must “opt in” or sign up for summer school, but this requires self-awareness of credit deficiencies and motivation to recover missing credits and sign up for summer school. Instead, FUSD changed its policy to automatically register students with credit deficiencies in summer school and allow them to “opt out” if they chose not to participate. This greatly increased students’ participation in summer school. The secondary summer school workflow process for student placement is in Appendix B.

These examples illustrate how the Equity and Access work has influenced district and school practices to improve students’ course opportunities, progress toward high school graduation, and access to higher education. As one middle school principal reflected,

I’d been doing this for 15 years and never once thought that there isn’t foreign language at every middle school. It really opened my eyes to the lack of equity in public education. That was really my first glimpse of looking at it from that lens, that systematically we can intervene to make sure that the equity disparity doesn’t exist.

As a high school principal explained,

When we began the work to align A–G and started to go through the course catalogue, we figured out, my God, we have all these classes that don’t even apply to A–G. The tool forced that conversation, which was great.

Making Systemic Changes in FUSD and IHE Practices to Improve Students’ Postsecondary Transition

The partnership with UC Merced is the foundation of the Equity and Access work in FUSD, including the critical shared commitment (Chapter 2) and the institutional prestige of the UC system that has allowed FUSD to garner support for and interest in this work. As Hanson stated,

Instant credibility to what we’re doing is that we started with UC people, and we started with the gold standard of transcript evaluation, called A–G. Everybody understands what that is. Everybody understands that it means something. It has made everybody that much more interested, accepting, and trusting that the work is valid, that it has meaning, and that the work is of high quality.

The Equity and Access work has expanded over time to include partnerships with local IHEs at all levels of the higher education system—not only UC Merced but also Fresno State and the State Center Community College District. These partnerships include formal data agreements between each IHE and FUSD, and as the Equity and Access team has examined institution-specific data, they have raised questions and facilitated discussions with the IHE partners to address practices associated with inequities in students’ access to and success in college.

One major change has been in how students complete registration, course placement, and enrollment at Fresno State. When the Equity and Access team examined students’ fall enrollment data at Fresno State, they found that FUSD students were “down-drafted”²⁴—that is, they were placed in non-credit-bearing, remedial English and mathematics courses when they were eligible (based on their high school course taking, grades, AP scores, or SAT scores) to enroll in credit-bearing courses.

Remediation puts students on a trajectory with a lower likelihood of degree completion at a higher cost and over a longer time period. To remedy this situation, FUSD worked with Fresno State to develop and implement an Expository Reading and Writing Course (ERWC) as the standard 12th-grade English course in FUSD.²⁵ Students who successfully complete ERWC with a grade of C or better are now exempt from taking the Fresno State English placement exam and are eligible to enroll in English 101, a credit-bearing introductory course.

FUSD and Fresno State have implemented several practices to help FUSD students register for the appropriate courses when they enter Fresno State, with an intended mutual benefit for students and the IHEs of improving student enrollment, persistence, and success. FUSD and Fresno State have created explicit exemption criteria for placement exams and remedial coursework, which FUSD tracks for its students. FUSD counselors follow up with non-exempt students to make sure they take the required placement exams, and Fresno State has scheduled specific placement exam dates for FUSD students. Now, FUSD can tell Fresno State how many and which of its students should be enrolling in which English and mathematics courses in their first semester, and the two institutions work together to automatically register incoming students for courses at the appropriate level.

Using data from the partnership with FUSD has also helped Fresno City College to better plan enrollment and course placement for its summer bridge program. The six-week program includes for-credit basic skills English or mathematics courses, along with a counseling course. Fresno City

College staff use FUSD Equity and Access data to identify students who are performing academically at one or two levels below credit-bearing college courses in order to recruit them to the bridge program. As Christopher Villa, Vice President of Student Services at Fresno City College, explained, the data and FUSD partnership enable strategic recruitment and improved services for students when college staff know exactly what students' academic strengths and deficiencies are before they come to campus in the summer. At other campuses, Villa explained,

I could randomly advertise the bridge, and put up a website, and a brochure. It's first come, first served. Random. The [Beta Tool] is very helpful to us in being strategic in identifying pre-college-level students and to move or accelerate them in the curriculum.

The Equity and Access team is also working on examining other practices based on its data from Fresno City College to better support FUSD students' postsecondary access and success. One example is that FUSD now tracks students' career interests and is using this information to plan campus tours at Fresno City College tailored to students' reported interests. As Villa reflected, "Data, I think, is central to all of this. We need to collect data, meaningful data, analyze it quickly, and be nimble with it. To respond to needs is critical to any effort."

IHE partners noted that the partnership with FUSD has been a challenging shift in institutional culture and processes but also a rewarding one based on their shared commitment to improving students' access to and success in higher education in the Central Valley. Villa explained that the partnership has created a mindset shift to think about how to support FUSD students for the good of the entire community:

We tend to think very compartmentally in higher ed. What I like about this model is we're trying to break that down, so that we feel that the responsibility for that 15-year old isn't just Fresno Unified's, but it should be ours.

Several IHE administrators noted that colleges and universities tend to treat students as independent adults and take a hands-off approach to course selection, registration, career exploration, and otherwise helping students navigate the higher education system. In contrast, they reflected that the partnership has held them accountable, pushed them to be more transparent, and shifted their mindset to focus more on supporting students as a mechanism to improve student enrollment, persistence, and success.

FUSD staff expressed challenges with changing IHE practices to meet all of the students' needs they identify through the Equity and Access work, but they noted progress in and the importance of the work. One Equity and Access team member explained that they identify and address inequities one at a time to make systemic changes to improve students' opportunities and outcomes:

Is the reason that they're not applying because they don't know how to apply? Well, let's teach them. Is the reason they don't apply because they don't have time to? Well, then let's do it during school. Is the reason why they're not applying to a community college because they haven't gone to the community college? Well, let's bring the community college here.

One FUSD official said,

[The IHEs] have the data, but they don't necessarily change their practice. It's then a conversation with our superintendent and their chancellor, their college president. We're trying to get them to push down from the top as we're pushing up from the bottom and it's made some strides. What it shows is, we're going to do whatever it takes, so meet us part way.

From the IHE perspective, FUSD pushes them to "change conditions in the present," but that is sometimes difficult to do within an IHE system, particularly when timelines and processes do not always match up for the district and IHEs. For example, the district does not have data on students' grades until spring, and IHEs typically do their course and staffing projections in the fall for the next fall. Over time, however, the partnership has built trust, and the IHEs have agreed to use FUSD's data to inform their course plans. Fall 2015 marks the first time that Fresno State is using Beta Tool data to automatically place students into introductory-level English and mathematics courses if the district data indicate that students are eligible for such placement. Although the Fresno State administration supports the idea, they expressed anxiety about the risk of allocating course spots for FUSD students without guarantees that those students will show up in the fall (an "enrollment management" issue, in IHE parlance). This approach will be tested as students transition into the higher education system and no longer receive direct supports from FUSD to help them navigate course taking and other issues, but the IHE partners have credited the Equity and Access unit in FUSD with maintaining a focus on issues of equity and access with students at the center.

A major remaining challenge and limitation of FUSD's IHE collaborations is that FUSD does not have California higher education systemwide data to track students through the application and

enrollment processes beyond its three local IHE partners. Therefore, the district cannot monitor and support its students who apply to and attend other community colleges, CSUs, UCs, or private IHEs. For FUSD students, two-year college enrollment is concentrated at Fresno City College, and four-year enrollment is concentrated at Fresno State; direct benefits are harder to measure for UC Merced because UC-eligible students may not attend UC Merced, and UC eligibility does not guarantee admission. Moreover, while UC Merced has an explicit commitment to improve overall access to higher education for Central Valley students, it does not have an explicit admissions priority for local students. The Equity and Access team continues to deepen its analysis and supports for students at its partner IHEs, but it has limited capacity to support all students in the transition to postsecondary education.

Summary

The Equity and Access work in FUSD has changed counselors' practice at the school level by providing counselors with information, implementing processes of ongoing review, and providing actionable indicators to guide their practice. This work has also influenced district practices through a cabinet-level platform and ongoing review process, with the notable result of increasing A–G course opportunities and improving the district's A–G completion rate (as described in Chapter 2). Beyond the district, the Equity and Access work has altered IHE practices through strong partnerships that use data to examine and address inequities in students' preparation for placement in higher education.

As important as these aggregate measures and institutional changes are, however, it is at the level of the individual student that the Equity and Access work takes on its true meaning. Take Mateo,²⁶ for example. Mateo's unstable foster care situations during his high school years resulted in significant residential mobility, which in turn affected his academic progress and performance. Using the tools created by the Equity and Access unit, the counseling team at Mateo's final high school and Project Access staff who focus on homeless and foster care youth worked together to identify his risk factors, get him on-track to graduate, and upon graduation to enroll him in a local community college with on-campus housing to help him make a successful postsecondary transition. As his counselor explained,

As a collective team, we worked to help one of my students last year. Mateo was in several foster homes throughout his four years of high school, including three his senior year. Mateo attended [continuation schools] and worked his way up to earn the credits needed to be on-track for graduation and attend [a district high school] his senior year. Project Access was a great resource to help him with the matriculation steps to State Center Community College District, specifically with priority registration. They also assisted with information regarding housing at the college. Our goal was to have Mateo move away from his current environment and really focus on being a college student. I am pleased to say that Mateo completed summer school and is currently enrolled for the fall semester. He also earned a \$1,000 scholarship from the Rotary Club as a student who has overcome many barriers and showed significant academic improvement. We are all very proud of Mateo. He is a great example of someone who used the opportunities FUSD offered him to, without a doubt, change the course of his entire life in a positive way.

Unlike the example that began this chapter—that of a student falling through the cracks because one course deficiency—Mateo had multiple risk factors. Yet because of the Equity and Access data and processes in place in FUSD high schools, Mateo’s counselors and other district staff were able to identify his needs and provide him with all of the available district supports so that he could graduate from high school and attend college. It is this opportunity that FUSD seeks for each and every student under the district’s care.

Chapter 4. Expanding Equity and Access to Other Bodies of District Work

This chapter describes two areas of district practice into which Equity and Access has recently expanded—(1) a partnership with the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Department to increase students’ access to career pathways and (2) a partnership with the Department of Prevention and Intervention (DPI) to increase students’ access to social, emotional, and behavioral support services. The Equity and Access unit has worked with staff in each of these departments to create data tools and indicators, implement processes to use the resulting data, and build a culture of continuous improvement with a focus on equity and access in their respective roles.

The initial Equity and Access work, described in Chapter 3, focused on equitable access to college preparatory (A–G) course opportunities and to a range of postsecondary options. Based both on the successful implementation of the approach with counselors and on data about inequities in other arenas, FUSD leaders identified the need to expand the equity and access lens to improve students’ opportunities and outcomes throughout the K12 system. As Hanson explained,

It was very logical. You have to make sure first off kids can graduate. Then, once we can get them to graduate, what are their options? We moved to A–G coursework. That drove us to our counselors that would have to be deeply involved. Now, having said that, I have to say that we didn’t shift work in a linear way. I would say that the work just kept expanding. The work around counselors, it’s not let up. It has continued to morph and change. It’s always just continued to—as we learned how to do something, we bit off a new chunk. We simultaneously expanded work into new areas.

After the initial engagement with the counseling department, the Equity and Access work kept expanding within the district office, one department at a time. Thus far, the Equity and Access team has engaged with the following district departments:

- ***College and Career Readiness (CCR)***: This department oversees guidance counselors, career and technical education (CTE), and expanded learning programs (afterschool, summer school, credit recovery).
- ***Department of Prevention and Intervention (DPI)***: This department oversees social, emotional, and behavioral services and student services, including social workers,

mentoring, student discipline, attendance, Project Access (foster and homeless youth), home hospital instruction, behavioral interventions (positive behavioral interventions and supports, bullying prevention, restorative practices), and school climate.

- ***English Learners (EL)***: This department oversees district services for EL students.
- ***Alternative Education***: This department oversees alternative education schools and programs.
- ***Chief Academic Officer (CAO) and Supervisors of Schools (SOS)***: The CAO and this department oversee all of the district SOSs who provide direct support to school administrators.

Each of these partnerships began with a series of conversations between the Equity and Access staff and the lead administrator for the department. These conversations took shape over a period of several months to examine existing district data, ask questions, identify inequities and areas of need, create new indicators, make decisions based on the data to change department and school practices and monitor staff practices and student outcomes. In these partnerships, Equity and Access staff support the department lead to use data in an ongoing review process and to maintain a focus on identifying and addressing inequities. Following this initial development period, the level of engagement between the departments and the Equity and Access unit varies, depending on department lead interest and district priorities.

To support this expanding work, the Equity and Access team has also expanded, growing from the two initial UC Merced CEP staff (Aguilar and Suryana) to now include 13 staff—Aguilar, Harris, five policy analysts, three technical analysts, and three programmers.

- ***Associate Vice Chancellor, UC Merced***: functions as Associate Superintendent of Equity and Access within FUSD and leads the Equity and Access unit.
- ***Executive Director, District and School Accountability and Improvement***: manages strategic initiatives, including cabinet- and district-level indicator development, internal quality control, and database development.
- ***Policy analysts***: work primarily with department leads to create and implement processes and indicators to measure performance and inform ongoing review and improvement to address jointly identified departmental issues.

- **Technical analysts:** work primarily with the programming team and department teams to develop and implement indicators by providing both thought leadership and technical quality control to ensure that the indicators are measuring inequities identified by the department leads and Equity and Access team.
- **Programmers:** develop the programming language and Equity and Access databases and tools, using technical expertise to ensure accurate and timely data collection from district and external data sources. See Appendix C for information about technical requirements for programmers.

Feedback from the department leads who have worked with the Equity and Access team is overwhelmingly positive. The partnerships between Equity and Access and two departments—CCR and DPI—have been the deepest and longest running. These partnerships, in particular, demonstrate the potential and challenges of implementing the Equity and Access approach more widely across the district.

Equity and Access Partnership With the College and Career Readiness Department

Although the A–G work is critical for ensuring students’ college options, the district recognizes that college alone does not encompass “the greatest number of postsecondary choices.” The lack of attention to and progress on preparing students for careers within the K12 education system is not unique to FUSD. As a recent Jobs for the Future report states,

While the phrase “college and career readiness” appears seemingly everywhere in the current discourse about the goals of high school, the “career readiness” part often seems like an afterthought, tacked on as if to suggest that if students pursue an academic, college-prep course of study—the real priority of most recent school reforms—they will also, as a side benefit, have better job prospects. This lack of attention to career preparation only serves to intensify the class divide, leaving the most privileged students to anticipate and prepare for professional careers like those of their parents, while students from low-income families continue to think of work mainly as a way to survive. What it means to be “ready” for a career is complicated and deserves real attention of its own.²⁷

To address the need for college *and* career preparation, FUSD created the CCR Department in the 2014–15 school year. This department replaced the former Office of Career Readiness, which had housed traditional CTE programs and services. The CCR Department joins and aligns three major bodies of district work—(1) college readiness, which includes all guidance counseling; (2) career readiness, which includes traditional CTE and emerging Linked Learning career pathways work; and (3) expanded learning, which includes afterschool, summer school, and credit recovery programs. The department is charged with creating multiple pathways for students, working with Equity and Access. As Sally Fowler, the CCR Director explained,

When we design pathways, we design them so students actually have choices after high school. They would have enough A–G if they wanted to go to college. They would have embedded certifications in those pathways so they could go directly to work, or they could go directly into a certification program at a postsecondary education agency whether it be private postsecondary, community college, or a four year.

One of the major charges of the CCR Department is to create multiple options for students by providing them with A–G course opportunities and with career course and pathway opportunities so they are college *and* career ready when they graduate from FUSD. As in many California districts, FUSD has a regional occupational program (ROP) for students to take individual CTE courses, a California Partnership Academy, and several CTE–focused small learning communities within comprehensive high schools. In contrast to the traditional ROP and CTE models in which students take one or two courses to gain exposure to a career field, Linked Learning pathways create articulated course sequences in specific career fields that are aligned to industry-recognized certificates or credentials or provide transferable credits to a postsecondary degree program.²⁸ Linked Learning combines rigorous academics with career-based learning in the classroom, work-based learning in professional settings, and supports to ensure that students are successful in both settings; the model has demonstrated promise for improving students’ academic achievement, A–G completion, college planning, and professional skills.²⁹

In 2014–15, FUSD was awarded a California Pathways Trust grant to start a Linked Learning career pathway in every district high school. This grant is specifically for FUSD to start a health pathway in partnership with the State Center Community College District and the adult school. Additional pathways will be developed based on labor market needs, student interest, and staff

capacity. The implementation of Linked Learning and the Pathways Trust grant is emerging in FUSD. The goal over the next five years is to create pathways in every high school that serve at least half of the district's high school students, including students across the academic performance spectrum. Currently, 33 percent of students in Grades 9–12 are enrolled in a CTE course, but most of these students are not in a Linked Learning pathway.

The district is currently in the process of establishing pathway parameters regarding target student cohort size, expectations for teacher qualifications and integration of core academic and career courses, and pathway course requirements. Staff from the CCR department are working with teachers at the school level to develop the career pathways parameters, and Fowler explained that there has been strong interest from core academic teachers who are excited about increasing the relevance and engagement of their instruction and from CTE teachers who are interested in increasing the rigor of their coursework to best prepare students for college and careers.

As the CCR Department develops and implements its career pathways model across the district, it is working with the Equity and Access team to use data to inform pathways creation and refinement. The CCR Department lead and Equity and Access staff have used the district's postsecondary data-sharing agreements to examine data on students' educational experiences from Grades 9 through 14 or 16. The goals are to understand who enrolls in higher education, who persists, and how much progress, success, or remediation students from various career pathways have in higher education, as well as how career pathway students' outcomes compare with nonpathway students. Fowler stated the importance of data for having deeper discussions within the district and with partner colleges: "In the past, we would have conversations about what we need to have happen for kids, and now we know what is happening and what isn't happening for kids because the data makes a conversation very, very real."

The Equity and Access partnership with the CCR Department has shaped the district's career pathways planning and implementation. The district is currently in scale-up mode; they have data on only several schools with existing career pathways, but they are using data from these schools to inform program improvement and design as they build Linked Learning pathways at all district high schools. In their analysis of student postsecondary performance from existing Linked Learning pathways, CCR and Equity and Access staff realized that students in a nursing pathway at one high school were graduating with fairly low A–G completion rates. These students

generally enrolled in postsecondary education after graduation, but they were struggling in their college science courses and often needed remedial coursework. Based on that analysis, the CCR Department decided to add more science to the nursing pathway “so by the time the students exit four years from now or three years from now, those students will be more proficient in science and probably not need the remediation that they’ve needed.”

The CCR Department lead meets regularly with Equity and Access staff to review data, ask questions, identify needs for new indicators that capture the emerging career pathways and other work of the department, and make evidence-based decisions. Through these regular discussions, Fowler and her department have focused on using data to improve students’ access to and success in college and career pathways. As Fowler explained,

The data kind of leads us down a path to make better [program] decisions. We’re constantly having these discussions now about what do we need to know about our students to be able to make better decisions? What do our counselors need to input? What do our teachers need to input? What do our job developers need to input? What do our pathway coordinators need to be able to query in order to determine the success of students in a pathway? Those are ongoing discussions, which is a completely different focus for our district than where we were seven, eight years ago.

The CCR Department and Equity and Access staff are working on building indicators to gauge students’ career readiness to complement counselors’ analysis of academic indicators to gauge students’ college readiness. Career readiness indicators will include participation, persistence, and course grades in career pathway courses, declaring a career focus area, completing a career pathway, and completing A–G requirements. In the process of indicator creation, CCR staff and school staff will now be able to monitor students’ on-track status starting in Grade 9 rather than just in Grade 11 as is current practice, and they will be better able to ensure that all students have options at the end of high school. They are working with high school counselors to create ongoing review processes to monitor both college and career pathways indicators and to create a tiered system of interventions and supports for students based on their progress throughout high school.

Equity and Access Partnership With the Department of Prevention and Intervention

Students in FUSD live in a context of concentrated disadvantage; poverty, unemployment, limited parental educational attainment, and limited English proficiency are risk factors and challenges in many students' families and in the larger community. These challenges may affect students' nutrition, sleep, stress, and overall well-being, which in turn affect academic performance and behavior. DPI is a wide-ranging department that oversees FUSD work related to social and emotional student services and school climate. In the Equity and Access–DPI partnership, Equity and Access staff members have helped DPI to create tools and indicators to improve the identification of student needs and to use data to inform decisions, focusing on equity of service provision and of students' social and emotional outcomes. As Ambra Dorsey, the DPI Director, explained, “The goal within DPI is just making sure that the maximum number of students can be served and to be able to measure the effectiveness and make real-time changes based on what the data is showing us.”

The Equity and Access team worked with the DPI lead to create two tools—the Early Identification and Intervention System (EIIS) and the Child Welfare Attendance (CWA) tool—to identify student needs. Staff have also developed accompanying processes to systematize student referrals to district social worker and CWA support services and to equitably allocate those services.

- **EIIS:** serves as an early warning system, with thresholds for attendance, behavior, and academics that are automated to flag and prioritize students who need to be seen by a social worker or guidance counselor. Equity and Access and DPI staff created a list of 27 academic-attendance-behavior indicator color combinations (green for on-track, red for off-track or at-risk) and a process for prioritizing social worker and counselor referrals based on these indicators. For example, one student may be getting good grades and coming to school but may have been recently suspended for fighting. Another student may have no behavioral problems but may be struggling academically and skipping school frequently. The idea is that the majority of students who need social and emotional supports and interventions should be identified through these indicators. However, school staff can still make individual referrals based on their individual relationships with students and knowledge that extends beyond these indicators.

- **CWA Tool:** pulls attendance information from the district’s student information system (SIS) and flags students with six absences for a school conference and students with 10 absences for CWA intervention.

Dorsey explained that prior practice was that social workers and CWAs “were each kind of doing their own thing”:

Referrals were coming to the social worker historically via—we had a referral form, but principals didn’t always use it. They’ve come on Post-its. They’re being e-mailed. There was not really a way for us to check who was being referred over. Why were they being referred over? What were the goals that the social worker was going to work on? Social workers were just doing their own thing. They did what worked for them. They weren’t really tracking outcomes.

Child welfare attendance (CWA) specialists—they work with families. They go on home visits. There’s nothing that would prioritize kids that they needed to see. Literally, we would wait for a school to fill out a form, send it over. We’d get the form. It was a very cumbersome process. We had three people in the district doing it. We were wondering, “Why is attendance not moving?” Well, there are three CWAs in a district of 70,000 [students], and we’re waiting on schools to fill out a form.

As with the CCR partnership, the DPI lead works with Equity and Access staff so that they can better understand the work of the department, identify and create indicators to measure that work, and create systems for using the data to inform and improve DPI staff members’ daily practice with students. Dorsey described this process: “There are so many meetings about what are we going to measure? What questions do we want to ask? What are real-time indicators? What is actionable? We are looking at more actionable indicators and multiple data points and connecting them to, ‘What can we do?’” She explained the importance of having the team of Equity and Access policy analysts and programmers to push her to use data in an ongoing review process and the importance of her expertise in pushing them to balance the burdens and benefits of data on staff members’ daily work with students.

The DPI also has emerging work on implementing restorative practices to reform the district’s behavior and discipline policies and create a more supportive and less punitive system. In this arena, Equity and Access staff members are helping the DPI lead to create a Restorative Practice Tool that includes student performance indicators such as suspensions and expulsions and staff

practice indicators such as the frequency of reentry circles and peer mediation sessions held at a school. DPI and Equity and Access staff noted the importance of measuring the quantity and quality of student services and the challenges in deciding what to measure and how best to capture implementation fidelity and quality practices.

To date, the biggest direct benefit of the Equity and Access partnership for DPI has been the investment of district funds in additional social workers, CWA staff, and restorative practice counselors, which has decreased caseloads and allowed staff to serve more students. As Dorsey stated,

The partnership with Equity and Access was important because it was the first time we were able to really quantify who these kids are, what are the characteristics that say, “These kids should be seen by a social worker.” The reality is really a social worker should be working with maybe 60 or 70 kids. If you’ve got 300 kids that need it, we’ve been able to show capacity and—we need more social emotional staff. We’ve been saying it, historically. We haven’t been able to show it. Once we realized truly how many kids were out there, the data really helped us to advocate for funding.

In the last budget cycle, the district added 20 CWAs to the previous three CWAs in the district, based on DPI and Equity and Access analysis. The Equity and Access team analyzed the number of students with chronic attendance problems and student background characteristics, by school, to decide where to prioritize CWA placement. Most of the CWAs (17 of 23) are assigned to one or two elementary schools each, and the additional six CWAs work out of the central office and are assigned to a mix of six to eight elementary, middle, and high schools. In this restructured system, CWAs can meet with more families and meet with families a lot sooner. Similarly, the district has hired 12 restorative practice counselors to provide direct services to students in several schools and to develop school capacity to implement restorative practices.

As was the case with the counselors, hiring more CWA staff has reduced the caseloads for existing staff, giving them more time to work directly with students and their families. The DPI Director, like the Director of Counseling, provided training and support for social workers and CWAs on how to use the data tools, explaining how they work so that staff understand the data and decision rules embedded in the system. The DPI Director lead also facilitates monthly social worker and CWA meetings to create processes and accountability for using the tools to ask questions and inform their practice.

Dorsey acknowledged several challenges in implementing the Equity and Access tools and accompanying processes. First, school staff members want more autonomy over student referrals. Second, social workers and CWAs have expressed frustration about the lack of integration of the Equity and Access Beta Tool into the district's ATLAS data system. For example, social workers have to log their meetings with students in the district data system for accountability and monitoring purposes, but they also have use the Beta Tool to log some activities and to locate information that is available only in that tool. DPI practitioners, who have limited time for data entry, must balance these data management demands with the direct services they provide to students. The counseling department has largely overcome the criticism of dual data systems by demonstrating that the Beta Tool automates much of the data collection and entry that counselors formerly did manually (e.g., transcript review, collecting students' self-reported college application information). By contrast, the tool's added value has been less apparent to DPI staff because the automation of student referrals to social workers and CWAs involves a trade-off between efficiency and effectiveness that is more subjective than it is in many counselor activities, like tracking whether A–G–eligible students apply to college.

This more subjective work of social and emotional services also creates challenges for developing relevant indicators. The Equity and Access–DPI partnership necessarily involves ongoing conversations about how to identify or create measures, given the confidential nature of student personal health information, the difficulty of quantifying expected outcomes from social and emotional services, and the lack of expertise in this subject area on the Equity and Access team. As Dorsey reflected,

We still struggle, even with the tool and with having the kids identified. You can go to work and plan to meet with six kids and run a group, but you get to see two of them because there are two kids fighting and you have to do a threat assessment. The balance of crisis-driven stuff, that's something that's been difficult for me to explain to Jorge—you can't ignore the girl who's trying to kill herself in the hallway. You have to respond and make sure she's safe and supported. Standardizing social-emotional services, I think it's tricky. It's much different than capturing credits and how many workshops you're going to do about college, which is a little bit more black and white.

Dorsey thus differentiated the “gray” work of social and emotional services from the “more black and white” activities of academically focused guidance counseling and expressed some frustration

with efforts to adapt the counselor-based approach for social workers and other DPI staff. Nonetheless, she concluded, “With that said, even with that challenge, there’s absolutely no way that my department could have moved forward the way it did without the partnership.”

Summary

The Equity and Access unit’s work with the CCR Department and DPI demonstrate the iterative process of creating data systems and indicators and constructing processes that use the data to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of staff members’ daily work. These partnerships also illustrate the challenges of expanding the Equity and Access work beyond the realm of counselors and college readiness to make a broader impact in the district. As of yet, the work remains uneven across the central office and is indeed still inchoate in many departments. The CAO summed up situation as follows:

That muscle was really getting developed, the strength about how to do it, how to pick the right indicators, how to use those in daily and weekly practice. Now those two departments (CCR and DPI), even though they still struggle with their own learning in this area, they’re ahead. Clearly, people can see the impact.

Using data in an ongoing review process to identify inequities and strategize about how to reduce them is now part of the expected work of the CCR Department and DPI, and both have made strides in creating a culture of continuous improvement within their departments. As the CCR Director noted,

This is the most progress we have ever made as a district. I’m so proud of that. It is just so refreshing to see that we’re finally pushing through, and we’re finally making a difference for our kids. For me, I feel like I’ve been pushing and pushing for years, and I feel like now there are teams of people to push with.

As the work continues to deepen and spread throughout central office departments, the Equity and Access focus has broadened to the school level in an effort to embed the data tools and continuous improvement cycles into the day-to-day, year-to-year planning of every school in the district. This emerging effort is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 5. Using Data to Inform School Improvement

As Hanson emphasizes to district and school staff, “It’s always about everything, but not with equal focus and intensity.” He likes to use an anecdote about his three children, explaining that he cares equally about all of them and their well-being and success, but at any given moment he may be focusing on one child’s pressing academic, social and emotional, or health and safety needs. For example, if one child falls on the playground and breaks her arm, his immediate focus will be on taking her to the hospital. Or if another child has a big exam coming up, his focus might be on helping that child to prepare. Central to this anecdote is that (1) he has a clear idea of the end goal for his children and (2) he has the capacity to identify and address their specific, time-sensitive needs. Staff interviewed for this book were familiar with the “it’s always about everything” saying, and they had mixed reactions to it. One principal offered an interpretation:

It’s like the cockpit in an airplane. You see all these gauges and everything. The pilot can’t look at all those gauges all the time. You look at what you need to look at to get to your destination. The destination’s fixed. How you get there can vary based on contextual variables of the flight.

Hanson says that staff members often focus “before the comma,” while he tries to focus his conversations and work “after the comma.” One principal reflected on the challenge before the comma, noting, “If you have too many priorities, you have none.” The problem is information and attention overload. As the Equity and Access work has grown in the district, the Beta Tool has also grown to what school-level staff consistently described as an overwhelming number of indicators. Emerging work between the Equity and Access team, instructional superintendents, and school principals hinges on building staff capacity to manage the tension “before” and “after” the comma. This includes maintaining a focus on overall continuous improvement of student opportunities and outcomes while also creating and implementing processes of ongoing review that focus attention on particular decisions, practices, and outcomes at relevant points throughout the year.

Improving A–G completion rates is a “litmus test” indicator of the Equity and Access guiding principle, but starting earlier than high school and improving school-level practices beyond counseling and social-emotional support services are both critical for improving students’ opportunities and outcomes. As described in Chapter 2, FUSD serves a highly disadvantaged student population with persistently low academic performance, and dramatic and

“It’s always about everything, but not with equal focus and intensity.”

Michael E. Hanson, Superintendent,
Fresno Unified School District

“If you have too many priorities, you have none.”

Principal,
Fresno Unified School
District

lasting improvements in students' lives can only come about through broad and deep systemic change. At this juncture, the district faces several major remaining challenges to integrate the Equity and Access work deeply throughout the system: (1) building staff capacity to use data in an ongoing review process, (2) creating a culture of continuous improvement, (3) improving classroom instruction, and (4) improving students' academic performance.

The Equity and Access unit's efforts described in the previous chapters demonstrate the potential of creating indicators to provide timely and actionable information to improve school, district, and IHE practices through ongoing review processes. Within FUSD, the Equity and Access partnerships with the CCR Department and DPI (and other district departments, to a more limited degree) have created a core group of district-level staff who have begun using data systematically to create more equitable access to opportunities and services for students. But the Beta Tool and Equity and Access work is only beginning to make an impact at the level of school-based practices beyond those of high school counselors and, to a more limited degree, social and emotional support staff. Hanson explained,

A–G, attendance, expulsion, things like that had started to be created and started to be used in a cycle of review way—we were trying to grapple with, “How do we get the schools to own the data and start to look at it with regularity, and in an improvement process way?” There is no other way to achieve our guiding principle other than improving classroom teaching. We're going to have to struggle very diligently to improve our capacity to deliver supports for kids in an academic environment in real time.

This chapter describes the work in progress in FUSD to move school site planning toward a culture of continuous review and improvement. It also explores remaining questions about how and to what extent the Equity and Access work will alter principal and teacher practice.

Providing More Information to Schools in Site Planning

The Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) is a mandated, annual process for all public schools in California that receive state and federal funds through the Consolidated Application and Reporting System (CARS) and Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Program Improvement funds. According to the California Department of Education (CDE), “The purpose of the SPSA is to coordinate all educational services at the school.” In its *Guide for Developing the Single Plan for Student Achievement*, CDE also states, “The SPSA is a blueprint to improve the academic performance of all students.”³⁰ The SPSA requires schools to specify their goals, strategies, and resource allocation. School principals prepare and submit the SPSA in the spring of each school year in preparation for the next school year.

The SQII accountability framework and LCFF policy, both described in Chapter 2, presented an opportunity to integrate the Equity and Access indicators and tools and bring them to the school level, districtwide through the SPSA. As the CAO explained, “The SQII brought clarity and focus to the Beta Tool.” The SQII has explicit domains—academic performance, academic growth, social-emotional, and school climate—and each CORE district has flexibility to determine the indicators it will use for accountability purposes under each domain. Since the Equity and Access team has developed such a rich set of indicators, the district has relied on the Beta Tool and guidance from Equity and Access staff to determine the indicators to include under each of the SQII domains. In addition, LCFF requirements underscore the need to examine subgroup inequities and create school plans and allocate resources to meet the needs of all students. The SPSA offered a mechanism through which to align SQII domains and Equity and Access indicators with school goals, strategies, and resources.

In the 2014–15 school year, FUSD created a school-level SQII process and revised SPSA form to align it with the school SQII. The district rolled out the new tools to all district schools in the SPSA planning process, marking the first time that schools throughout the K12 system were directly engaged in this work. All principals were required to select at least three indicators in the SQII (supplied by the Beta Tool) as their goals for the upcoming year and to demonstrate how they were aligning strategies and resources to achieve those goals.

The School SQII Tool, developed by the Equity and Access team, provides information to all principals about the school’s performance on indicators in each of the five SQII domains and includes color-coded rankings on each indicator so that principals can see their areas of relative strength (green) and weakness (red) compared to other schools in the district. The SQII tool also indicates the 10 indicators on which the school performs in the bottom of district schools. This pilot ranking system was intended to help principals use data to select their goals, highlighting areas of low performance for schools to focus on improving. The School SQII Tool also allows principals to dig deeper into the data and examine disparities at their school site between student subgroups on each indicator.

The SPSA Check and Balance Tool is a back-end mechanism for instructional superintendents to use to inform their conversations with principals and for Equity and Access staff to use in their analysis of schools’ plans. The “validation notes” section of the tool provides an opportunity for staff from state and federal programs, Equity and Access, and supervisors of schools to record any concerns or questions about principals’ selected goals, focusing respectively on compliance, equity, and knowledge of schools’ strengths and needs. As Exhibit 12 shows, some schools selected goals in areas in which they perform relatively well. Instructional superintendents and Equity and Access staff emphasized that principals may have valid reasons for focusing on improvement in areas in which they have already achieved some success, but the process is intended to facilitate meaningful conversations about school priorities and strategies for improvement.

Exhibit 12. SPSA Check and Balance Tool for Instructional Superintendents and Equity and Access Staff

SPSA Check and Balance Tool

User Guide | SPSA 2015-16 Template | SQII/SPSA/LCAP CCI Graphic | Summary Report | SPSA School Report

SCHOOL: BY SUPERVISOR:

This entry has been completed by on 03/16/2015

Missing Target	Target Is flat or declining	Indicators match bottom half	Indicators match bottom quarter
0/7	0.00%	5/7 71.43%	4/7 57.14%
		3/7	42.86%

Section A

A.1 Academic Domain

BOTTOM 10 INDICATORS INFORMATION

ID	Description
4072	Number and percentage of TK-12th grade African American students who are not at grade level - Grade Level Source
4062	Number and percentage of African American 2nd-12th grades students scoring moderately or significantly below on the most recent DRP assessment
2139	Number and percentage of students scoring at/above Common Core Reading level on the Fall DRP
4036	Number and percentage of 5th-6th grade students meeting only the EIS at-risk academic criteria (red zone) and met the EIS at-risk academic criteria (red zone) in the previous year
4008	Number and percentage of students with a D/F in semester 1 in their current reading or ELA class
3899	Number and percentage of TK-12th grade students who are one grade level below - Grade Level Source
3898	Number and percentage of TK-12th grade students who are at grade level - Grade Level Source
3988	Number and percentage of TK-3rd grade students who are at grade level - Grade Level Source
2163	Number and percentage of students scoring significantly below the Common Core Reading level on the Fall DRP
4019	Number and percentage of English Learner students who declined on the most recent ELDA

Indicator ID	Description	Rank	Current School
2139	Number and percentage of students scoring at/above Common Core Reading level on the Fall DRP 30 / 416	65 / 67	7.21 %
4017	Number and percentage of Kindergarten students who demonstrated ELA growth on the most recent KAIG ELA assessment 81 / 81	1 / 64	100 %
3985	Number and percentage of 1st grade students who demonstrated growth on the most recent BAS 73 / 78	19 / 64	93.59 %
0		0 / 0	0 %
0		0 / 0	0 %

Indicators match top half		Indicators match top quarter	
3 / 7	42.86%	1 / 7	14.29%

		POTENTIAL SCHOOL PAIRING	
Rank	Current	Indicator	School
65/67	90.91	0	Please select school
65/67	100	0	Please select school
65/67	7.21	0	Please select school
63/67	88.89	0	Please select school
61/67	37.61		
61/68	30.22		
61/68	14.72		
58/66	18.11		
57/67	73.32		
55/67	50		

Save

Target	Segment Avg (i.e. HS,MS,ES)	Exception
28	18.84	<input type="checkbox"/>
80	96.28	<input type="checkbox"/>
80	87.94	<input type="checkbox"/>
65	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
0	0	<input type="checkbox"/>

STATE & FEDERAL VALIDATION NOTES

Goal #4 - No indicator - All grade levels - math assessment

Completed by

on 04/08/2015

EQUITY & ACCESS VALIDATION NOTES

1) Concern about the selection of indicators 4017 and 3985; is performing better than other sites and so this does not seem to be an urgent need.

Completed by

on 05/12/2015

SUPERVISOR OF SCHOOLS VALIDATION NOTES

Completed by

on

Approved by on

The district revised and simplified the SPSA form by putting the indicators and actions (Section A) and resource allocation (Section B) all onto one overview page and aligning indicators with the SQII. As Katie Russell, the lead supervisor of schools (SOS), described,

On the very top of the page, you see this alignment between an indicator that shows where your students are performing, what action you're going to take based on the data, what professional learning needs to be done, and then the allocation of resources. The ability to see that all on one page has been one of the best additions to our new SPSA template, and we've gotten great feedback from the principals.

Instructional superintendents provided intensive supports to school principals to complete the planning process and new SPSA in 2015. They met several times with each principal on their caseload to discuss the rationale behind the new SPSA process and to provide feedback after principals drafted each section of the SPSA form. The instructional superintendents also met regularly with one another throughout the planning period to discuss questions they were receiving from principals and patterns they observed in principals' draft SPSA sections so that they could formulate consistent questions and answers to provide to the principals. They reviewed the draft sections to see whether principals were prioritizing areas that the Equity and Access tools indicated were areas of need for the school, whether the principals had aligned their indicators with district priorities, and whether they had aligned strategies and professional learning with their selected indicators. As Russell described,

We'd have conversations. What made you choose that indicator? What other supporting indicators might you consider to monitor to help move that driving indicator? Those are a few examples of questions that we may ask. Then after our feedback conversation with the principal, we would give them a week or so to act on that feedback and then our team would review their revised plan. If needed, we would go back to that principal and provide them some additional clarity to make adjustments to their plan. It really takes probing questions because you could be green in an indicator and they really still do need to focus on it. If we saw another indicator that in our mind they should be looking at, we would pose questions around that. It's about empowering principals to be able to see it themselves. I would say we're in the process. We're still learning how to navigate it with 106 principals to have those quality conversations.

The CAO (Mecum) emphasized that providing support to principals is an important part of their learning and capacity building:

The way it's rolled out and the types of questions that you're entering and asking, together in partnership, being side by side with the information and the struggles, I think that matters a great deal. I think a lot of people just aren't patient enough to understand what it takes for adults to learn, just like for kids. I think the analytical understanding and really getting into deep strategies, we're going to have to really do more work on that piece.

Building Principal Capacity to Use Data in an Ongoing Review Process

In 2014–15, all district principals used the Equity and Access indicators to complete the revised SPSA. The short-term purpose of this process was to provide supports for school administrators to use data to inform their site planning decisions, but the longer-term goal is to create a culture of continuous improvement by getting principals to use the SPSA and the SQII indicators in an ongoing review process to ask and answer their questions, to make decisions, and to change practices to improve students' opportunities and outcomes.

SPSA has traditionally been perceived as a compliance document, and district officials recognized that it is a major shift to get principals to “own it” and “live it.” The district has invested resources in creating accountable communities (professional learning communities) to build in structured time during the school day for teachers and administrators to meet to discuss data and how to use the multiple measures available to them to guide their instruction and school practices. District officials emphasized that the habit of using data regularly to inform site discussions is a work in progress with the revised SPSA process and School SQII Tool. Russell said,

What really needs to happen at the site is really knowing what your data is saying, what is the professional learning to support that, what's the allocation of resources to support that. Having that in alignment and having discussions about that is a big change in our system.

Although the district has not yet linked SQII and SPSA to principal and teacher evaluation, that linkage is in the works, and fear of increased use of school performance indicators for principal evaluation and accountability has made some principals hesitant about the revised SPSA process. As one principal said,

The biggest success is that it forces a very detailed conversation and a very purposeful conversation. It makes us think about all kids. It makes us strategize for all. It creates accountability around all. The challenge is how do we grow a culture that's truly just about kids and what's good for kids and not solely around data and accountability? Because I think if we just talk data, it limits people's thinking and their willingness to try things.

Mecum recognized, "I don't think you'd find anybody who disagrees with the theory of action in the CORE waiver, but when you get into student data connected to adult performance, fear starts to set in. What does all this data mean? Look at all these indicators. Is this going to affect my job?" Russell also acknowledged,

If this tool is used as an accountability measure of whether you're doing a good job or not and it could be tied to your performance, that's different from a tool that's driving you to make decisions that sometimes go well and sometimes don't. You learn from it and you move on. We have to be able to find what that balance is.

One of the ways the Equity and Access team is trying to help principals use the SPSA to inform their practice is to identify promising instructional and professional development strategies. In 2015–16, the Equity and Access team is analyzing patterns between selected indicators, resource allocation, and student outcomes to share instructional and professional development strategies that are associated with substantial student outcome gains with principals across the district. The aim is not to be prescriptive in requiring schools that want to improve student literacy, for example, to implement a certain reading program. But the Equity and Access team, CAO, lead SOS, and instructional superintendents all hope that providing data about strategies that have worked in some schools will serve as a conversation starter for principals, demonstrating the potential of data for informing school practice and improvement, and using peers as resources in a continuous improvement culture.

The anticipated by-product of these peer conversations and support from the instructional superintendents is that principals will be able to articulate a clear rationale on how their SPSA will meet schools' and students' greatest needs, and they will use the SPSA as a process to monitor student outcomes and adjust strategies as necessary. The district is developing the processes to use the rich Equity and Access data set and Beta Tool to help create a culture of ongoing review at the school level, focused on the equity of students' opportunities to improve student outcomes.

However, the two major district challenges—creating a culture of continuous improvement and improving student performance—are connected but distinct. Several district officials noted the importance of improving instruction; as one official said, “The biggest barrier to district improvement is quality instruction.” Aguilar reflected, “Equity and Access is basically systems of support that can respond to the needs of students outside of instruction. I don’t believe that’s what Equity and Access should be limited to.” But questions remain about what exactly the Equity and Access unit can achieve to change school- and classroom-level practice and, ultimately, improve student academic performance.

Summary

A–G completion is the “litmus test” of the Equity and Access guiding principle, but changing school-level practice and creating a school-level culture of continuous improvement are essential for overall district improvement. In 2014–15, the district provided all school principals with Equity and Access data in the School SQII to inform their site planning. FUSD used the mandated SPSA process to facilitate widespread use of the Beta Tool, and instructional superintendents provided intensive supports to principals to help them to understand and use the data in the tool. The long-term goal is to create an ongoing review process of using data to guide continuous improvement and a focus on remediating inequities at schools across the district, but this is nascent work. Building a continuous improvement culture and improving students’ academic performance are major remaining areas of ongoing work in the district, and the Equity and Access role in both is still being developed at the school level.

Chapter 6. Learning From Fresno’s Equity and Access Partnership

The Equity and Access work in FUSD is an “n of 1” experiment that has occurred in a particular context, at a particular point in time, and it is important to emphasize that any interested district or IHE would need to adapt Fresno’s approach and tools to their own local context—including their own history, capacity, resources, and needs. Nonetheless, several lessons from FUSD may apply to other districts and IHEs interested in reducing opportunity and outcome gaps for students.

Lessons Learned From Fresno

As Fresno’s Equity and Access unit and its work across the district and with IHE partners have evolved and expanded, several key lessons have emerged. These lessons are already informing FUSD’s own improvement efforts and may be instructive for others to consider in their own contexts.

Lesson 1. Senior leadership commitment from all partner institutions is key to initiating and sustaining an equity and access focus.

Commitment from the FUSD Superintendent and Board and from the UC Merced Chancellor—the senior leadership at each institution—has been an essential component of this partnership, providing credibility, authority, and focus to the Equity and Access effort. At FUSD, Hanson made this work a priority by creating an Equity and Access unit led by Aguilar as Associate Superintendent for Equity and Access and Special Assistant to the Superintendent. This cabinet-level position allows Aguilar to keep equity and access on the superintendent’s radar and provides the Equity and Access team with authority from the superintendent to identify and help remediate inequities within the district and in students’ access to higher education. District and IHE staff agreed that support from top administration has been critical in facilitating any impact the Equity and Access team has been able to achieve.

This facilitating condition has been enhanced by the unusual degree of stability among FUSD central office leadership. Hanson has served as Superintendent since 2005, much longer than is typical for urban superintendents.³¹ Moreover, the Board has unanimously voted to renew Hanson’s contract, demonstrating their shared commitment to the Equity and Access work and to

the long-term continuous improvement journey in the district. Aguilar has been with UC Merced since 1998 and in his Equity and Access position since 2009. Quinto (Chief Financial Officer), Mecum (Human and Labor Relations and now Chief Academic Officer), and Harris (Accountability and Improvement) have all served on the executive team throughout Hanson's tenure. As described earlier, FUSD started the Equity and Access unit in an economic downturn, in a fiscally unstable and functionally disorganized school district, in the middle of a grading scandal. The district has sustained this work through the implementation of the CORE waiver, LCFE, Common Core State Standards, and a new state standardized assessment. Maintaining and expanding the Equity and Access focus and dedicated unit for more than six years throughout all of these changes demonstrates the commitment Hanson, Aguilar, and the district have made to this work.

At UC Merced, the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and the Associate Vice Chancellor created the Center for Educational Partnerships with an explicit focus on developing K12 partnerships to improve postsecondary access for students in the Central Valley. Similarly, as IHE partnerships with Fresno State and State Center Community College District (including Fresno City College) have been developed, senior leadership commitment at each institution has been critical in starting, sustaining, and expanding this work.

Lesson 2. An explicit guiding principle serves as a constant reminder to all staff about the purpose of the Equity and Access work.

In FUSD, the guiding principle of the Equity and Access unit is “to provide all students with the opportunity to graduate with the greatest number of postsecondary choices from the widest array of options.” That the guiding principle goes beyond high school graduation to claim responsibility for providing students with options after high school has reportedly been central to the success of this work. District staff consistently stated versions of the following sentiment: “Postsecondary education, the military, working are all okay, but we want each student to have *all* of those options. The system shouldn't limit students' options.” The guiding principle drives the work of the Equity and Access unit, has remained consistent over time, and is ingrained in the beliefs and language of those who have worked with the Equity and Access team across the district and at the partner IHEs.

Lesson 3. A robust district data system with indicators that are timely, actionable, and relevant can guide organizational decisions and staff practices.

In an ongoing review process, staff must identify their areas of strength and need, be able to ask relevant questions, and have the data to answer those questions in order to make decisions that guide improvement. To this end, the key features of FUSD’s Beta Tool are as follows:

- ***Indicators go beyond those typically required for K12 accountability purposes, and new indicators are created as needed.*** Most district data systems and early warning systems make meaning of existing measures such as attendance, suspensions, course taking, course grades, standardized exam scores, and graduation rates that are required to be reported for various accountability purposes. The Beta Tool creates new indicators, including measures of student performance, student procedures, and staff practices that derive directly from users of the data.
- ***Indicators and tools are developed in partnership with district staff.*** Equity and Access and district staff work together closely in an iterative process to interpret existing data and create new indicators as needed to address staff questions, guide practices, and allow ongoing monitoring of staff practices and student performance.
- ***Data are updated as frequently as possible, with as much automation as possible.*** The timeliness of the data allows staff to “change conditions in the present” for students. Data are as real-time as possible, and their automated entry into the Beta Tool allows staff to focus on using information to improve their practice instead of wasting valuable time collecting and manually entering data. Although some manual entry is still required, basic information available from the district or IHE partners updates automatically in the Beta Tool, allowing staff to delve deeper into examining and addressing students’ needs and progress.
- ***Data are easily accessible in various tools and formats.*** FUSD’s Equity and Access team has created user-friendly data tools tailored to the work of particular district staff. The most notable examples are the counselor tools that focus on A–G completion and the college application process. The tools highlight indicators selected as the most relevant for the user, helping to restrict the overall number of indicators to allow staff to use the data meaningfully. The Beta Tool also has searchable queries, filters, and reporting features that allow staff to pose and respond to questions at various levels of aggregation (e.g., individual students, grade levels, schools) and detail (e.g., overall GPA, A–G GPA, A–G course completion by subject area).

Lesson 4. Implementing a process of ongoing review and creating a culture of continuous improvement is a long-term endeavor.

With a robust data system, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by all the available information. It is thus important to create processes and systems to help staff focus their attention on strategically important questions and to use data wisely to improve their work. Members of the Equity and Access team have partnered with district and IHE staff to build the individual and organizational capacity needed to implement processes of ongoing review that can inform relevant decisions, improve practice, and advance the equity and access agenda.

The guidance counselor work is the most concrete example of how Equity and Access has established expectations for what indicators to look at, when to look at them, and what actions to take based on the resulting information. Other district departments have made progress but face challenges in creating indicators that accurately capture their work. The Equity and Access team has regular meetings with staff in various district departments to understand what they do and collectively strategize about what indicators are needed to better serve students. These conversations focus on improving the equity of students' opportunities as a means to improve student outcomes as well as on creating data systems and structures that help—rather than hinder—the daily work of staff throughout the district.

Those who have worked most closely with the Equity and Access team have gone through the iterative process of (1) identifying and creating performance indicators (e.g., on-track for A–G completion), (2) establishing procedure indicators to track students' completion of various time-sensitive tasks (e.g., summer school registration for students off-track in an A–G subject course), and (3) using performance and procedure indicators in an ongoing review process to address important questions, identify problems, and guide staff decisions and practices. Although some departments and areas of work have made significant strides toward developing a culture of continuous improvement focused on equity and access, others are just beginning this shift. Moreover, these processes and capacities are still developing for school principals and the instructional superintendents who support them. Individual comfort with navigating the School SQII Tool and interpreting the available data varies widely. It will take time and multiple iterations to develop and instantiate robust tools and the processes to support them across the district. Patience and persistence are thus critical to the success of this work.

Remaining Challenges in FUSD

The above lessons provide insights into what has worked and what has sustained the Equity and Access focus in FUSD over time, but it is equally important to learn from FUSD's challenges. There are several areas of tension and remaining questions for FUSD to address in its Equity and Access work across the district.

Building Data Literacy and Managing Information Overload

The Equity and Access team has built a robust data tool and accompanying processes to help staff in certain district departments use that data meaningfully and regularly to guide their practice. Equity and Access staff work closely with staff in various areas of district operations and with IHE partners to build data literacy for staff to identify relevant existing indicators, create new ones where needed, and implement systems to use data to monitor changes in staff practices and student progress. Equity and Access staff collaborate closely with district and IHE administrators to build indicators and tools that meet staff needs, but this work has been in continuous “build” mode over time, resulting in a massive Beta Tool with estimates ranging from several hundred to several thousand total indicators. Individual access is limited to the specific tools and indicators most relevant to their role (e.g., counselors use the A–G Tool and Student Profile Tool), and the Equity and Access team supports staff in understanding and building their capacity to use these role-specific tools. However, the challenge of information overload persists. This challenge suggests the following questions for the district to consider as it continues to expand and deepen its improvement efforts:

- What amount of information in data systems and tools is sufficient and necessary to inform decision making and practice?
- Who should define priority indicators, how many should there be, and how standardized or flexible should they be?
- For time-dependent indicators, what is the best way to help staff examine specific indicators at certain points throughout the year?

Creating a Cohesive Data System

School-level staff in the district expressed frustration about the time and mental energy required to work across two data systems—the district’s student information system and the Equity and Access Beta Tool. Staff from the Equity and Access; Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (REA); and Information Technology (IT) units also raised challenges in their respective and joint work, including defining and communicating about their roles, aligning processes to meet their respective responsibilities, and fulfilling various requests from school and district staff.

- What components of the Beta Tool should and will be integrated into the district’s student information system, when, and by whom? Specifically, how or should data from IHE partners be integrated into the district system?
- What are the data responsibilities of each district unit (Equity and Access, REA, and IT), and how are these responsibilities communicated to central office and school staff?
- Whose long-term responsibility will it be to update and maintain the Beta Tool?

Getting to Quality

One district official described the Equity and Access team’s success so far as “picking the low-hanging fruit of increasing opportunities,” and several district staff members cautioned that the remaining work of improving *quality* across the district system—of staff practices, instruction, support service provision, and student learning—was both more difficult and more important. This raises the overarching question of defining parameters of the Equity and Access unit’s work. Specifically:

- What is the unit’s role in helping to develop quantitative and qualitative measures of student performance, student procedures, and staff practice across different areas of district work?
- What is the role of Equity and Access in improving specific school-level practices—school data use, student support services, and classroom instruction?
- What actions are necessary to address remaining patterns of students being given access to opportunities (e.g., take trigonometry in 11th grade) and demonstrating success on district metrics (e.g., earn a grade of C or better, complete A–G requirements) but not meeting external academic performance standards (e.g., do not earn a college-ready score on the CSU Early Assessment Program mathematics exam)?

Balancing Professional Autonomy, Improvement, and Accountability

Every group of staff that has collaborated with the Equity and Access unit—from counselors, to IHE partners, to social and emotional services support staff, to school principals—has navigated the balance between using professional judgment and using more standardized data tools and processes to make decisions and guide practice.

- What is the right balance between professional autonomy and the efficiency and effectiveness that the tool can create?
- What is the right balance between using data in a continuous improvement process and using data for purposes of accountability or individual evaluation?

Sustaining Leadership Commitment

Sustained leadership commitment has been essential to the Equity and Access efforts and progress. Many district and IHE staff members recognized Hanson and Aguilar’s longevity in the district and worried how the work might change or whether it would continue if the partnership were to end or one of these leaders were to leave. Both Hanson and Aguilar expressed confidence that Equity and Access had enough traction in the district to persist, although it would change with different individuals at the helm. As Hanson stated,

If we both left tomorrow, I would anticipate that there would be a relaxing in the rubber band, so to speak, in a short amount of time. Then, any number of people doing the work, from principal, to teacher, to central office would go, “Oh my God. This is the work we need to be doing. Where are those tools? Let’s pick ‘em up and go.” I think we’ve been building a strong group of folks. True, nobody is Jorge, but I don’t think Jorge when we started this really had exactly what we’re doing right now in his mind’s eye either. I mean, sometimes you just recognize that what you’re doing is new, and different, and worthwhile, and helpful, and great. And so you keep doing it. Just like if I left, people—there would be a hiccup for about a day. [Chuckles] I think we’ve been at it long enough where people would know what to do. It would be maybe different, but it would maintain.

Founding Vice Chancellor Lawrence also explained UC Merced’s ongoing commitment: “I think it will be sustainable as long as there are leaders at the Center [CEP] who understand that the purpose of the Center is to provide opportunity to students of the Valley. Everybody on campus understands that this is really critical. It’s critical for our state.”

As Hanson said, the district and UC Merced have invested in developing a strong team of staff in the Equity and Access unit. In addition, creating explicit processes such as the counselor calendar (Appendix A) and summer school course registration processes (Appendix B) and creating staff practice indicators in the Beta Tool have created institutional memory and organizational capacity for instantiating Equity and Access data into the regular work of district, school, and IHE staff.

Considerations for Other Districts and IHEs

Hanson and Aguilar describe their joint work as something that has been developed with public dollars to serve the public good. The hope is that others will learn from and be inspired by this work and its potential for reducing inequalities in the opportunities that students have to succeed in school and life beyond high school graduation. But context matters. We have learned from decades of research on implementation that you cannot just pick up practices and processes developed in one context, plunk them down in another, and expect them to take root. Indeed, when the Equity and Access team expanded their work beyond high school counselors and began to apply the Beta Tool and processes with other district departments, they found that context matters even within a single district. It will, therefore, be important for districts and their partners who are interested in using and adapting Fresno’s Equity and Access approach and tools to consider the following issues and questions:

Student Performance

- What is the current status of your district or IHE performance?
- What is overall and student subgroup performance, and where are areas of greatest disparity?
- Which indicators are high priorities for the system or institution?

Data Infrastructure

- What data systems and tools are already in place?
- What indicators of student performance, student procedures, and staff practices currently exist?
- What elements of the existing systems can be used to support equity and improvement, and what needs to be created or refined?
- What resources are required, and who will do this work?

Organizational Processes and Culture

- Does the institution have processes of ongoing review and a culture of continuous improvement?
- What processes are needed to facilitate the regular use of data in ongoing discussions about practices and performance?
- How nimble is the institution about changing practices “in the present” to improve students’ opportunities?

A Note on IHE Data and Partnerships

With specific regard to IHE data, FUSD benefits from its geographic proximity to one IHE in each sector—UC Merced (approximately 60 miles from Fresno), Fresno State, and Fresno City College. FUSD graduates predominantly attend Fresno State and Fresno City College, so data agreements with these three IHEs are largely sufficient for supporting district students in the college application and matriculation process. The agreement with UC Merced does not fully capture FUSD students’ UC enrollment because students’ enrollment is more dispersed across the UC system campuses, and, of course, some students choose to attend CSU and community college and private IHEs that are not captured in FUSD’s data agreements and partnerships.

In districts with more or fewer local IHE options, in which college attendance is not as concentrated among a few IHEs as it is in FUSD, and in districts that are not as large as Fresno, establishing partnerships with individual IHEs can be a challenge. Ultimately, the inefficiency of establishing and sustaining individual district-IHE data-sharing agreements and the lack of full coverage for any district warrants a larger discussion about the potential and need for an aligned K12-IHE data system in the state.

The FUSD-IHE partnerships illustrate the promise of cross-sector work for improving students’ opportunities and outcomes. The district’s commitment to supporting its students “while they are in our care” and the IHE changes in practice to support students in navigating the postsecondary transition have the potential to improve students’ college preparation, applications, enrollment, persistence, and success.

Leadership Commitment

- Is senior leadership committed to equity and improvement, or would it be helpful to create a position or team specifically devoted to this work?
- Is there an articulated overarching goal or guiding principle to sustain a focus on equity?

Governance Structure

- What is the institution's governance structure?
- Who will be key players in and champions of this work?
- What are leverage points or opportunities for this work?
- Does the institution have a theory of action or strategic plan about how the system can and should change to reduce inequities and improve student outcomes?

Conclusion

FUSD is challenged by high levels of poverty and persistent low performance, but the district has made major improvements in students' college readiness and access to higher education. It has made these gains through strong commitment of senior leadership at the district and its IHE partners, a robust district data system with timely student performance and procedure indicators and user-friendly tools, and processes of ongoing review in an emerging culture of continuous improvement. The combination of data and strategic processes for their use has demonstrated promise for changing staff practices and improving the equity of students' opportunities. An important element of the change strategy in Fresno has been the way that they have created opportunities out of existing structures and conditions, including making use of a major grading scandal to establish the foundation for this work.

The Equity and Access work has not progressed in a linear fashion. Rather, the district has leveraged successes in the area of postsecondary preparation with high school counselors and its IHE partners to propel broader and deeper work across the district and with IHEs. Many challenges remain, and FUSD staff members consistently emphasized that the Equity and Access work is a continuous improvement journey. Still, the district's journey, in partnership with local IHEs, provides important lessons for future actions in Fresno and for other districts and IHEs. Among these are the need to begin the work with a steadfast and long-term commitment and the need to focus on changing conditions for individual students in the present while developing systemic capacity to improve all students' opportunities and outcomes into the future.

Appendix A. Counselor Calendar: FUSD 2014–15

10th- and 12th-Grade College Readiness Deadlines

10 th Grade
12 th Grade
10 th /12 th Grade
Enrichment Conferences

2014-2015 FUSD CCR 10th/12th Grade Comprehensive Student Services Deadlines

AUGUST	Timeline	Deadline	SEPTEMBER	Timeline	Deadline
1. ACT Reg Deadline for Sept 13th Test Date		8/8/2014	1. College Fair	8/19/2014	9/12/2014
2. Fall Schedule/Transcript Review	8/4/2014	8/15/2014	2. At Risk Student Conference	8/30/2014	9/12/2014
3. Credit Recovery (Fresno Adult School)	8/18/2014	8/27/2014	3. Graduation Status Tool	9/4/2014	9/12/2014
4. A-G Course Enrollment	8/18/2014	8/29/2014	4. ACT Reg Deadline for Oct 25 th Test Date	8/18/2014	9/19/2014
5. Credit Recovery Referrals	8/18/2014	8/29/2014	5. Advanced ELA/Math Opt-outs and Changes	9/5/2014	9/26/2014
6. At Risk Student Conference	8/18/2014	8/29/2014	6. Senior Conference/Presentation	9/15/2014	9/26/2014
7. FAS Registration, Phone Call	8/18/2014	8/29/2014	7. PSAT Orientation/Registration	9/8/2014	9/26/2014
			8. Credit Recovery Referrals (On-Site)	8/18/2014	9/26/2014
			9. Accelerated Course Retention (Gate/Honors/AP)	8/5/2014	9/27/2014
			10. Senior Letter	8/19/2014	9/30/2014
			11. At Risk Student/Parent Conference	9/13/2014	9/30/2014
			12. Questbridge Application Workshop		9/30/2014
OCTOBER	Timeline	Deadline	NOVEMBER	Timeline	Deadline
1. University System Presentation		10/4/2014	1. Grad Status Update		11/1/2014
2. PSAT Administration		10/8/2014	2. Common Application Workshop		11/1/2014
3. Senior Post-Secondary Enrichment Workshop	9/13/2014	10/11/2014	2. UC Personal Statement Workshop		11/1/2014
4. Senior Parent Night	8/25/2014	10/17/2014	3. AB 1802 Student/Parent Conference	8/26/2014	11/7/2014
5. Financial Literacy Workshop: FAFSA Basics	9/15/2014	10/24/2014	4. ACT Reg Deadline for Dec 13 th Test Date	9/22/2014	11/7/2014
6. Financial Literacy Workshop: Grants	9/15/2014	10/24/2014	5. University System Presentation	9/22/2014	11/7/2014
7. Financial Literacy Workshop: Scholarships	9/15/2014	10/24/2014	6. At Risk Student Contact (Phone or 1-on-1 Meeting)	10/13/2014	11/14/2014
8. UC Personal Statement Workshop	10/1/2014	10/31/2014	6. Quarter 2 Phone/1-on-1 Meeting	10/1/2014	11/14/2014
			6. CSU Application Submission	10/1/2014	11/30/2014
			7. UC Application Submission	10/1/2014	11/30/2014
			8. Credit Recovery (Fresno Adult School)		11/30/2014
DECEMBER	Timeline	Deadline	JANUARY	Timeline	Deadline
1. FCC Honors Program		12/12/2014	1. Spring Schedule Review	12/29/2014	1/9/2015
2. Smittcamp Application Workshop	10/1/2014	12/14/2014	2. EPT/ELM Registration	1/12/2015	1/20/2015
3. 10 th Presentation (AG/Graduation/CAHSEE)	10/13/2014	12/16/2014	3. Si Se Puede Conference Recruitment		1/22/2015
4. College/Career Fair	9/12/2014	12/16/2014	4. Schedule/Transcript Review	1/12/2015	1/23/2015
5. HS Module		12/16/2014	5. Credit Recovery Referrals (Onsite)		1/23/2015
6. FAFSA Workshop (Student & Parent)		12/16/2014	6. EPT/ELM Test Prep Registration	1/12/2015	1/30/2015
7. 10 th Conference (On-Track/Subject Borderline)	8/18/2014	12/19/2014	7. Graduation Status Tool	1/12/2015	1/30/2015
8. At-Risk Student/Parent Conferences	9/15/2014	12/19/2014	8. Private College Application Submission	10/1/2015	1/30/2015
9. Fresno Adult School CTE Presentation	10/13/2014	12/19/2014	9. SCCC Application Submission		1/30/2015
10. Seal of Bi-literacy Training	9/8/2014	12/19/2014	10. Letters to all Seniors informing of Graduation Status		1/30/2015
11. NCAA Workshop	9/1/2014	12/19/2014			
12. Classroom Presentation		12/19/2014			
13. ASVAB		12/19/2014			

10th Grade
 12th Grade
 10th/12th Grade
 Enrichment Conferences

2014-2015 FUSD CCR 10th/12th Grade Comprehensive Student Services Deadlines

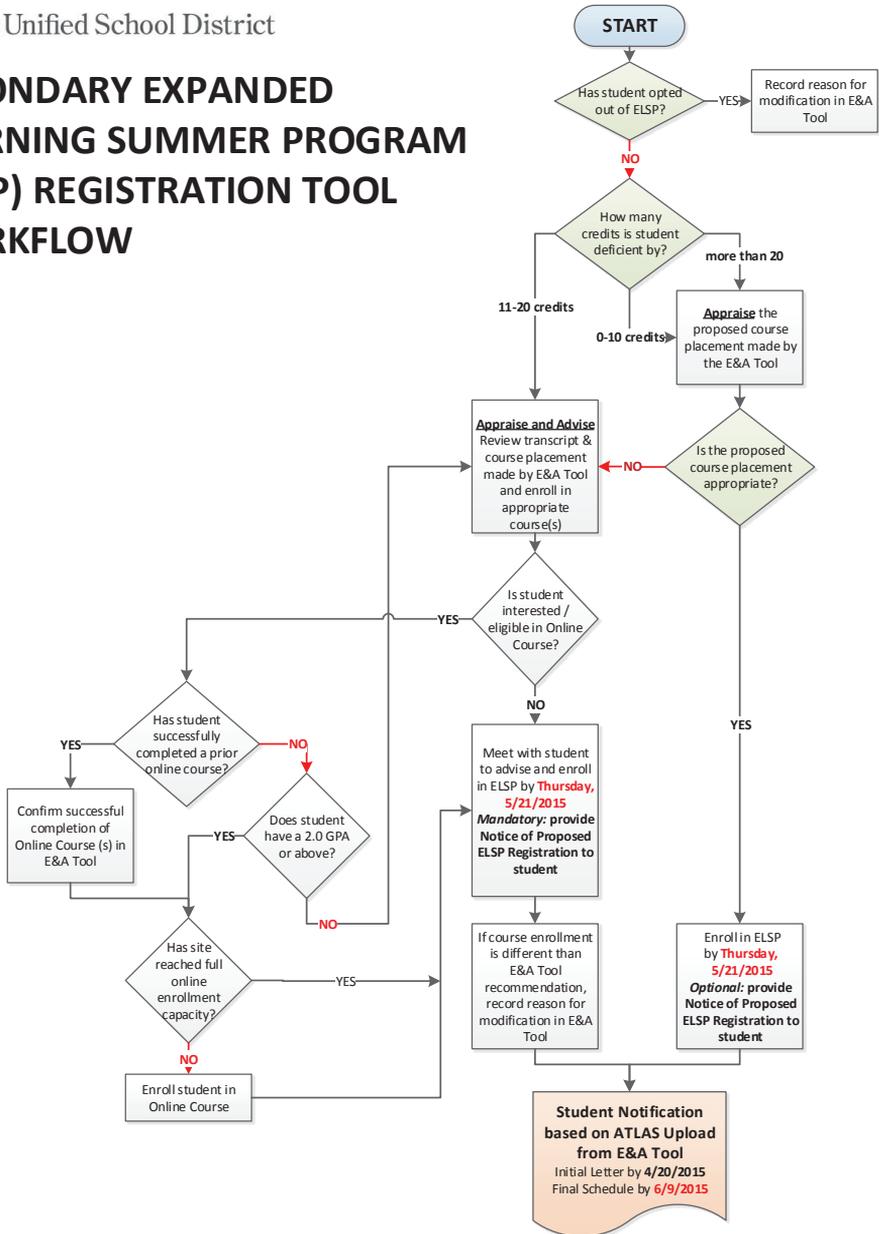
FEBRUARY		Timeline	Deadline	MARCH		Timeline	Deadline
1.	<i>Student FAFSA Application Workshop</i>	1/13/2015	2/1/2015	1.	<i>FAFSA/Dream Act Information Workshop</i>	1/13/2015	3/2/2015
2.	<i>AP Test Pre-Registration Workshop</i>		2/1/2015	2.	<i>Credit Recovery (Fresno Adult School)</i>		3/11/2015
3.	<i>Senior Letter</i>	1/19/2015	2/6/2015	3.	<i>South East Asian Conference</i>		3/15/2015
4.	<i>EPT/ELM Test Prep Registration</i>		2/6/2015	4.	<i>Experience Berkeley</i>		3/27/2015
5.	<i>African American Conference Fresno State</i>	1/13/2015	2/13/2015	5.	<i>Graduation Status Tool</i>		3/27/2015
6.	<i>FAFSA Cash for College Workshop (Parents)</i>	1/1/2015	2/13/2015	6.	<i>PSAT Score Review</i>	3/2/2015	3/27/2015
7.	<i>COSMOS Application Filing Period</i>	1/20/2015	2/20/2015	7.	<i>At-Risk Parent/Student Contact (Letter sent home)</i>	3/2/2015	3/27/2015
8.	<i>Chicano Youth Conference</i>		2/22/2015	8.	<i>Letters to all Seniors with less than 200 HS Credits</i>	11/1/2015	3/27/2015
9.	<i>AP Test Pre-Registration Workshop</i>	1/26/2015	2/27/2015	9.	<i>SCCCD Orientation</i>	11/1/2015	3/31/2015
10.	<i>CART Campus Visit</i>	10/27/2014	2/27/2015	10.	<i>SCCCD Advising</i>	1/12/2015	3/31/2015
11.	<i>CART Registration</i>	1/12/2015	2/27/2015				
12.	<i>One-on-One/Group Contact</i>		2/27/2015				
13.	<i>PSAT Score Review</i>	2/3/2015	2/27/2015				
14.	<i>At Risk Conference</i>		2/27/2015				
15.	<i>SCCCD Orientation</i>	9/1/2014	2/27/2015				
16.	<i>CTE Enrichment Opportunities (CART/ROP)</i>	10/27/2014	2/27/2015				
17.	<i>SCCCD Placement Test</i>	12/1/2014	2/27/2015				
APRIL		Timeline	Deadline	MAY		Timeline	Deadline
1.	<i>3rd Quarter At-Risk Contact-12th</i>	3/23/2015	4/10/2015	1.	<i>Dog Days Registration (CSUF)-12th</i>	3/2/2015	5/1/2015
2.	<i>ROP Registration</i>	4/1/2015	4/24/2015	2.	<i>Transcript Pre-Registration Review</i>	4/7/2015	5/1/2015
3.	<i>ROP Campus Visit (Duncan)</i>	4/1/2015	4/24/2015	3.	<i>Transcript Pre-Registration Workshop</i>	4/7/2015	5/1/2015
4.	<i>Senior Survey</i>	4/1/2015	4/29/2015	4.	<i>Mock Interviews/Resumes-12th</i>	4/7/2015	5/2/2015
				5.	<i>SCCCD Registration-12th</i>	4/8/2015	5/10/2015
				6.	<i>Stars Transfer Conference</i>		5/13/2015
				7.	<i>Coordinate/Monitor Volunteer Opportunities</i>	4/27/2015	5/15/2015
				8.	<i>AP Test Administration-10th /12th</i>	5/4/2015	5/15/2015
				9.	<i>At Risk Parent/Student Conference</i>	3/2/2015	5/22/2015
				10.	<i>AP Parent Night-10th</i>	4/27/2015	5/29/2015
				11.	<i>ELSP Registration-10th /12th</i>	1/21/2015	5/29/2015
				12.	<i>Senior Academic Awards</i>		5/30/2015
				13.	<i>ESLP Enrichment Opportunities</i>	4/27/2015	5/30/2015
JUNE		Timeline	Deadline	JULY		Timeline	Deadline
1.	<i>African American Recognition Ceremony</i>		6/1/2015	1.	<i>Graduation Status Tool</i>	6/23/2015	7/1/2015
2.	<i>Graduation Status Tool</i>	5/26/2015	6/5/2015	2.	<i>Graduation Status Tool</i>	7/16/2015	7/24/2015
3.	<i>Senior Check Out</i>	6/1/2015	6/5/2015				
11.	<i>NCAA Workshop</i>	12/20/2014	6/11/2015				
4.	<i>SPED</i>		6/11/2015				
4.	<i>504 Compliance Meeting</i>	9/1/2014	6/11/2015				
5.	<i>Accelerated Course Retention (Gate/Honors/AP)</i>	4/1/2015	6/20/2015				
5.	<i>AVID Recruitment</i>	8/18/2014	6/11/2015				

Appendix B. FUSD Summer School Registration Workflow Diagram



Fresno Unified School District

SECONDARY EXPANDED LEARNING SUMMER PROGRAM (ELSP) REGISTRATION TOOL WORKFLOW



Appendix C. Technical Requirements for Programmers

Technical Skill Set of Programmers

- Requires strong SQL language skill (either Microsoft SQL, Oracle, or MySQL).
- Good at SQL Database design, modeling SQL data types, and maintaining strong definitions.
- For presenting data in a Web format, it is good to have a programmer who is strong in designing and programming Web interfaces (HTML, CSS, JS, PHP, .NET, Java, and Coldfusion)
- For an interactive Web user interface, it is good to have a programmer who is strong in jQuery library and Javascript language with knowledge of current HTML 5 standards.

Technical Skill Set of Database Administrators (DBAs)

- Requires a strong ability to manage all technical aspects of SQL databases (e.g., design, implementation, and maintenance of SQL Server databases, including security, backup, logging, reporting, and recovery procedures).
- Familiarity with data transformation via standardization, cleaning, data repair, matching, and de-duping.
- Manage data from multiple sources, including internal, external, and third-party data from various student information systems.
- To support the growth of the database, DBAs need to assist in maintaining and improving database operational efficiency and perform all of the upgrades.

Preferred Programming Languages

FUSD staff use Coldfusion, which is well suited for rapid development of Web applications. It is not necessarily preferred, but it definitely has advantages for this kind of work that requires quick turnaround time.

Best Access Points for Student Data

Ideally, good data collection and data governance are priorities. FUSD has the ATLAS team programmers to properly model and collect information. FUSD then queries that data from their servers. The ATLAS team does not have information for everything that FUSD wants to measure, so they create their own data collection tools as needed and distribute them to faculty for data entry. Sometimes, departments have their own data collection tools that are not connected to ATLAS or Equity and Access in any way. In these cases, FUSD sometimes ends up exchanging spreadsheets and manually updating them as needed. This is less than ideal but is sometimes necessary to report on some data points in the short term. Regardless of the source, everything is entered into a Microsoft SQL database for use in the indicator system for reporting.

Best Practices in Quality Control

Having strong data definitions helps to prevent mishandling of the data, which contributes to quality control (QC).

Be very clear about the questions being asked. There is data sourcing and then there is data reporting, which is where the question is. For example, for a suspension indicator, there are several questions: Are you counting completed suspensions or suspension referrals? Are you attributing the suspensions to the student's school of current enrollment or the school of incident? These questions often come up after you report a number, so, as much as possible, you should ask the questions beforehand and be explicit when reporting the data.

Then there is "regular" QC. Generate a number, gut check it, and try to check it against other similar reports. But the previous point bears repeating—do not forget about the question. When you compare your number against other similar reports, it is often the case that those other reports are asking slightly different questions about the data, which means that the data won't be aligned, but if the question is different, then it is not supposed to be aligned. Despite this, people often have a desire to align reports even when the questions are different. It is an exercise in explanation and sometimes in aligning the questions themselves. This problem of alignment is often cast as a QC issue (i.e., these two reports do not agree; therefore, one is wrong). If the questions are different, then the whole comparison is false, but that does not stop people from making the comparison and saying that you are wrong.

Technology/Programming Lessons Learned

It is best to have very few data definitions that are strongly defined so that you can leverage them, and, as much as possible, you should adapt data sources to use the existing definitions rather than creating new definitions. FUSD's data indicators have two definitions:

1. StudentID + School Code. This is 95 percent of the indicators. These indicators mostly aggregate by school code and allow you to drill down to the individual students.
2. Total + School Code. This definition is already aggregated by school code in the query itself. This is for indicators that can only be reported by school and do not have data for individual students. This type is also useful for hard-coded values that come from a report.

For reasons of performance and data consistency, it is important to cache all query results and aggregations and then update that cache on a nightly basis or as needed.

When reporting data points (especially provocative ones), people often want to aggregate the data in various ways to try to better understand it (e.g., student group, grade level, ethnicity, etc.). If you are not careful, you will end up doing a lot of repetitive work, doing similar aggregations for several different data points. This is where having strong data definitions is useful. By having multiple data points under the same strong definition (e.g., StudentID + School Code), you can enable an assortment of analytics layers for that definition to aggregate all such data points in any number of ways. This leverage of the data is very important to enable you to make meaning for people and save yourself a lot of work.

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Jennifer O'Day, Ph.D., is an Institute Fellow at AIR. During the past 25 years, she has carried out research, advised national and state policymakers, and written extensively in the areas of systemic standards-based reform, educational equity, accountability, and capacity-building strategies. One main focus of her work in recent years has been on strategies for intervening in low-performing, high-poverty schools identified under systems of state, local, and federal accountability. In this work, she emphasizes the vital role that school districts play in establishing the conditions for meaningful change in schools and classrooms. She has authored numerous publications, including *Education Reform in New York City: Ambitious Change in the Nation's Most Complex School System*. She is also the founder and chair of the California Collaborative on District Reform, which joins researchers, district practitioners, state policymakers, and funders in an ongoing, evidence-based dialogue and collective action to improve instruction and student learning for all students in California's urban school systems, with particular emphasis on linguistic minorities, who make up more than 25 percent of California's student population. Dr. O'Day earned a Ph.D. in education, with a concentration on administration and policy analysis, from Stanford University.

There are many reasons that many people want to walk away from [Equity and Access] work—because other things have to be done first. Common Core, LCFF has to be figured out, School Quality Improvement Index, the new accountability model—whatever you want to put in there. They use it as reasons to hold off or to forestall doing this. I would argue—and put us up as a shining example of—it's exactly the time that you should be exploring, trying to implement [Equity and Access], when things are in flux in a period of change so that you can actually root this work in the DNA of the district, in the way they operate going forward. I would argue that the period of change is exactly the time that you should be leaning in to try to establish very firmly that this is about kids and their choices and options downstream. It's about eliminating every single gap that we possibly can while we have them in our care because that's what we're getting paid for. It's never easy. But I am here to say that for anybody who says it can't or shouldn't be done because of changing conditions, I'm living proof in a very, very difficult place to do business, that it can and should be done.

Michael E. Hanson, Superintendent
Fresno Unified School District



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