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Evaluation Study of California's High Priority Schools Grant Program: Year 1 Report

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Executive Summary

Passed in 1999, the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) established a results-based accountability system in California with specific performance targets for schools. The PSAA created a system of rewards and sanctions for meeting or not meeting those targets, and assistance programs for low-performing schools. In 2001, the High Priority Schools Grant Program (HPSGP) was established as part of PSAA to provide additional funds to the lowest-performing schools in the state, taking the place of the prior Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP). In addition to the state accountability system, the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) imposes another set of accountability targets for schools in California.

Priority for participation in the HPSGP was given to the lowest ranked schools in the state, and participating schools received \$400 per student per year for three years (and a possible fourth year depending on progress) to use towards implementing improvement strategies.¹ Schools were required to develop an Action Plan (or use one previously developed) to serve as a blueprint for the school and community to focus on improving student achievement and meeting growth targets. Planning year funds of \$50,000 were available to schools to use for the development of the Action Plan. Schools not making expected progress at the end of three years would then be subject to sanctions. In short, the HPSGP sought to improve instruction and student learning by focusing public and educator attention, by providing additional resources to help schools improve, and by creating extrinsic incentives (e.g., sanctions) to motivate change.

In 2005, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) was awarded a contract to conduct a legislatively mandated two-year evaluation of the implementation, impact, costs, and benefits of the HPSGP. This interim report summarizes evaluation activities completed in Year 1 of this study and presents findings regarding HPSGP implementation and school improvement.

The study design uses a mixed methods approach, including in-depth site visits to 16 HPSGP schools; analyses of extant data, including student- and school-level achievement data; and phone surveys with school and district administrators of HPSGP and comparison schools. To date, we have conducted analyses of student achievement, examined personnel resource information, completed the school site visit component of this project, and reviewed selected components of the HPSGP Annual Reports.

Achievement Analysis

This component of the evaluation explores the relationships between achievement trends and the participation of schools in the HPSGP using Academic Performance Index and Standardized

¹ The majority of schools received these funds starting in the 2002-03 school year. Although legislation recently approved a second round of HPSGP funds, this evaluation includes only the first cohort of HPSGP (2002-03 to 2005-06 implementation years, for schools receiving fourth year funds).

Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program. Before interpreting these results, it is important to acknowledge the difficulties inherent in the selection of appropriate comparison schools. Because HPSGP schools were purposely selected to be the lowest performing, there were few schools with comparable levels of academic achievement that did not participate in the HPSGP, II/USP, or other school reform programs. The comparison schools selected for these analyses had, on average, slightly higher API scores (at the middle and high school level) prior to the program implementation, and appear to serve slightly less challenging populations.

The analyses show mixed results in comparing the academic progress made by a particular subset of HPSGP schools in relation to comparison schools.² While a greater percentage of HPSGP schools met their schoolwide API targets in two of the three implementation years in relation to the comparison schools, this trend was also present prior to program implementation.

When controlling for student- and school-level characteristics, the student-level achievement results vary somewhat across years and grade spans. To summarize, during the three years of program implementation, achievement on 12 different tests – between two to five tests per year – was tracked for each school level for both HPSGP and comparison schools. For elementary schools, 7 of these 12 tests showed statistically significant greater growth in HPSGP schools than in comparison schools, while 3 tests showed no significant difference between the two groups of schools. Comparison schools showed statistically significantly better performance on 2 of the 12 tests, in relation to HPSGP schools. Thus, these student achievement analyses show that schools participating in the program have statistically significant enhanced performance in over half of the tests analyzed.

However, the performance difference is slight. The average annual difference across the seven out of twelve cases where this was observed is about 0.03 standard deviations. In the case of middle and high school, the annual average estimated effect is smaller, at about 0.02 and 0.01 standard deviations, respectively.

The following is an example of what an annual difference of 0.03 standard deviations means. Second graders in HPSGP and comparison schools had an average scale score of 308.2 with a standard deviation of 58.4 points. A difference of a 0.03 standard deviation means, on average, that second grade students at HPSGP elementary schools had scale scores that were about 1.8 points ($58.4 * 0.03$) higher than those enrolled at comparison sites.

Personnel Resources

Analyses of the quantities and attributes of school personnel provide an important context for understanding the HPSGP impact in relation to comparison schools. The findings from the personnel analyses show that despite serving the state's most challenging populations and receiving supplemental funding, HPSGP schools are at a resource disadvantage, at least in the area of staffing. This observation may affect the expected HPSGP impact. For instance, HPSGP

² This report focuses on two primary groups of HPSGP schools. The achievement analyses examined HPSGP schools that had not participated in any other reform program and received both a planning grant and on-time implementation funds (referred to in the report as the "Pure-Pure" HPSGP schools). The personnel resource analysis and site visits included schools that had not participated in any other reform program and received either on-time or late implementation funds (referred to in the report as "Pure" HPSGP schools).

schools exhibit a lower percentage of credentialed teachers in relation to the state (90 percent versus 94 percent), and lower levels of overall FTE personnel –including administrative, teachers, and pupil support staff – than comparison schools and the statewide average school.³ In addition, data show that 30 percent of HPSGP principals have been at the school site for less than a year.⁴

In considering these data, it is important to keep in mind that the short term nature of the funding, as well as apparent informal direction from the California Department of Education (CDE) not to use these funds for permanent staff, would tend to preclude FTE staffing increases due to HPSGP funds. It is also true that some of the temporary staff that might be funded by HPSGP funds (e.g., coaches) may not be reflected in the personnel analyses.⁵ At the same time, 9 of the 16 sites we visited and analyzed reported spending the majority of their HPSGP funds on personnel. Five visited sites spent over 75 percent of their HPSGP funds received during this three-year period on personnel. Among those, three schools were pre-identified as consistent growth schools and two as relative recent low growth.

Another resource concern is evidenced by the seeming failure of districts participating in the program to comply with an important assurance included in the HPSGP application. Districts were to ensure that by the second year of HPSGP implementation, the percentage of fully credentialed teachers in participating schools will increase at least to the district average.⁶ However, in fact, by the second year of program implementation (2003-04), the percentage of fully credentialed teachers equaled or exceeded the average for their district in only 56 percent of the Pure HPSGP schools.⁷ More information as to why this assurance is not being met will be sought in Year 2 of this evaluation.

The theory underlying the HPSGP is that participating schools receive substantial supplemental resources which will result in increased student achievement. In fact, the data above show that this infusion of HPSGP funds may only temporarily and partially reduce on a short term basis relative staff deficiencies between these schools and their counterparts. These relative personnel deficiencies warrant further investigation in Year 2 of this study.

Site Visits

The site visits completed for 16 schools in 9 districts in Year 1 included document collection and in-depth interviews and focus groups with a broad range of school and district stakeholders. The

³ Pure HPSGP schools had 5.42 FTE personnel per 100 students, while comparison schools and the average school had 5.68 and 5.54 FTE, respectively. This translates to two additional FTE for comparison schools with an enrollment of 800, and one additional FTE for the average school in the state.

⁴ While comparative data regarding average principal tenure are not currently available, in Year 2 of this study we anticipate being able to obtain such data from the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey data for California.

⁵ Schools may also receive support from district-level staff, such as subject matter coaches, which cannot be tracked to specific schools in CBEDS, these analyses may underestimate the overall personnel available to schools. This would apply to both HPSGP and comparison schools.

⁶ The district assurance in the original CDE document, entitled: “Application Information for Schools Applying in October, 2003 to the High Priority Schools Grant Program,” reads: “No later than the end of the second year of implementation, the percentage of fully credentialed and experienced teachers will increase at least to the district average. The increase after the first year of implementation will be at least one half of the total increase needed.”

⁷ This percentage is based on an analysis of CBEDS. By the third year of implementation (2004-05), 55 percent of Pure HPSGP schools had a proportion of fully credentialed teachers at or above the district average.

visits provided in-depth information regarding the relationships between program implementation, district policies, and intermediate outcomes to better understand what salient factors contributed to or detracted from successful implementation of the HPSGP in our case study schools.

One of the most predominant themes surfacing from the case study analysis is the critical and substantially varying role of the district. This clearly affected the visited schools' (both those identified as consistent growth and low growth⁸) ability to address challenges in implementing the HPSGP, their success in improving student performance, and the ability of the program to contribute to this. Among the districts included in the case study component of this study, three were perceived as quite helpful, whereas four districts were generally considered to be a challenge in the schools' efforts to improve student achievement. Supportive district practices included ongoing provision of student assessment data, professional development, and assigning and maintaining strong school staff. Conversely, undermining schools' reform efforts were a lack of district support in providing stable school leadership; districts in fiscal or managerial crisis; and a lack of targeted district support to low-performing schools.

A second set of over-arching issues in regard to the HPSGP relate to program implementation. Across half of the schools visited, there appeared to be substantial fundamental breakdowns in the implementation of the HPSGP, perpetuated by a lack of awareness about the program and its sanctions, the absence of a meaningful and active HPSGP Action Plan, variability in the use – and perceived effectiveness – of external evaluators, and disruptions in effective planning and confusion due to the timing of the fourth year funding. It should be noted that these breakdowns occurred in both consistent growth and recent low growth schools.

Despite these breakdowns, ideal conditions for implementation were also seen across the case study schools. While only about a third of the sites visited joined all these features, they included receiving the funds in a timely manner, full and accurate knowledge about the funds and how they could be spent, as well as sufficient constancy of leadership and staff in the school to allow for long-term planning that is needed for supplemental funds of this type to be strategically spent. Under these conditions, school staff and leaders appeared able to use HPSGP resources to purchase combinations of personnel, non-personnel, and contracted services (e.g. external training or conference participation) that they considered optimal for making a substantial difference in the academic experience and outcomes of their students.

Preliminary findings summarized in this report will inform the Year 2 phone surveys which will be conducted with a representative sample of HPSGP schools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall performance of low-performing schools (both those participating and not participating in the HPSGP) is, by many standards, improving in an era in which state and federal accountability systems have been introduced. At the same time, analyses of school- and student-level achievement for this evaluation to date show statistically significant but small additional improvement in schools participating in the HPSGP.

⁸ The case study sample was stratified by schools exhibiting consistent high growth and recent low growth on the API, relative to the performance of all Pure HPSGP schools.

One reason for lack of substantial HPSGP impact may result from the basic design of the program, i.e., a relatively short-term injection of funds may be insufficient to substantially affect school performance. Another over-arching theme from the case studies was that in the absence of certain “pre-conditions,” successful program implementation is unlikely. Other possible reasons include implementation breakdowns, insufficient district commitment and support, principal turnover, and the fact that HPSGP schools may be operating at a personnel resource deficit in relation to other schools even after the addition of HPSGP funds. Added to these contextual issues is the fact that HPSGP schools on average serve higher percentages of educationally challenged students (i.e., those in poverty and those who are English learners) than other schools.

Given this context, our interim assessment of the impact of the HPSGP is mixed. Although there are some statistically significant gains in student achievement in HPSGP schools in relation to the comparison sites, the magnitude of the differences is quite small. On the other hand, given the way the HPSGP recipients are selected (i.e., from among the lowest performing schools in the state), there is no way to select a completely acceptable comparison cohort. In addition, we are testing whether HPSGP as a funding supplement (as well as its other provisions) is able to bolster student achievement. But the fact that HPSGP schools appear to have fewer staff resources than the comparison sites, or the average school in the state (as well as higher percentages of students at risk for academic failure) raises the question of the extent to which the HPSGP actually provides a financial *supplement* for these schools. While the program does provide short-term funds that these schools would not have otherwise, it does not appear to raise them above the level of personnel resources that exists in the average school across the state on a permanent basis.

The personnel resource analyses included in this report show staff deficiencies at some of the most academically challenged schools in the state relative to all other schools. As salaries and benefits make up 81 percent of total education expenditures, this finding raises important questions about the extent to which the state’s current K-12 funding plan targets public education resources to the schools where they are most needed. The evidence presented in this report shows that this staffing deficiency remains during the time of a substantial infusion of HPSGP funds. We believe this raises larger questions about the kinds of broader reaching state interventions that may be needed to realize sustained change in the state’s most challenged schools. In considering recommendations for the HPSGP, it is important to acknowledge that this program does not occur in a vacuum. Relative deficiencies in the staffing resources received by under-performing schools through the more encompassing state and local resource allocation systems clearly affect the potential impact of a short term intervention such as the HPSGP. However, limiting our recommendation specifically to the HPSGP, we believe its chances of positively affecting student performance in participating schools, at least in the short term, may be enhanced through the following recommendations.

The role of the district must be explicitly enhanced and the district held accountable for school progress and for establishing and maintaining “conditions” for success. We recommend that bolstered assurances, against which districts will be held accountable, be a prerequisite for school participation in the HPSGP. The analyses from this study to date suggest that active engagement of districts is an important pre-condition for program success. In fostering district accountability, we recommend that the CDE develop a system of rewards and sanctions at the district level that are associated with the success or lack thereof of participating

schools. For example, in regard to the assurances above, district compliance should be especially closely monitored in cases where participating schools are not showing success. Ultimately, if districts do not comply and schools are continuing to fail, ongoing program funding should be withheld.

The CDE should enhance its monitoring of non-achievement related measurements, such as compliance with the district assurances and expenditures. Along with these district assurances must come regular reporting and monitoring to assess whether districts are indeed fulfilling their commitments. To the extent that these kinds of district assurances are required as a basis for participation in the program, it will also be necessary for program provisions to be clear as to the consequences for non-compliance and to clearly charge some agency with monitoring and carrying this out. If the CDE is charged through legislation for allocating HPSGP funds, it would seem that they should also be given the responsibility and authority needed to ensure that the program is implemented as designed and to terminate the program in a given school or district-wide when this is clearly not the case.

The Annual Reports should include data that will enable districts and the CDE to assess progress towards this goal and any other assurance (e.g., districts should report the percentage of fully credentialed teachers at the district and for each of its HPSGP schools). Districts that are not showing progress within the expected timeframe should be required to provide a brief report to the CDE on what steps the district will take to address these discrepancies. In short, there should be some degree of state monitoring of compliance with measurable agreed-to assurances.

This monitoring process could also include flagging schools for review if they under spent the annual grant by more than 50 percent. In our case studies, under spending was usually an indication of other systemic problems, such as a high degree of administrative turnover. The CDE could require the District/School Liaison Team (DSLTL) with the school site council to submit an explanation as to why the schools did not fully utilize the funds, how the accumulation in funds will be effectively utilized in the future, and what – if any – implications this has for the Action Plan.⁹

The long-term role of external evaluators should be explicitly clarified, and some measurement of their effectiveness be incorporated into the program. From the perspective of many of our case study school respondents, the external evaluator component was vaguely defined, and it showed the greatest variation in implementation (even when it was not the district). Establishing annual activities for external evaluators, such as required meetings with the DSLTL and joint reports to be submitted to the CDE (e.g., for schools that do not make their growth targets), may encourage greater consistency and heightened presence of the external evaluator in the school reform process.

The regular cycle of the continuous improvement process described in the pending guidelines for the next HPSGP cohort should also include an assessment of the effectiveness of the external evaluator, as currently there appears no accountability for these individuals who share a large responsibility in assisting the lowest performing schools in the state.

⁹ A District/School Liaison Team is required under the provisions for the new HPSGP cohort.

Ratings of the schools being assisted in regard to what the evaluator actually did, whether this was perceived as helpful, and whether they would recommend them to other similar schools might be considered. Exactly who has authority over external evaluators seems unclear, and it may not be possible for the CDE to provide this form of oversight. If true, perhaps these types of assessments could be conducted independently under contract to the state, or legislation may be altered to clarify what assurances are in place to assure that external evaluators are actually assisting schools.

The CDE should target “failure” early, by monitoring the performance of HPSGP schools annually and identify actions for schools that do not meet their API growth target in a given year. When schools are not showing progress annually (e.g., they do not meet their API growth target in a given year), there should be an increase in oversight, such as requiring ramped-up support from the district and possibly a required continuing role for the external evaluator, assuming that some layer of accountability for their performance incorporated as well.

After another year of not meeting the API growth targets, schools might be required to ramp up external support even more, possibly with a different external advisor who can provide prior evidence of success with other low performing schools. Or, perhaps in these cases it would simply be more expedient to accelerate the SAIT process. Overall, however, it seems important to increase intervention, guidance, and support as early as possible for schools that are clearly not making expected progress through the HPSGP. It also seems important to convey a sense of accountability for the external evaluator, as well as the district, in regard to the school’s performance. They need to be seen as a team, jointly responsible and jointly accountable for school improvement.

The timing of the funds should be carefully considered for the next cohort, with clear timelines to allow for effective school planning and expectations for transitioning out of the HPSGP. The state and districts should provide clear directives and assurances as to exactly what funds will arrive at the school at what time and with what degree of flexibility in regard to carry-over. Districts with sufficient resources should support schools in implementing the program (e.g., allow schools to plan in the spring/summer) when state funds are delayed, and schools should be allowed time extensions in meeting their performance targets if the funds do not arrive at the school in a timely fashion. For instance, if resources do not arrive at the school until mid-year, it may be unreasonable to expect that substantial academic growth will be realized through the program in that year. Or, perhaps districts could be assured in some binding way regarding the state’s commitment to forward these funds and be directed to fund the school from other monies in the meantime.

To facilitate the continuation of reform, the CDE should provide clear expectations about a transition phase. For instance, districts and schools (through the external evaluator and DSLT) should submit a transition plan at the beginning of the third year of implementation. This plan would assess the reforms/changes attributed to HPSGP funds, identify which strategies have been most effective, and identify the necessary resources (e.g., financial and personnel) that will allow the schools to continue key strategies beyond the HPSGP.

While we see the merits of a set funding amount over the course of the grant (e.g., same total amount across three or four years regardless of enrollment changes) which may encourage more

effective planning, the state may want to consider modifications in the funding amount if schools exhibit a dramatic increase (or decrease) in school enrollment.

As it funds a new cohort of HPSGP schools, the state should allow schools with demonstrated success from prior cohorts to apply for some level of continued funding in exchange for providing mentoring and support to a partner school in the new cohort. Ongoing continuation funding for these schools might be contingent on their continuing progress, as well as that of the site they are mentoring.

There should be clear guidance on how to meaningfully integrate the HPSGP objectives and API growth targets into the Single Plan for Student Achievement. One of the case study observations was the lack of a current, distinct HPSGP Action Plan beyond the plan narrative that the school and/or district had submitted as part of the application process. The predominant plan, if not the *only* plan, in place at the schools was the Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA), in which HPSGP funds were identified as a funding source to reach the educational objectives outline in the plan. The CDE should provide clear guidance on how the consolidated plan should address both the needs of meeting both the AYP and the API. While the stated objective of both the state and the federal accountability system can be simply stated as bringing all school children to proficiency, they do have different ways of measuring progress and differing criteria for determining when a school is failing to meet the goal. The SPSA should include how the school will meet the objectives under the state accountability system and the HPSGP requirements, as well as AYP.

Plans for Year 2 of this Evaluation

The primary data collection activity slated for the second year of this study is a survey of a much broader range of HPSGP schools than could be included in the case study analyses presented in this report. The major issues to be pursued through these analyses are those outlined in this report emerging from the site visits, with the goal to yield findings that can be generalized to the larger population of HPSGP participants. Given the heavy emphasis placed on the district role that has resulted from these case studies, we will need to confer early with CDE staff and with the Advisory Committee for this study to determine the extent to which we should expand these calls to include more respondents from a given school, as opposed to maximizing the number of schools that can be covered. In addition, we will be interviewing district-level staff to gain more generalizable information regarding district perspectives of program implementation and methods for effectively using the HPSGP intervention to improve student performance at participating schools.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Passed in 1999, the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) established a results-based accountability system in California with specific performance targets for schools. The PSAA created a system of rewards and sanctions for meeting or not meeting those targets, and assistance programs for low-performing schools. In 2001, the High Priority Schools Grant Program (HPSGP) was established as part of PSAA under Assembly Bill (AB) 961, Chapter 747, to provide additional funds to the lowest-performing schools in the state, taking the place of the prior Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP). In addition to the state accountability system, the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) imposes another set of accountability targets for schools in California.

While schools in deciles 1-5 were eligible, priority for participation in the HPSGP was given to schools ranked in the lowest decile on the state Academic Performance Index (API).¹⁰ A total of 658 schools statewide participated in the HPSGP, receiving over \$740 million¹¹ in HPSGP implementation funds between 2002-03 and 2005-06. These schools compose 10.3 percent¹² of the state's students and overwhelmingly serve high poverty, high minority, and high English learner student populations.

In 2005, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) was awarded a contract to conduct the legislatively mandated evaluation of the HPSGP to examine its implementation, impact, costs, and benefits of the HPSGP. The California Department of Education (CDE) identified five primary evaluation questions for the study:

- 1) How effectively did participating schools and districts implement the HPSGP?
- 2) What are the impacts on, and benefits to, students from a school's participation in the HPSGP based on:
 - a. Results of assessments used to determine whether or not schools have made significant progress towards meeting their growth targets as specified in the PSAA
 - b. Results of disaggregated pupil's performance data for each of the following subgroups, as specified in PSAA:
 - i. Major racial and ethnic groups
 - ii. English language learners

¹⁰ Each decile represents 10 percent of all schools. The "first" decile refers to the lowest-performing 10 percent of schools in terms of API. The "tenth" decile refers to the highest performing 10 percent of schools. The 2001 API Base assigned 738 schools, on average, to each decile.

¹¹ Data obtained from CDE HPSGP Funding files for 2002-03 through 2005-06.

¹² Source: California Basic Educational Data System SIF Files for 2004-05.

- iii. Pupils with disabilities
 - iv. Pupils with socioeconomic disadvantages
- 3) What has been the overall impact of participation in the HPSGP on school and district personnel, parents, and the community, and on school and district organization, policies, and practices?
 - 4) What gains in student academic performance have been realized from the investment of HPSGP resources based on:
 - a. Longitudinal analysis of academic performance data of schools participating in the HPSGP?
 - b. Longitudinal analysis of academic performance data of schools participating in the HPSGP compared to the academic performance data of all low-performing schools in the State?
 - c. Analysis of growth patterns in academic performance for:
 - i. Schools funded under the HPSGP
 - ii. Schools funded under both the HPSGP and II/USP
 - iii. Schools funded under the HPSGP and CSR?
 - 5) What unintended consequences have resulted from the implementation of the HPSGP?

This interim report summarizes evaluation activities completed in Year 1 of the study and presents findings regarding HPSGP implementation and school improvement drawn from our case studies and achievement analyses to date.

HPSGP Evaluation Study Conceptual Framework

To address these five evaluation questions, the research team used a conceptual framework that builds on existing effective schools research to specifically examine contexts that may facilitate achievement growth in California's lower performing schools. Research on instructional and organizational capacity and on professional development has examined the effects of school characteristics and capacity on student learning (Purkey & Smith, 1983; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; O'Day, Goertz, & Floden, 1995; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Mohrman & Lawler, 1996; Williams, Kirst, & Haertel, 2005). These characteristics include a focus on student learning and common strategies, a culture of professional collaboration and collective responsibility, high quality curriculum, systematic monitoring of student learning, strong instructional leadership, and adequate resources. More recent research has noted the significance of professional community (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995) in which information and authority are shared (Mohrman & Lawler, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1996).

Because of similarities between the HPSGP and its predecessor II/USP (to be described further), AIR's comprehensive evaluation of II/USP (O'Day & Bitter, 2003) and the II/USP continuation study (Bitter et al., 2005) provide especially useful background information from which to explore the implementation and effects of the HPSGP. Our present study draws from this prior

work and the overall research literature on school improvement to develop our conceptual framework, devise data collection instruments, and collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data during Year 1 of this evaluation.

Building on this prior body of work, the HPSGP study design uses a mixed methods approach, including:

- 1) In-depth case studies of 16 HPSGP schools;
- 2) Analyses of extant data, including student- and school-level achievement data for HPSGP schools and non-HPSGP schools within California, HPSGP Annual Reports and expenditure reports for all HPSGP schools, and the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS); and
- 3) School and district administrator phone surveys from HPSGP and comparison schools.

The remaining sections in this chapter provide information about the context for the HPSGP in relation to federal and state school improvement and accountability programs, and an overview of the HPSGP.

Overview of Federal and State School Improvement and Accountability Programs

While examining specific components of the HPSGP must be central to its evaluation, the HPSGP is not being implemented in isolation. As a result, we need to consider the program's implementation and outcomes in participating schools in light of prior and concurrent participation in other school improvement and accountability programs, including II/USP, Comprehensive School Reform (CSR)¹³, and NCLB. Nearly half of the schools participating in HPSGP participated in one of the three cohorts of II/USP or the CSR program.

In addition, schools and districts receiving Title I funds must meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets required by NCLB. Nearly 95 percent of schools that participated only in the HPSGP are also in Title 1, and two-thirds are in Program Improvement and subject to corrective action and/or restructuring sanctions. In these schools, NCLB may take precedence in the school's focus on improvement. These overlapping accountability systems present confounding factors that limit our ability to ascertain the independent effect of the HPSGP. Given these confounding factors in assessing the impact of the program, the analyses in this report include schools that participated only in the HPSGP.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001)

A focus on school accountability has resulted in efforts at both the federal and state levels to identify and improve the lowest-performing schools. Since the mid-1990's, states across the

¹³ The federal Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program (formerly the 1998 Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program) provides grants for up to three years to support the implementation of comprehensive school reform based on research-based effective practices.

country have instituted performance-based accountability policies as part and parcel of their standards-based reforms. In addition, new policies and programs have been put in place to provide additional support and resources to low-performing schools. States are now being further challenged by the intensified accountability demands of NCLB, which requires states to set AYP targets that highlight the gaps in achievement among groups of students and among schools, and to develop strategies to support schools that consistently do not meet their AYP targets.

NCLB uses “Adequate Yearly Progress” as an outcome measure to monitor student achievement across schools. In California, AYP encompasses several measures and targets, including participation rates; proficiency rates on state assessments including the California Standards Test (CST) and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE); API performance; and graduation rates for high schools. Specific targets are set within each of these categories. All schools, districts, and numerically significant subpopulations are expected to meet proficiency targets (also known as annual measurable objectives, or AMOs) for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. For example, in 2005, for an elementary school to meet AYP, the school needed a 95 percent participation rate on statewide assessments, 24.4 percent of students scoring proficient on ELA assessments, 26.5 percent proficient on mathematics assessments, and a one point growth on the API or a score of at least 590.

To meet AYP, all numerically significant subgroups, including English learners and students with disabilities, must also meet these expectations. The expected percentage of students at or above proficiency has increased, and will continue to increase, on a schedule laid out by the state and guided by the federal government. The AYP targets encourage schools to move students from “basic” and “below basic” to “proficient” in order to increase the percentage of students in or above this targeted band. The AYP also emphasizes the progress of student subgroups, requiring each subgroup to meet the same performance standards as all other students.

Under NCLB, any Title I school is subject to sanctions if it fails to make AYP for two consecutive years. At this point, the school enters “Program Improvement” (PI) and remains in PI status until it has met AYP for two consecutive years. Districts are responsible for providing technical assistance and corrective actions during the PI process. There are a broad range of sanction and intervention options that gradually increase in severity each year that a school does not make AYP. These interventions include notification to parents that the school is in PI status; giving parents the option to change schools; replacement of school staff; and ultimately, school restructuring. A series of other instructional modifications and support enhancements are required along the way. With NCLB, the district is the primary entity responsible for taking corrective action with underperforming schools.

Under NCLB, local education agencies (LEAs) can also be identified for Program Improvement (PI) by failing to make LEA AYP for two years in a row.¹⁴ An LEA is identified for PI when it does not make AYP in the same content area (ELA or Math) and does not meet AYP criteria in the same content area in each grade span, or does not make AYP on the same indicator (API or graduation rate), for two consecutive years. Program Improvement LEAs are expected to create a plan for improvement and to implement that plan in the year after being identified. They face additional corrective actions in the third year. Corrective actions could include the replacement

¹⁴ LEAs include county offices of education.

of district staff or appointing a state trustee in place of the superintendent, among other options. LEAs do not exit PI status until they have made AYP for two consecutive years.

Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) (1999)

Prior to NCLB, California instituted its own results-based accountability system. The PSAA legislation grew out of recommendations proposed in a 1997 report entitled, “Steering by Results.” This report was released by the Awards and Interventions Advisory Committee, a committee established by the California Legislature to aid in the development of a plan “for the establishment of incentives for the improvement of pupil academic achievement.” In this report, the recommendation was made for a “comprehensive program of incentives, positive and negative, that would have as its goal an increase in the number of students who meet or exceed [the] standards.”

Governor Gray Davis sponsored and signed the PSAA legislation in 1999 to establish a high-stakes accountability system in California that set specific performance targets for schools, a system of rewards and sanctions for meeting or not meeting those targets, and assistance programs for low-performing schools. The PSAA Legislation originally included three major components: the API, the II/USP, and the High Performing/Improving Schools Program (also known as the Governor’s Performance Award (GPA)). The High Performing/Improving Schools Program was an incentive program awarding schools that met their growth targets, showed comparable growth among all significant ethnic and economically disadvantaged subgroups, and satisfied testing participation rate requirements; no funds have been appropriated for awards since 2002.

The API is the cornerstone of the state’s accountability system in that it is the numeric index that enables the monitoring and comparison of student achievement across schools. The API provides the basis for growth targets to which schools are held accountable and is also the measure that is used when the state identifies schools for sanctions, interventions, and targeted programs like II/USP and HPSGP. The API is a numeric index assigned to each school, ranging from 200 to 1000. Initially based solely on the results of the norm-referenced SAT-9 portion of the STAR program, calculation of the API now incorporates the CAHSEE and the CST in ELA, mathematics, science, and history/social science, and has increased the weight assigned to these standards-based measures (the exact weight depends on the grade span of the school and, to a lesser degree, on the number of valid scores).

The Board of Education set an interim performance API target of 800 for all schools to achieve. This goal has dictated the basis for determining yearly individual school API targets. For a school with an API score below 800, the annual performance target is to grow by five percent of the difference between its base API score and 800. For a school with an API score of 800 or above, the target is to maintain a score of at least 800. For a school to reach its target, it must also show comparable improvement for all numerically significant ethnic and socio-economically disadvantaged subgroups (This is known as the comparable improvement target and is set at 80

percent of the schoolwide target¹⁵). As of 2005-06, special education students and English learners are included in these subgroup targets. An alternative accountability system has been approved to account for schools with fewer than 100 pupils, special education schools, and alternative schools.

Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP) (1999-2001)

As II/USP was the forerunner upon which many of the HPSGP components are based, it is worthwhile to briefly describe this program. The II/USP was first implemented in the summer of 1999 when schools scoring in the bottom half of the state's schools on the SAT-9 for two consecutive years (1998 and 1999) were invited to submit an application to participate in the program. Cohort 1 included 430 schools, representing a range of grade levels, SAT-9 deciles, and geography. Cohort 2 included an additional 430 schools in the fall of 2000, and 430 were included as Cohort 3 in the fall of 2001. These Cohort 2 and 3 schools had API scores in the lower five deciles and had not met their API growth targets in the previous year.

Schools that participated in II/USP made the explicit trade-off of receiving additional resources over three years for potential consequences at the end of this period, should those resources not result in improved student performance. II/USP schools received \$50,000 for a planning year to develop an Action Plan for school improvement with the required assistance of a state-approved External Evaluator. They then received funding at a level of \$200 per pupil per year to implement the Action Plan.

As participants in the II/USP program, these schools were expected to identify barriers to student improvement, devise strategies to remove them, and ultimately to show improvement in student achievement. Schools that showed no growth in two implementation years became "state-monitored" schools and were required to enter into a contract with a School Assistance and Intervention Team (SAIT). SAITs are teams of educational consultants—often retired educators, and other individuals from private companies, county offices of education, and nonprofit organizations—who work with and monitor schools to improve student achievement. The SAIT first assesses whether a school has the "essential program components" (EPCs)¹⁶ necessary for student achievement. In schools where these components are missing, the goal is to implement them, focusing on resource allocation and benchmarks for student achievement.

Overview of the High Priority Schools Grant Program (HPSGP)

In 2001, when NCLB was enacted by the federal government and II/USP was in its third year of implementation, the HPSGP was established as part of PSAA. Although schools ranked in

¹⁵ The target for numerically significant subgroups will change for the 2006-07 school year, at which point the subgroup targets will be the same as the schoolwide target (i.e., 5 percent of the difference between the API base and 800).

¹⁶ The EPCs vary by grade level, but in general include components such as the adoption of state-board adopted curricula, AB 75 training for principals, and the implementation of an assessment system to monitor student progress. Retrieved June 27, 2006 from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/lp/vl/essentialcomp.asp>.

deciles 1 – 5 on the API were eligible, priority for participation in the HPSGP was given to schools ranked in the lowest decile. Similarly to II/USP, the HPSGP provided supplemental resources for schools to use in the development and implementation of a school improvement plan designed to raise student academic achievement, and participating schools were held accountable for results. Should HPSGP schools' improvement efforts not yield sufficient growth to meet the state's API targets, they would face the threat of state sanctions.

The core components of the HPSGP are:¹⁷

- 1) *Targeting of resources to the lowest- performing schools.* Schools participating in the HPSGP received \$400 per student per year for three years (and a possible fourth year depending on progress) to use towards implementing improvement strategies.
- 2) *Action Plan.* Schools are required to develop an Action Plan (or use one previously developed) to serve as a blueprint for the school and community to focus on improving student achievement and meeting growth targets.
- 3) *District Monitoring.* Districts must monitor the development of the Action Plan and report on schools participating in the HPSGP by submitting annual reports that account for school characteristics such as instructional materials used, courses offered, levels of parental involvement, teacher training and principal experience.
- 4) *Sanctions.* Schools within the HPSGP are expected to meet API growth targets. Failure to make significant growth by 36 months from September 2002 was to result in interventions or sanctions.

The HPSGP and II/USP share many underlying assumptions and program requirements. Both seek to improve instruction and student learning by focusing public and educator attention, by providing additional resources to help schools improve, and by creating extrinsic incentives (sanctions) to motivate change. However, the HPSGP targets funds more narrowly (to the lowest-performing schools in decile 1 of the API), doubles the level of funding, provides an extended implementation period for schools, more clearly acknowledges the district's role in school improvement by including a district monitoring component, and allows entities other than state-approved External Evaluators to provide technical assistance.. Several of these changes were shaped by lessons learned from the implementation of II/USP. Exhibit 1.1 provides a side-by-side comparison of the features of the HPSGP and II/USP.

¹⁷ Although legislation recently approved a second round of HPSGP funds, this evaluation considers only the first cohort of HPSGP (2002-03 to 2005-06 implementation years, for schools receiving fourth year funds).

Exhibit 1.1. II/USP and HPSGP Comparison

	II/USP	HPSGP
Eligibility criteria	Decile 1 – 5 on API rankings	Decile 1 – 5 on API rankings (Priority for Decile 1)
Number of cohorts	3	1*
Role of the district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Approves Action Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participates in the development of the Action Plan ▪ Submits annual data on HPSGP schools ▪ Permitted to serve as an external evaluator
Implementation funding amounts (per student, per year)	\$200	\$400**
Matching grant requirement	\$200	\$200
Planning year grants	Yes (required)	Yes (optional)
Action Plan	Required	Required
External Evaluator	Required. Schools selected from state-approved list.	Required. Schools had more flexibility in the selection.
Implementation period	2 or 3 years	3 years (4 th year funding based on meeting targets/making significant growth)
When progress (for “significant growth”) is evaluated	After 2 years	After 3 years
Definition of “significant growth”	1 point API growth per year	10 points API growth after 3 years, growth must be positive 2 out of the 3 years
What happened to schools after progress is evaluated?	<p><i>After 2 years:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Schools that made API targets for 2 consecutive years exited program; no additional funding. ▪ Schools that made significant growth 1 out of 2 years became under watch, and provided 3rd year of funding. ▪ Schools that did not meet targets and did not make significant growth entered SAIT process. 	<p><i>After 3 years:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Schools that met targets, or did not meet targets but made significant growth received a 4th year of funding (2005-06) ▪ Schools that did not meet targets and did not make significant growth entered SAIT process.

* Funding and guidelines for Cohort 2 are forthcoming.

** Variations in funding sources will be described in the following section.

One important distinction between II/USP and HPSGP is the definition of “significant growth” – the minimum API growth threshold that schools must achieve in order to avoid sanctions. Under II/USP, schools making significant growth were schools that in a given year, made at least a 1 API point gain. Under the HPSGP, “significant growth” was revised to encompass a school’s API growth performance over the program’s implementation period. A minimum total growth of 10 API points over three years (with growth being positive two out of three years) was set as the criteria for receiving an additional year of HPSGP funds. Schools that did not make significant growth were subject to state sanctions, which to date has been the SAIT process.

HPSGP Implementation

The HPSGP was first implemented in 2001 when the state distributed a limited number of planning grants to assist schools in the development of an Action Plan. The one-time planning grants, valued at \$50,000, were optional for schools interested in participating in the HPSGP. To ensure that the planning money was targeted to the lowest-performing schools in the state, the CDE used the 2000 API Growth score to rank applying schools from lowest to highest, and funded the schools in this order until funding was exhausted. Of the 360 planning grants awarded in the 2001-02 school year, 78 percent of the schools were ranked in decile 1 of the Base API score in 2001, 19 percent were in decile 2, and two schools were in decile 3.

Exhibit 1.2. 2001 State Rank Distribution of Schools Receiving HPSGP Planning Grants, 2001-02

2001 State Rank (From 2001 API Base Report)*	Number of schools receiving HPSGP planning grants in 2001 - 02	Percent of total HPSGP planning grant schools	Total number of schools in California (per decile)	Percent of total receiving planning grants (per decile)
Decile 1	281	78.1%	761	36.9%
Decile 2	68	18.9%	711	9.6%
Decile 3	2	0.5%	730	0.3%
<i>Missing Rank</i>	9	2.5%	--	--
Total	360	100%		

*Note: Although schools were selected for planning grants using the 2000 API Growth score, state decile ranks are only included in API Base reports. Therefore, we present the 2001 state rank.

In 2002, the first round of HPSGP implementation funds became available. Eligibility for receiving these funds was determined by ranking schools from lowest to highest according to the 2001 API Base score. The CDE invited 826 of the lowest-ranked schools to submit an application. Schools submitting applications that fully met the CDE’s requirements were awarded implementation funds according to their rank until state funds were exhausted. See Exhibit 1.3 for the specific number and distribution of schools receiving implementation funds.

Due to differences in timing and criteria used for awarding planning grants and implementation funds, 36 schools with planning grants did not subsequently receive implementation funds.

The HPSGP application provided schools with guidelines to follow in the development and implementation of the Action Plan. Specifically, it required the participation of the school site-council or Action Plan team and the local bargaining representative. Schools were also required to use technical assistance from school district personnel, county offices of education, universities, a CDE-approved External Evaluator (private provider), or any other person or entity with proven successful expertise specific to the challenges in low-performing schools. In addition, schools were required to address 14 dimensions of school improvement in the Action Plan, including the identification of barriers to academic achievement at the school and district, specification of strategies to address these barriers, strategies to focus on literacy with an emphasis on English learners and other numerically significant subgroups, and plans for involving teachers in AB 466 training and administrators in AB 75 training. Schools were asked to submit a six-page narrative summary of their Action Plan as a part of the HPSGP Application.

Schools selected for the HPSGP received implementation funds amounting to \$400 per pupil per year (with a \$200 matching requirement) over the course of three years. These funds were provided to support the activities laid out in the Action Plan. In June 2002, 536 HPSGP schools were selected to receive implementation funds “on time,” as shown in Exhibit 1.3. In May, June and November of 2003, when a second round of implementation funds became available, 98 additional schools were selected for the HPSGP. Although approval of funding for these schools was delayed, they were held responsible for making progress during the 2002-03 school year.

Exhibit 1.3. 2001 State Rank Distribution of Schools Receiving HPSGP Implementation Funds

2001 State Rank (From 2001 API Base Report)	Number of Schools Receiving On-Time HPSGP Implementation Funds	Number of Schools Receiving Late HPSGP Implementation Funds	Total Number of Schools in California (per Decile)	% of Total Receiving On Time or Late Implementation Funds (per Decile)
Decile 1	504	47	761	72.4%
Decile 2	16	47	711	8.9%
<i>Missing Rank</i>	16	4	--	--
Total	536	98*		

* This count does not include 17 schools who received late funds from CSR and are regarded as participants in the HPSGP. Please refer to Exhibit 1.4 for further details.

Each participating school received a total funding amount of \$400 per pupil based on its total enrollment in 2000-01, according to CBEDS. The total funding amount remained the same across the three years of funding, irrespective of variations in enrollment. HPSGP implementation funds totaling approximately \$740 million were awarded between 2002-03 and 2005-06 (excluding planning grant funds). The average value of implementation funds across four years of funding was approximately \$1.1 million per school.¹⁸

¹⁸ The exact total value of HPSGP funds for all schools across all years is \$740,340,272 and was obtained using data from the CDE HPSGP funding files. The average funding value per school was \$1,147,142. If we include II/USP funds for jointly funded schools, the total funding value between 2002-03 and 2005-06 was \$1,033,573,792, averaging \$1,270,960 per school.

Both II/USP and Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) schools were allowed to apply to the HPSGP. As a result, the implementation of the HPSGP acquired an additional level of complexity with varying funding sources and reform programs. Shown in Exhibit 1.4, HPSGP schools can be categorized into three groups: those that previously participated in II/USP (whether state- or CSR-funded), those that previously participated in CSR, and those that participated in the HPSGP only, which we refer to in this report as “Pure” HPSGP schools.

Exhibit 1.4. Number of HPSGP Schools by Program Participation

Program Participation	Total Number of Schools Receiving HPSGP Implementation Funds	As a Percentage of Total HPSGP schools
State-Funded II/USP	242	36.8%
<i>Cohort I</i>	48	
<i>Cohort II</i>	105	
<i>Cohort III</i>	89	
CSR-Funded II/USP	48	7.3%
<i>Cohort I</i>	21	
<i>Cohort II</i>	20	
<i>Cohort III</i>	7*	
CSR-Funded HPSGP	17*	2.6%
Pure HPSGP	351	53.3%
Total	658	100%

* These are HPSGP schools that receive CSR funds in lieu of HPSGP funds, but were still considered to be participants in the HPSGP.

Both state- and CSR-funded II/USP schools were allowed to apply to the HPSGP and could reuse a previously created Action Plan in their application. Out of the 658 schools receiving HPSGP implementation funds, 44 percent were state- or CSR-funded II/USP schools. II/USP and CSR schools that were selected for participation in the HPSGP were funded jointly by both programs, receiving \$200 from II/USP or CSR, and \$200 from HPSGP, for a total of \$400 per pupil. Regardless of their cohort, jointly funded schools were eligible to receive a maximum of three years of implementation funds. In addition to the years in which they had previously received II/USP funds, Cohort 1 jointly funded schools received one year of implementation funds under the HPSGP, Cohort 2 schools received two years of implementation funds under the HPSGP, and Cohort 3 schools received all three years of implementation funds under the HPSGP.

A total of 17 schools, referred to as CSR-funded HPSGP schools in Exhibit 1.4, received funding from CSR to participate in the HPSGP. These schools received the full amount of \$400 per pupil from CSR.

Finally, Pure HPSGP schools represent 53.3 percent of the total number of schools receiving HPSGP implementation funds. To better isolate the impact of the HPSGP in light of the various funding sources, exit criteria, and prior participation in other school reform programs, we have limited the analyses in this report to Pure HPSGP schools. The exception to this is the student-level achievement analysis which examines the relationship between program participation and

achievement for a subset of the Pure HPSGP schools. These analyses focus on the 229 Pure HPSGP schools that received planning grants *and* on-time implementation funding.¹⁹ This subset of schools is referred to in Chapter 2 as the “Pure-Pure” HPSGP schools. Whether future analyses should include a broader range of the schools participating in this program will be further clarified through additional discussions with the CDE staff overseeing this project and from our evaluation advisory group.²⁰

Report Overview

To date, we have completed the school site visit component of this project, conducted analyses of student achievement, examined resource information from CBEDS, and reviewed selected elements of the Annual Report. The results from these activities are presented in the following chapters. Chapter 2 explores the relationships between achievement trends and the participation of schools in the HPSGP, using API and Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) student level achievement data for 2001-02 to 2004-05. Analyses of personnel resources presented in Chapter 3 draw on statewide data sources such as the CBEDS, as well as the HPSGP Annual Reports.

The 16 case study site visits completed in Year 1 included document collection and in-depth interviews and focus groups with a broad range of school and district stakeholders. In Chapter 4, we explore the relationships between implementation, district policies, and intermediate outcomes such as changes in school capacity and instruction to better understand what salient factors contributed to or detracted from successful implementation of the HPSGP in our case study schools. Findings summarized in this chapter will inform the Year 2 phone surveys which will be conducted with a larger sample of HPSGP schools; results from this activity will comprise a major component of the Year 2 Report in 2007. Chapter 5 presents a summary of Year 1 findings and recommendations to date.

¹⁹ On-time funding is illustrated in Exhibit 1.3.

²⁰ As part of this evaluation, the research team consults with an advisory group comprised to state, district, and local stakeholders. The purpose of this group is to provide input on the study design, including data collection instruments, sampling plans, and data analysis strategies.

Chapter 2: Achievement Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents results to date corresponding to evaluation questions 2 and 4, which are intended to assess whether the HPSGP has had an impact on student performance in participating schools. Further elements of these two evaluation questions (e.g., examining disaggregated pupil performance data for subgroups) are not included in this chapter, but will be fully addressed in the final report for this study.

While evaluation question 2 focuses on changes in student performance based on criteria in accord with the PSAA, question 4 raises the question of gains in student performance in a more general sense. In addition, question 5 asks about “unintended consequences” in regard to the reform. These questions are informed by the analysis that concludes this chapter, which examines the degree of dissonance between the state and federal accountability expectations facing these schools. Both the state and federal systems are exacting and clear in regard to what is expected of “low performing” schools. For this reason, this chapter ends with some preliminary analyses of the degree of seeming disagreement in regard to school performance between the two systems.

Selecting the Sample of HPSGP and Comparison Schools

As described in Chapter 1, HPSGP schools include a number of schools that also participated in II/USP and CSR. Even among the schools that participated only in the HPSGP (“Pure” HPSGP schools), there are differences in the timing of the implementation funds. In addition, because the planning year was optional and due to different selection criteria for implementation funds, not all Pure HPSGP schools received *both* planning and implementation funds. The first set of analyses presented in this chapter only use the subset of the Pure HPSGP schools that did not participate in any other reform program, received planning grants, and received on-time implementation funds. We refer to this subset as “Pure-Pure” HPSGP schools.²¹

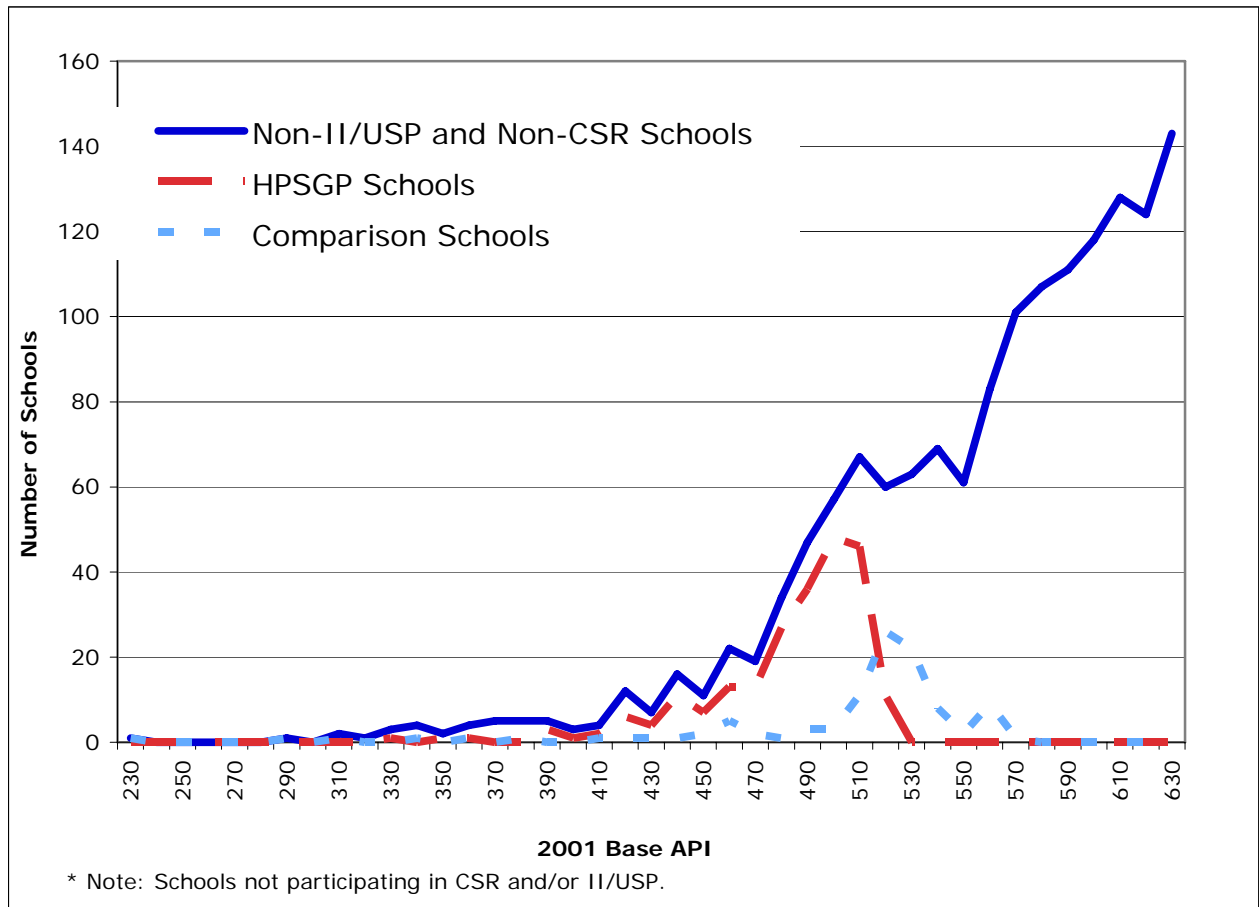
Selecting the comparison schools for these analyses is critical to producing the most objective possible results in regard to the HPSGP impact. These schools are used for comparing academic achievement in Pure-Pure HPSGP schools to what we see in similar schools over this same period. This provides the basis for estimating what academic performance would have been expected in these HPSGP schools had they not been in the program. The ideal comparison group would exhibit the same characteristics as Pure-Pure HPSGP schools with the only major difference being HPSGP participation. However, as the lowest performing schools in the state

²¹ The analyses present in this report exclude alternative, continuation, special education, state special, juvenile hall, community day, and adult education schools. Only those schools with a school type of elementary, middle/junior high, or high school in CBEDS are included.

were targeted for this program, it is not possible to identify completely similar comparison schools.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, HPSGP implementation funds were allocated using the 2001 API Base. Schools were ranked from lowest to highest API, and implementation funds were distributed with priority given to the lowest-scoring schools until funds were exhausted. Using the same method, we selected the lowest-scoring schools (according to their 2001 API Base) that were not chosen for the HPSGP. In addition, we ruled out schools that had participated in II/USP and/or CSR to ensure that the comparison schools do not reflect the influence of these other programs. Because the HPSGP generally funded the lowest-performing schools, as shown in Exhibit 2.1, the comparison schools have a higher average 2001 API Base.

Exhibit 2.1. 2001 Base API Distribution of Pure-Pure HPSGP and Selected Comparison Schools



Another important consideration for the group of comparison schools is sample size. The sample must be large enough to provide statistically significant results. Ideally, this would include at least 30 schools in each of the categories of elementary, middle, and high schools. At the same time, although having relatively large comparison groups is important, increasing the number of schools also has the effect of reaching further into the pool of higher-performing schools. With

these trade-offs in mind, we selected a comparison group that includes 45 elementary schools, 29 middle schools, and 29 high schools (as shown in Exhibit 2.2).

Exhibit 2.2. Average 2001 API Base of Comparison and Pure-Pure HPSGP Schools

CBEDS School Type	Non-HPSGP Comparison Schools		Pure-Pure HPSGP Schools		Total	
	Number of Schools	Average 2001 API Base	Number of Schools	Average 2001 API Base	Number of Schools	Average 2001 API Base
ELEMENTARY	45	483.6	142	483.3	187	483.4
MIDDLE	29	534.9	48	472.0	77	496.3
HIGH SCHOOL	29	487.0	39	470.8	68	477.7
Total	103	499.0	229	478.8	332	485.2

NOTE: This table includes the subset of HPSGP schools that did not participate in any other state reform program, and received planning grants and on-time implementation funds. We refer to this subset as "Pure-Pure" HPSGP schools.

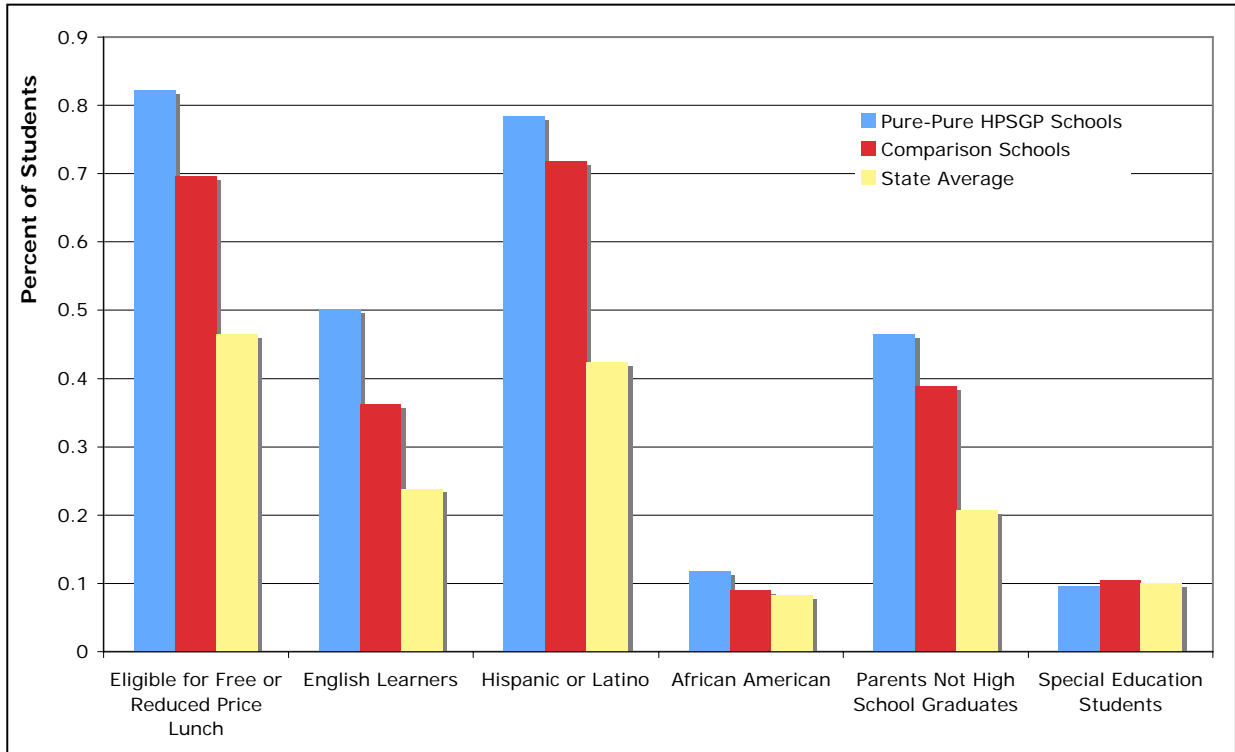
Exhibit 2.2 also presents Pure-Pure HPSGP and comparison schools' average 2001 API Base by school type. The exhibit shows that in 2001, Pure-Pure HPSGP and comparison elementary schools had similar performance levels, with an API Base of about 483 points. However, fewer comparison schools performed at the same level as HPSGP middle schools, which required us to include relatively higher-performing middle schools in order to reach the target sample size of about 30 observations, which somewhat affects achievement comparability. The comparison high schools have only a slightly higher 2001 API Base (an average of 487 points) than the HPSGP schools (470.8 points).

Descriptive Analysis

Demographic Characteristics of HPSGP and Comparison Schools

HPSGP and comparison schools differ not only in their academic performance but also in the populations of students they serve. As shown above in Exhibit 2.2, HPSGP schools performed at a lower level in 2001 than the comparison group. Because academic performance is highly correlated with socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity, and other demographic characteristics, it is important to analyze these dimensions in both groups of schools. Exhibit 2.3 shows that Pure-Pure HPSGP schools served, on average, a somewhat more challenging student population in 2001. In 2005, these differences remained almost exactly the same (see Technical Appendix B-1).

Exhibit 2.3. Comparison of Student Demographic Characteristics for Pure-Pure HPSGP and Comparison Schools to Statewide Averages, 2000-01



Source: 2001 API Base database, enrollment weighted estimates.

Changes in Enrollment and Funding Levels

In considering the effect of the HPSGP on student achievement, it is important to make note of the changes in enrollment that impact the per pupil funding levels over time. As explained in Chapter 1, the HPSGP provided a constant level of funding, which was set at \$400 per pupil based 2000-01 enrollment (using CBEDS). The objective was to provide the same additional financial support for each child served in these low-performing schools. However, this intention of equal financial support per pupil was not realized in the end.²² As the \$400 per pupil was based on the 2001 CBEDS school enrollment, changes in enrollment over time generated unequal financial support per student in HPSGP schools. In order to understand the magnitude of these differences in HPSGP funding, Exhibit 2.4 shows the changes in enrollment in Pure-Pure HPSGP schools between the base year 2000-01 and the actual implementation years of the program (i.e., 2002-03 through 2004-05).

²² The advantages of allocating \$400 per student based on a fixed enrollment is that it allows for consistency in school budgeting purposes and avoids the need to set aside different levels of state funding from year to year.

Exhibit 2.4. Changes in CBEDS Enrollment in Pure-Pure HPSGP Schools

Percentage Change in Enrollment	From 2000-01 to 2002-03	From 2000-01 to 2003-04	From 2000-01 to 2004-05
Dropped More Than 50%	0.0%	0.4%	0.8%
Dropped More Than 20% But Less Than 50%	4.2%	6.4%	12.3%
Dropped More Than 10% But Less Than 20%	4.7%	8.9%	14.8%
Dropped More Than 5% But Less Than 10%	13.1%	12.7%	14.4%
Dropped Less Than 5%	16.9%	19.1%	15.7%
Increased Less Than 5%	25.0%	17.4%	9.7%
Increased More Than 5% But Less Than 10%	18.2%	12.3%	11.0%
Increased More Than 10% But Less Than 20%	12.3%	14.8%	13.1%
Increased More Than 20% But Less Than 50%	3.0%	5.5%	5.1%
Increased More Than 50%	2.5%	2.5%	3.0%
Total %	100%	100%	100%
Total N	236	236	236

Schools that have had relatively minor enrollment variation – a gain or loss of less than 5 percent of their 2000-01 enrollment – are shaded. As shown, about 42 percent of Pure-Pure HPSGP schools experienced a change in enrollment of less than five percent between 2000-01 and 2002-03. Beyond this band, the percentage of schools experiencing more significant changes in enrollment declines. For instance, less than 3 percent of Pure-Pure HPSGP schools (six schools) more than doubled their enrollment between 2000-01 and 2002-03. This implies that these six schools received less than half of the intended HPSGP resources per student. This exhibit also shows that as we move further away of the 2000-01 base year, changes in enrollment become more substantial. The percentages of schools that experienced changes in enrollment smaller than five percent in 2003-04 and 2004-05 decline to 36.5 and 25 percent, respectively. This means that the farther away the base year (i.e., 2000-01), the greater the variation in per-pupil HPSGP funds.

Exhibit 2.5 presents the actual per pupil program funds received by Pure-Pure HPSGP schools. We have again shaded a central interval that ranges from \$300 to \$500 per student. Exactly 69 percent of Pure-Pure HPSGP schools received funds in this interval in 2002-03. In that same year, over a quarter received between \$200 and \$300 per student, and about two percent received even less.

Exhibit 2.5. Percentages of Pure-Pure HPSGP Schools by Per Pupil HPSGP Funds Over Time

Funding Level Per Student	% of Pure HPSGP Schools		
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
0-100	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
100-200	1.7%	0.8%	0.4%
200-300	27.5%	2.5%	4.2%
300-400	66.5%	48.7%	36.9%
400-500	2.5%	41.1%	44.9%
500-600	1.3%	3.8%	8.9%
600-700	0.0%	2.1%	3.0%
700-800	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%
More Than 800	0.0%	0.4%	0.4%
Total %	100%	100%	100%
Total N	236	236	236

School-Level Performance Trends of HPSGP and Comparison Schools

Before looking for relationships between HPSGP participation and student-level academic achievement, this section describes the school-level performance trends in the Pure-Pure HPSGP and comparison schools. In California's accountability system, the main school-level performance indicator is the API. Schools with a schoolwide API that is lower than 800 points are given an annual growth target that is 5 percent of the difference between 800 and the school's current score. There are separate growth targets for numerically significant subgroups, such as ethnic and socio-economically disadvantaged students. Exhibit 2.6 shows the percentage of Pure-Pure HPSGP and comparison schools that met their schoolwide growth targets from 1999-2000 through 2004-05.²³

²³ Note that this exhibit only includes those Pure-Pure HPSGP and comparison schools that have non-missing school-wide API information in all the years analyzed. The purpose of this selection is to maintain the group of analyzed schools constant over time.

Exhibit 2.6 Percentage of Pure-Pure HPSGP and Comparison Schools Meeting Schoolwide API Growth Targets, 1999-2000 to 2004-05

	Year	Pure-Pure HPSGP Schools			Comparison Schools			All Schools In California*
		Yes	No	% Yes	Yes	No	% Yes	% Yes
Pre-HPSGP	1999-2000	140	43	76.5%	45	17	72.6%	83.2%
	2000-01	97	86	53.0%	19	43	30.6%	71.2%
HPSGP Planning Year	2001-02	114	69	62.3%	33	29	53.2%	67.3%
HPSGP Implementation	2002-03	172	11	94.0%	57	5	91.9%	89.6%
	2003-04	120	63	65.6%	36	26	58.1%	64.0%
	2004-05	142	41	77.6%	52	10	83.9%	81.6%

NOTE: This table includes the subset of HPSGP schools that did not participate in any other state reform program, and received planning grants and on-time implementation funds. We refer to this subset as "Pure-Pure" HPSGP schools. Pure-Pure HPSGP or comparison school missing schoolwide growth data in one or more years of the 6-year analysis have been excluded from the analysis. This additional restriction is important in order to follow the same group of schools over time.

* This column only includes those schools that are designated as elementary, middle, or high schools in the CBEDS database

The exhibit shows that a higher proportion of Pure-Pure HPSGP schools than comparison schools reached their schoolwide API growth targets in the school years 1999-2000 through 2003-04. For instance, in the 2001-02 school year, 62 percent of the HPSGP schools reached their schoolwide growth targets compared to 53 percent of the comparison schools. Only during the last school year analyzed did a higher proportion of comparison schools meet the schoolwide API growth target.²⁴

However, these results cannot be interpreted as evidence of the HPSGP's success for several reasons. First, greater percentages of HPSGP schools than comparison schools were meeting their schoolwide targets before the program was actually implemented. Second, this analysis does not control for student- or school-level characteristics. And finally, given that HPSGP schools are farther down the performance spectrum, they have more room for improvement in terms of their API performance. Due to the manner in which the API is calculated, which results in more points gained when students in the lower levels of proficiency improve their achievement, these schools can potentially reach their growth targets more easily.²⁵ For these reasons, this type of analysis should only be considered descriptive.

Another analysis that we can perform with the school-level API measure is to show the number of HPSGP and comparison schools that fall into the different state ranks in different years.²⁶ As shown in Exhibit 2.7, 98 percent of the 210 Pure-Pure HPSGP schools with non-missing state

²⁴ It is interesting to note that the school year 2002-03 was particularly successful in terms of schools meeting their school-wide API targets. That year, the Norm Reference Test (NRT) was changed from the SAT-9 to the CAT/6.

²⁵ Please refer to <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ap/documents/infoguide05b.pdf> for further information on this topic. API growth targets are five percent of the difference between 800 points and their current API, whenever this number is smaller than 800. This means that smaller APIs generate larger growth targets because they are farther away of the overall long-term performance target of 800 points.

²⁶ Note that the API was not designed to generate longitudinal analyses over time. Its composition in terms of tests, subjects and weights changes from year to year, and therefore is not comparable across years.

ranks from 2001 through 2005 were in the lowest decile, with the other five being in decile 2.²⁷ On the other hand, only half of the comparison schools with non-missing data in every year were in the lowest decile. Neither group had any schools above decile 2 in 2001. Over time, some schools in both groups have moved out of the lowest state rank deciles. In fact, one HPSGP and one comparison school reached the state decile rank 7 in 2005.²⁸

Exhibit 2.7. Estimation of API Statewide Decile Ranks for Pure-Pure HPSGP and Comparison Schools with Non-Missing Data, 2001 to 2005

Number of Schools	State Decile Rank									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2001*										
HPSGP Schools	205	5								
Comparison Schools	43	43								
2002										
HPSGP Schools	170	39	1							
Comparison Schools	34	37	11	4						
2003										
HPSGP Schools	144	53	12	1						
Comparison Schools	33	34	13	4	1	1				
2004										
HPSGP Schools	119	70	18	2	1					
Comparison Schools	31	31	15	5	3	1				
2005										
HPSGP Schools	111	67	22	6	3		1			
Comparison Schools	29	29	15	7	2	3	1			

NOTE: This table includes the subset of HPSGP schools that did not participate in any other state reform program, and received planning grants and on-time implementation funds. Pure-Pure HPSGP or comparison schools missing decile ranks in any of the years analyzed have been excluded. This additional restriction is important in order to follow the same group of schools over time. The number of schools is larger in this exhibit than in Exhibit 2.3, due to differences in the number of schools with missing data.

* 2001 represents the 2000-01 school year.

Analysis of the Impact of Program Participation

Improving student achievement is central to the purpose of the HPSGP. In attempting to evaluate the impact of the program on this dimension, we must take into account the demographic characteristics of the student population and the relative starting points in regard to student achievement of HPSGP and the comparison schools.

²⁷ Some of the Pure-Pure HPSGP and comparison schools had missing state rank data over this time span and therefore could not be included in this analysis.

²⁸ Even though these schools have made considerable progress over these years in terms of academic performance, no school reached the 800 points threshold on their API Base between 2001 and 2005. The two schools that appear in Exhibit 2.5 in decile rank 7 in 2005 had an API Base of 744 and 799 points during that year.

These analyses need to be based on performance trends over time, rather than any performance gap in a particular year. Accordingly, we use statewide student-level STAR data from 1998 through 2005. These data capture all students served in public schools in grades 2 through 11 (except for the small percentage of students exempted from the STAR test). These data allow us to control for student-level demographic characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, and eligibility for free or reduced price lunch,²⁹ but do not allow individual students to be linked over time.

We use regression analyses to control for the differences in student- and school-level background characteristics across the Pure-Pure HPSGP and comparison schools. Also to account for the fact that we are combining student- and school-level variables in these equations, we use a Hierarchical Linear Model (HLM) framework. Technical Appendix B-2 shows the student- and school-level demographic characteristics included as controls in the HLM regressions for this study.

Determining Achievement Outcome Measures

Evaluating the academic performance trends of HPSGP and comparison schools requires consistent student-level measures of performance over time. From the state's STAR database, which provides student-level achievement data for the years 1998 through 2005, we used multiple measures to evaluate progress in academic achievement over time. The two types of statewide tests included in STAR during this time period were Norm Referenced Tests (NRT), including the SAT-9 and the CAT/6, and the standards-based CST.

In regard to the NRT elements of STAR, the SAT-9 test was administered from 1998 through 2002, and the CAT/6 from 2003 through 2004 for all grades 2 through 11. However, in 2005, this test was only implemented in grades 3 and 7. Therefore, we were not able to include CAT/6 data for this year given that the grades do not align. The standards-based CST is available for grades 2 through 11 from 2002 through 2005.

Because of these changes in the tests administered, it was necessary to standardize the results; otherwise the scores from these three tests cannot be compared over time. In addition, CST scores must be standardized within grade levels because the test is not "vertically equated," meaning that CST scale scores across grades are not comparable. For example, a CST scale score of 450 points in grade 3 is not necessarily a better score than 400 points in grade 2.

Once this standardization is completed, the resulting scores indicate how far away (in standard deviations)³⁰ each student is from the state average in a specific subject. The subjects included in this analysis are language, mathematics, and reading for the SAT-9 and CAT/6, and English language arts (ELA) and mathematics for the CST. Although standardization allows us to make

²⁹ The literature that links family characteristics, such as ethnicity and parental education, to student academic achievement is extensive, dating back to the Coleman Report (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, & York, 1966). Peers and other school-level factors also influence the educational experience of students, bringing a social aspect into the equation and generating a very complex system of interacting factors at different levels. Hanushek (2002) provides an overview of the school-level factors that affect academic achievement.

³⁰ We standardize scale scores within grades to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. A standard deviation is a statistical measure of how data are dispersed around the average or mean value, based on a normal distribution where about two thirds of the values lie within one standard deviation from the mean. It is a useful way to compare differences between two groups with different ranges of values.

valid comparisons against a specific benchmark (i.e., the average performance of the state), it does not permit measurement of absolute growth since by standardizing we are resetting the average performance of the state to zero each year.

The analyses planned next year will also include other academic performance measures that make use of the proficiency levels built in to the CST test. They consist of the percentage of students performing at a certain skill level, for instance, at “proficient” or above.

“HPSGP Effect” by School Type in “Pure-Pure” HPSGP Schools

The analysis presented in this section is designed to capture the effect of participation in a fully implemented HPSGP³¹ by comparing average test scores of HPSGP and comparison schools when student- and school-level characteristics are held constant. Because the purpose is to focus on achievement growth, the model incorporates a time dimension. For a detailed discussion of the equations used, please refer to Technical Appendix B-3.

Featuring elementary schools, Exhibit 2.8 presents the estimated effect of program participation on annual growth rates of academic achievement in Pure-Pure HPSGP schools. A *plus* sign indicates that HPSGP schools’ achievement improved at a higher rate than comparison schools; a *minus* sign means the HPSGP schools’ achievement improved at a slower rate (please note that it does not mean the achievement declined). The label “no clear effect” indicates that no statistically significant difference in academic progress is observable between these two sets of schools.

³¹ By “fully implemented,” we mean schools that received HPSGP planning grants and on-time implementation funds.

Exhibit 2.8. Estimation of “HPSGP Effect” on Annual Achievement Growth Rates in Pure-Pure HPSGP Elementary Schools <1>

	Pre-HPSGP (2000 - 01)	Planning Year (2001 - 02)	1st Year Implementation (2002 - 03)	2nd Year Implementation (2003-04)	3rd Year Implementation (2004-05)
SAT-9 & CAT/6 Reading	+	No Clear Effect	No Clear Effect	+	
SAT-9 & CAT/6 Math	+	No Clear Effect	No Clear Effect	+	
SAT-9 & CAT/6 Language	+	No Clear Effect	No Clear Effect	+	
CST ELA			+	+	-
CST Math			+	+	-

<1> There are 142 Pure-Pure HPSGP and 45 comparison schools in this analysis.

NOTE: A plus sign indicates that HPSGP schools’ achievement improved at a higher rate than comparison schools; a minus sign means the HPSGP schools’ achievement improved at a slower rate (it does not mean the achievement declined). The label “no clear effect” indicates that no statistically significant difference in academic progress is observable between Pure-Pure HPSGP and comparison schools.

Of the 12 tests administered during the implementation period (e.g., 2002-03 through 2004-05), seven showed statistically significantly greater growth in HPSGP schools than in the comparison schools, while three tests show no significant differences. On two tests, the comparison schools showed statistically significantly better performance in relation to HPSGP schools. Note that the three subjects of the SAT-9 and CAT/6 (reading, math, and language arts) show higher achievement improvement in elementary HPSGP schools in the year before the implementation of the program (2000-01). These Norm Reference Test (NRT) scores also show that no statistically significant effect is observable during the planning year (2001-02) and first implementation year (2002-03). On the other hand, the standardized CST scores show a statistically significant and positive HPSGP effect during the first implementation year, and all tests point to a positive effect during the second implementation year. However, the regression results for elementary schools raise questions about the sustainability of the positive HPSGP effect. The CST, which provides the only scores that can be used for these analyses for 2005, shows less academic improvement in HPSGP schools than in comparison schools. Unfortunately, we cannot corroborate this finding with NRT scores given that only grades 3 and 7 were tested that year.

Middle schools are featured in Exhibit 2.9. HPSGP middle schools showed statistically significantly greater growth in relation to the comparison schools on 8 of the 12 tests administered during the implementation years; there were no significant differences between the two groups on the remaining four tests. Of note is the slower growth observed in HPSGP schools during the planning year (2001-02).

Exhibit 2.9. Estimation of “HPSGP Effect” on Annual Achievement Growth Rates in Pure-Pure HPSGP Middle Schools <1>

	Pre-HPSGP (2000 - 01)	Planning Year (2001 - 02)	1st Year Implementation (2002 - 03)	2nd Year Implementation (2003-04)	3rd Year Implementation (2004-05)
SAT-9 & CAT/6 Reading	No Clear Effect	-	+	+	
SAT-9 & CAT/6 Math	No Clear Effect	-	No Clear Effect	No Clear Effect	
SAT-9 & CAT/6 Language	No Clear Effect	-	+	+	
CST ELA			+	+	No Clear Effect
CST Math			+	No Clear Effect	+

<1> There are 48 Pure-Pure HPSGP and 29 comparison schools in this analysis.

NOTE: A plus signs indicates that HPSGP schools’ achievement improved at a higher rate than comparison schools; a minus sign means the HPSGP schools’ achievement improved at a slower rate (it does not mean the achievement declined). The label “no clear effect” indicates that no statistically significant difference in academic progress is observable between Pure-Pure HPSGP and comparison schools.

In Exhibit 2.10, the data for high schools look noticeably different. This shows an alternating pattern from year to year between the HPSGP and the comparison schools. While the HPSGP schools show more growth in the first year of implementation, the comparison schools show more growth in the planning and second years.

Exhibit 2.10. Estimation of “HPSGP Effect” on Annual Achievement Growth Rates in Pure-Pure HPSGP High Schools <1>

	Pre-HPSGP (2000 - 01)	Planning Year (2001 - 02)	1st Year Implementation (2002 - 03)	2nd Year Implementation (2003-04)	3rd Year Implementation (2004-05)
SAT-9 & CAT/6 Reading	No Clear Effect	-	+	-	
SAT-9 & CAT/6 Math	No Clear Effect	-	+	-	
SAT-9 & CAT/6 Language	+	-	+	-	
CST ELA			+	-	No Clear Effect
CST Math			+	No Clear Effect	+

<1> There are 39 Pure-Pure HPSGP and 29 comparison schools in this analysis.

NOTE: A plus sign indicates that HPSGP schools' achievement improved at a higher rate than comparison schools; a minus sign means the HPSGP schools' achievement improved at a slower rate (it does not mean the achievement declined). The label "no clear effect" indicates that no statistically significant difference in academic progress is observable between Pure-Pure HPSGP and comparison schools.

Having analyzed the statistical properties of the relationship between HPSGP implementation and student academic achievement, it is also important to assess the extent to which these effects appear to be “educationally significant.” That is, whether the observed statistical difference appears small or large in magnitude. For example, an intervention can appear to be related to a change in student performance that is significant in a statistical sense (i.e., not likely to be due to chance alone) but which is also so small that the difference in performance is not considered very important.

While there is a larger number of tests that show an HPSGP advantage over comparison schools than tests that show no effect or a disadvantage, the performance difference in favor of the HPSGP is slight. Taking the average across subjects and tests of all statistically significant differences in growth rates between Pure-Pure HPSGP and comparison elementary schools over the implementation period (i.e., after the planning year of 2001-02), the annual average estimated HPSGP effect is about 0.03 standard deviations.³² Across three years, this suggests a difference of about 0.09 standard deviations in test scores for Pure-Pure HPSGP elementary schools in

³² The overall standard deviation estimates were derived from a simple average across all implementation years across all subjects by school level.

relation to the comparisons. In the case of middle and high school, the annual average estimated effect is smaller, at about 0.02 and 0.01 standard deviations, respectively.³³

One basis for considering the magnitude of these changes comes from Cohen (1969), which proposes three effect size categories: 0.25 standard deviations or less as “small,” 0.25 to 0.4 as “medium,” and 0.4 or more as “large.” Within this framework, the estimated “HPSGP” effect for Pure-Pure HPSGP schools that received planning grants and on-time implementation funds is small.

The following is an example of what an annual difference of 0.03 standard deviations means in more concrete terms. Second graders in Pure-Pure HPSGP and comparison schools had an average scale score of 308.2 with a standard deviation of 58.4 points on the CST in 2005 (CST ELA scale scores). A difference of a 0.03 standard deviation means, on average, that second grade students in HPSGP elementary schools had scale scores that were about 1.8 ($58.4 * 0.03$) higher than those enrolled at comparison sites.

Definition of API and AYP “Progress”: State and Federal Dissonance

Although separate from the impact of the HPSGP itself on student achievement, this section examines differences in the definition of progress between the state and federal accountability systems. Given that the HPSGP targets low-performing schools in California, it is crucial for these schools to know when and how their strategies and school improvement reforms raise student achievement. However, the measurements used by the state and federal accountability systems can send mixed signals regarding a school’s progress. As mentioned in Chapter 1, NCLB imposes one set of criteria by which to define yearly progress (e.g., AYP), while the state accountability system establishes schoolwide and comparable growth targets based on the API. Please see Chapter 1 for a more detailed overview of NCLB and PSAA, and Technical Appendix A for a side-by-side comparison of the AYP and API.

Under these dual accountability systems, AYP and API targets do not always coincide. This means that schools are being evaluated by two different criteria, which may send mixed signals about their overall performance and academic progress over time.

Because of unintended consequences that may result from conflicting state and federal messages in regard to school success, we analyzed the degree of consistency between both accountability systems. In particular, we analyze the percentage of Pure HPSGP schools receiving differing messages regarding student achievement from the federal and state system.³⁴

Exhibit 2.11 shows the results of this analysis for HPSGP schools across three years. In 2003, for instance, 231 Pure HPSGP schools – out of the total 327 schools for which there is available

³³ Technical Appendices B-4 through B-9 show the HLM regression results for elementary, middle, and high schools.

³⁴ Note that AYP targets were even more rigorous in 2004-05. Proficiency rates were increased from 13.6 percent to 24.4 percent for ELA, and from 16.0 percent to 26.5 percent for mathematics. The minimum API score increased from 560 to 590.

information – met all their API targets but not their AYP. This means that 71 percent of Pure HPSGP schools received positive feedback from the state, while receiving negative feedback from the federal government. In addition, about 1 percent of schools met their AYP but not their API targets, for a total of 72 percent of schools receiving mixed messages in that year.

Exhibit 2.11. Inconsistency between State and Federal Accountability Measurements: Percentages of Pure HPSGP Schools by API and AYP

Year*	Met All API Targets		Did Not Meet All API Targets		Total
	Met AYP	Did Not Meet AYP	Met AYP	Did Not Meet AYP	
2003	68	231	2	26	327
2004	72	107	33	120	332
2005	51	182	4	104	341

Year	Met All API Targets		Did Not Meet All API Targets		Total
	Met AYP	Did Not Meet AYP	Met AYP	Did Not Meet AYP	
2003	20.8%	70.6%	0.6%	8.0%	100%
2004	21.7%	32.2%	9.9%	36.1%	100%
2005	15.0%	53.4%	1.2%	30.5%	100%

NOTE: These tables include only the subset of HPSGP schools that did not participate in any other state reform program.

* 2003 represents the 2002-03 school year.

As shown, the inconsistency between the state and federal accountability system changes over time. The inconsistency rate declined to 42.1 and 54.6 percent in 2004 and 2005, respectively, with the majority of this dissonance attributed to schools that met the API targets but not the AYP. Even with this decrease, a high proportion of HPSGP schools received mixed signals in the evaluation of their academic progress. This is an issue that may generate confusion among schools that are struggling to define and implement effective improvement strategies under the HPSGP. Technical Appendix B-10 repeats this analysis for all schools in California.

Conclusion

The analyses presented in this chapter show mixed results in comparing the academic progress made by Pure-Pure HPSGP schools in relation to the best comparison group that we could construct for the purposes of this analysis. As discussed, the method used by the state in selecting the very lowest performing schools statewide for participation in the HPSGP precluded selection of an ideal comparison set of schools. (This is not to suggest criticism of this approach, but simply points out the analysis limitations it introduces.) This selection method unavoidably introduces some bias into the analysis. Given this, it is important to at least consider the possible effect of this known bias between the HPSGP and comparison schools, even though it is not possible to fully determine it.

While a greater percentage of Pure-Pure HPSGP schools met their schoolwide API targets in two of the three implementation years in relation to the comparison schools, this trend was also present prior to program implementation. In addition, analyses that do not control for student-

and school-level characteristics can only be considered descriptive and not an assessment of the program's impact.

When controlling for these characteristics, the student-level achievement results vary somewhat across years and grade levels. Considering the overall results, there is evidence of a statistically significant but educationally small HPSGP impact. One can only speculate as to the extent to which this slight program advantage is mitigated by inherent selection bias. In addition, only policymakers can determine if these results are sufficient to warrant program costs. An additional question important to these considerations is sustainability of impact, a topic to be further explored in Year 2 of these analyses.

Chapter 3: School Personnel

Introduction

This chapter describes the quantities and characteristics of the personnel resources found in Pure HPSGP schools.³⁵ Specific analyses include the evaluation of a district assurance requiring increases in fully credentialed staff among schools participating in the program; a comparison of the personnel resources in Pure HPSGP schools relative to other schools in the state; and an assessment of principal experience in Pure HPSGP schools. These analyses inform evaluation question 2 regarding the impact of the HPSGP, and evaluation question 3 on the overall impact of participation in the HPSGP on school and district personnel as well as on school and district organization, policies, and practices.

The student-level achievement results to date, as presented in Chapter 2, show a statistically significant but educationally small impact from the HPSGP. One possible explanation for these relatively modest results to date is that even with HPSGP funds in hand, the schools in this program face a resource disadvantage in relation to similar schools, all schools across the state, and possibly those already meeting the ultimate state accountability objective of an 800 API.

While the analyses presented in this chapter do not definitively answer the question of a possible resource deficiency in HPSGP schools, they provide evidence that this question is worthy of further exploration. We have seen in Chapter 2 that HPSGP schools face some of the most challenged student populations in the state, with considerably higher percentages of students in poverty and English learners. As outlined in Berne and Stiefel (1994) and as determined in virtually all education adequacy determinations conducted across the states (www.cfequity.org), sites with higher percentages of students with supplemental learning requirements (e.g., poverty and EL) have generally been determined to require *more* resources than schools with fewer numbers of these students when expected to reach common educational outcomes. That is, equal funding generally has not been considered “equitable” across sites with measurably different student needs.

In order to be considered as being treated equally given the high needs student populations HPSGP schools serve, greater personnel resources might be expected at these schools *prior and in addition to* any supplement received through the short-term “shot in the arm” the HPSGP grant is supposed to provide. If, in fact, personnel resources at these schools are actually *less than* those at the schools they are being compared to even after the receipt of HPSGP funds, it may not be surprising that they are not substantially surpassing these schools in performance as shown in Chapter 2.

³⁵ While there are 351 Pure HPSGP schools, the majority of the analyses presented in this chapter reflect information on 342 Pure HPSGP schools that are not alternative, continuation, special education, state special, juvenile hall, community day or adult education schools.

Although it is possible that HPSGP-related expenditures on resources other than staff may compensate for any staff deficiencies observed at HPSGP schools, this seems open to question given the known importance of such things as class size and staff quality to education outcomes. We recognize, however, that the question of resource parity for HPSGP sites is a topic that needs further exploration in the second year of this study.

CBEDS: Personnel Resource Analysis

The following analyses draw upon CBEDS data derived from the Personnel Assignment Information Form (PAIF) to assess compliance with an assurance signed by districts with HPSGP schools and to compare resource levels in HPSGP schools to other school groups.

Full Credentials: An Assessment of District Assurance #5

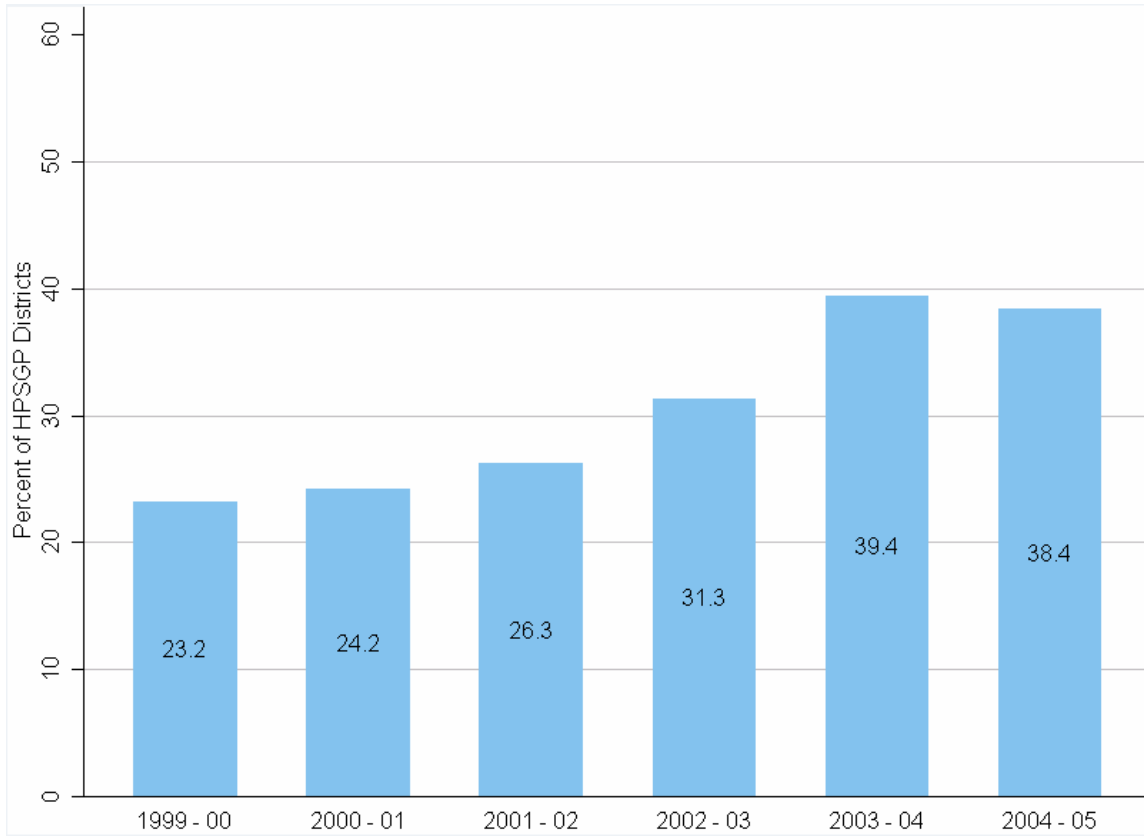
Included in the application for the HPSGP are a series of six assurances detailing specific actions that districts must comply with as participants in the HPSGP. The fifth assurance charges districts to ensure that by the second year of HPSGP implementation, the percentage of fully credentialed teachers in participating schools will increase at least to the district average.³⁶ Statewide, the average district percentage of fully credentialed teachers rose from 90 to 94 percent between 2001-02 and 2004-05. The following analyses use CBEDS data on fully credentialed teachers to assess the degree to which district assurance #5 was met by the 99 participating districts statewide that had at least one Pure HPSGP school.

Exhibit 3.1 displays the percentage of HPSGP districts in which all Pure HPSGP schools are at or above the average for their district regarding the percentage³⁷ of fully credentialed staff between 1999-2000 and 2004-05. Overall, a little over a third of the districts with Pure HPSGP schools were in full compliance with the assurance during the HPSGP implementation period. Between the first and second year of HPSGP implementation, compliance rose from 31 to 39 percent, dropping slightly to 38 percent in the third year of implementation (2004-05).

³⁶ The district assurance in the original CDE document, entitled: "Application Information for Schools Applying in October, 2003 to the High Priority Schools Grant Program," reads: "No later than the end of the second year of implementation, the percentage of fully credentialed and experienced teachers will increase at least to the district average. The increase after the first year of implementation will be at least one half of the total increase needed."

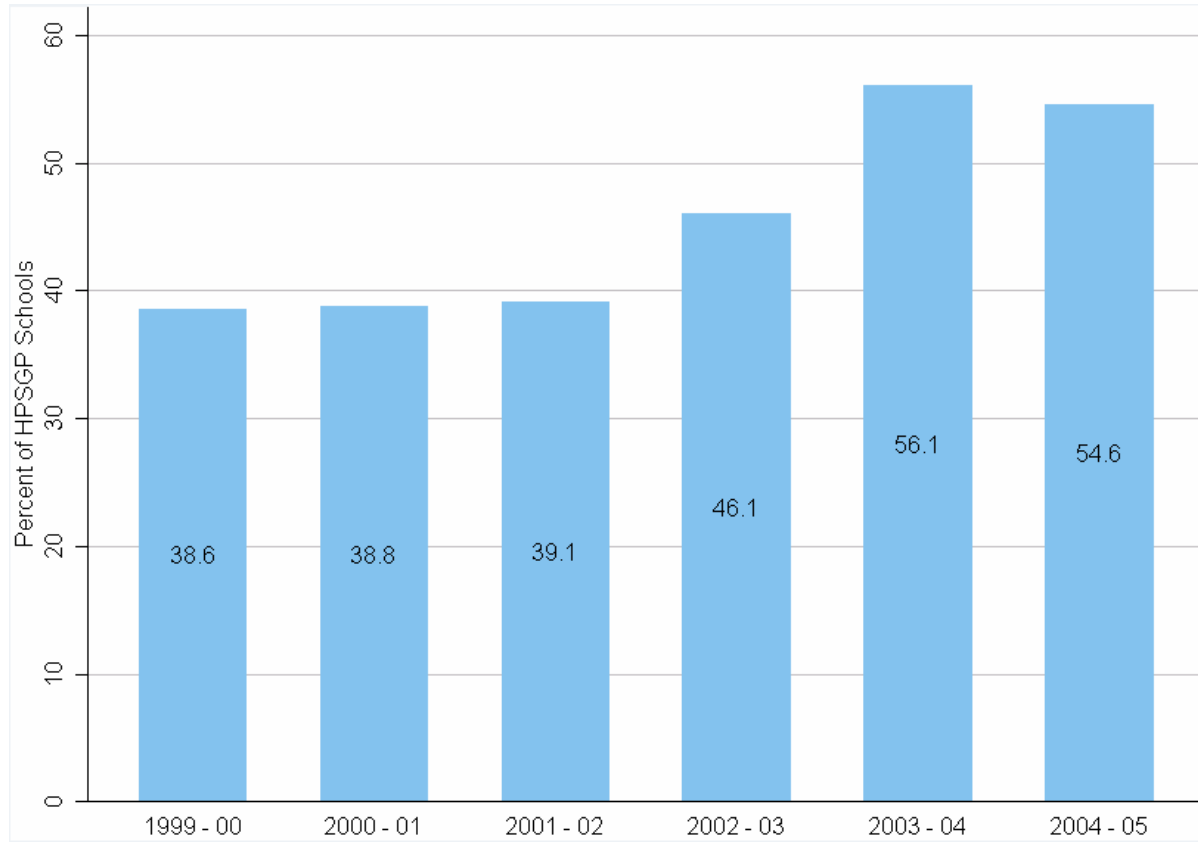
³⁷ The district average of the percentage of teachers who are fully credentialed used in this analysis is a weighted district wide average, including all CBEDS school types. (i.e., the total number of fully credentialed teachers in the district divided by the total number of teachers in the district). No major differences were seen in the results when using an unweighted average.

Exhibit 3.1. Percentage of HPSGP Districts in which all Pure HPSGP Schools are At or Above the District Average Percent of Fully Credentialed Teachers , 1999-2000 to 2004-05



While Exhibit 3.1 shows a picture of HPSGP district compliance with the assurance, Exhibit 3.2 provides a perspective on the average percentage of Pure HPSGP schools at or above the district average percentage of fully credentialed teachers. This exhibit reveals a pattern similar to that shown in Exhibit 3.1, with an increase between 2002-03 and 2003-04, followed by a slight decrease in 2004-05. The percentage of fully credentialed teachers equaled or exceeded the average for their district in approximately 55 percent of the Pure HPSGP schools for the years 2003-04 (second year of implementation) and 2004-05.

Exhibit 3.2. Average Percent of Pure HPSGP Schools in HPSGP Districts At or Above the District Average Percent of Fully Credentialed Teachers, 1999-2000 to 2004-05



Although Exhibits 3.1 and 3.2 indicate that on average HPSGP districts fell well below full compliance with this district assurance during the HPSGP implementation period, the increase in the percentage of districts and schools in compliance with the assurance from 2001-02 to 2003-04 suggests some improvement during this period. In addition, Technical Appendices C-14 to C-17 show that the four districts with the largest concentration of Pure HPSGP schools in the state (greater than 10 schools) have shown greater progress between 2003-04 and 2004-05 in increasing the percentage of fully credentialed teachers in their Pure HPSGP than is shown in Exhibit 3.2. In 2004-05, between 61 and 76 percent of the Pure HPSGP schools in these districts were at or above the district average of fully credentialed teachers. Nonetheless, overall, these data suggest that districts statewide have a ways to go in terms of giving equal attention to their most needy schools.

Comparative Personnel Resource Levels

Using 2004-05 CBEDS data derived from the Personnel Assignment Information Form (PAIF), we compared the quantities and characteristics of personnel resources across three broad

categories: administrators, teachers and pupil support staff.³⁸ The following exhibits present overall findings across all school levels (elementary, middle, and high) in terms of full-time equivalent staff; findings by individual school level are referenced in this section and the exhibits are displayed in Technical Appendix C.

These analyses were conducted across four groups of schools:

- All Pure HPSGP schools
- Comparison schools in the Year 1 achievement analyses, as described in Chapter 2
- Schools at or above API 800, as reported in the 2004 API Base data file
- All schools in California.

Schools at or above API of 800 are included to provide a basis of comparison between some of the lowest performing schools in the state, i.e., the HPSGP as well as the comparison sites, in relation to schools currently meeting the state accountability API target of 800. For comparability, all of the above school groups exclude alternative, continuation, special education, state special, juvenile hall, community day and adult education schools. Exhibit 3.3 provides a comparison of the key demographics across the school groups.

Exhibit 3.3. School Characteristics by School Group and by School Type, 2004-05

Analysis Group	School Level	N	% Free and Reduced Lunch	% English Learners	Enrollment
A. Pure HPSGP Schools*	Elementary	229	93.9	63.2	791
	Middle	67	80.7	46.4	1,231
	High	46	67.9	36.4	2,084
	Average		87.1	55.7	1,030
B. Comparison Schools**	Elementary	41	84.7	49.2	475
	Middle	30	80.3	39.5	1,125
	High	28	63.5	23.4	1,713
	Average		77.7	39.3	1,022
C. Schools at or above API 800	Elementary	1,401	17	8.7	541
	Middle	210	11.4	4.9	885
	High	71	10.3	3.6	1,627
	Average		16	8	630
D. All Schools	Elementary	5,582	53.6	27.5	562
	Middle	1,274	47.3	20.3	927
	High	1,159	35.6	14.9	1,540
	Average		50.1	24.7	761

Note: % Free and Reduced Lunch and % English Learners were obtained from the 2004 API Base data file while enrollment was obtained from the CBEDS Student Information File (SIF).

³⁸ These personnel categories are aligned with administrative employees, teachers and pupil services employees as defined in Education Code 41401 and referenced in the *Administrative Manual for CBEDS Coordinators and School Principals, October 2005*. Please refer to Technical Appendix C-1 for a more detailed description of the specific personnel assignments that are included within each category.

* Nine Pure HPSGP schools are excluded from these analyses, as they fall into one of the following categories: alternative, continuation, special education, state special, juvenile hall, community day or adult education schools.

** Although the comparison group used here is identical to the comparison group used in Chapter 2, the numbers of middle and high schools displayed are slightly different than those seen in Chapter 2 due to the use of a more recent school type variable in this analysis. Further adjustments will be made in Year 2.

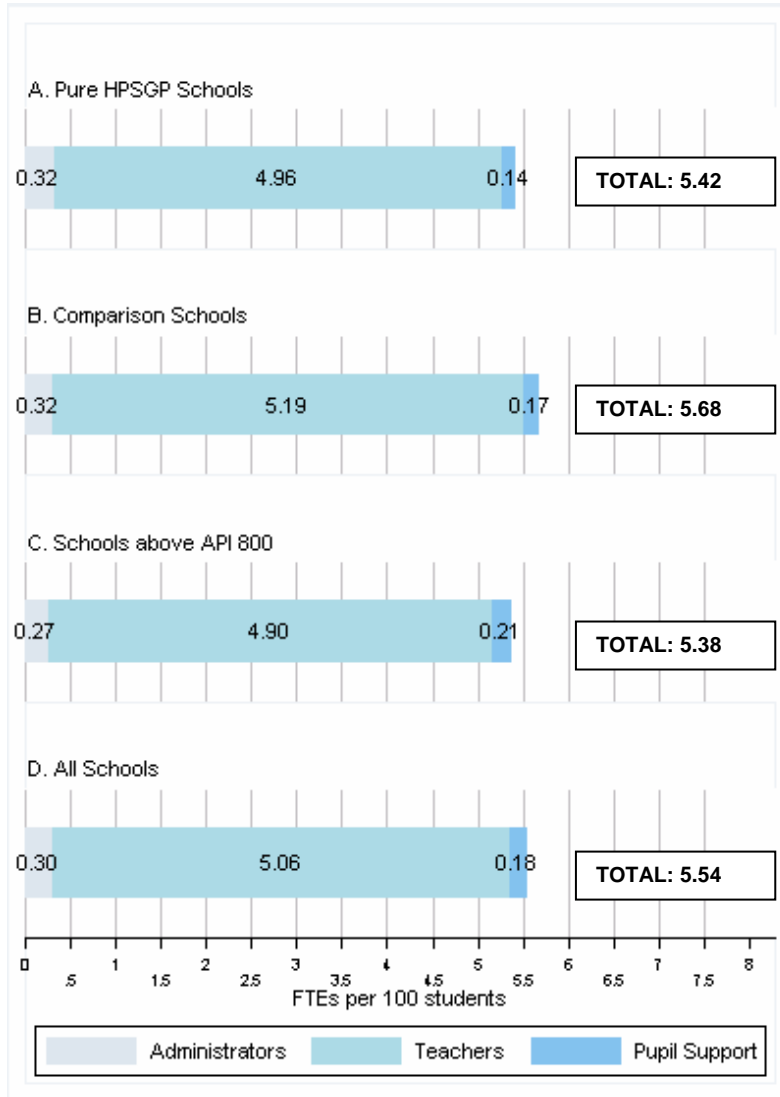
Source: CBEDS, 2004-05.

Overall levels of personnel resources

Exhibit 3.4 displays the average level of total personnel resources in each school group and the distribution by personnel category. As schools receive support from district-level staff, such as subject matter coaches, which cannot be tracked to specific schools in CBEDS, these analyses may underestimate the overall personnel available to the schools. Note, however, this would apply to both HPSGP and non-HPSGP schools, to the extent that they receive support from the district or other personnel not directly associated with the schools in CBEDS. In 2004-05, we observe that on average, Pure HPSGP schools have a total of 5.42 Full Time Equivalent (FTEs) per 100 students, below the statewide average of 5.54 FTEs. For a school with 800 students – the average school size of Pure HPSGP schools in 2005 – this translates to a difference of approximately one FTE.³⁹ By contrast, comparison schools have higher resource levels at 5.68 FTEs per 100 students, which represent about two additional staff for a school with 800 students. The largest disparity between Pure HPSGP and comparison schools is in the form of teachers, with 4.96 FTE teachers per 100 students in Pure HPSGP schools versus 5.19 FTE in comparison schools (a difference of about 1.8 FTE teacher for a school with 800 students). The degree to which this resource disparity across these two types of schools has existed over time will require further analysis. However, these resource differences may very well affect the performance comparison between HPSGP and comparison schools described in Chapter 2.

³⁹ The average school size of Pure HPSGP schools was 796 students, using the 2005 API Growth database.

Exhibit 3.4 Average FTE Personnel per 100 Students by School Grouping, 2004-05



Source: CBEDS PAIF, 2004-05.

If we look at resource levels between school levels and specific personnel categories, some of the differences become more pronounced (see Technical Appendices C-2 through C-5). For example, when examining teachers in elementary schools only, Pure HPSGP schools, with 5.11 FTEs per 100 students, appear to have a noticeably lower level of teachers than comparison schools, with 5.76 FTEs per 100 students. The difference is on the order of two fewer students per teacher for comparison schools (19.6 students per teacher in Pure HPSGP schools versus 17.4 students in comparison schools), or 5.2 additional FTE teachers for an elementary school with 800 students. A similar pattern is observed in high schools where comparison schools have, on average, one less student per teacher (or 2.7 additional FTE teachers for a school with 800 students).

The largest difference in overall personnel resources is observed at the elementary level, with Pure HPSGP and comparison schools exhibiting 5.53 and 6.27 FTE per 100 students,

respectively. However, there are some areas in which HPSGP schools appear to have an advantage. Although below the state average, Pure HPSGP middle schools have the highest overall personnel resource levels (4.98 FTE per 100 students) in comparison to other middle school groups. In addition, both Pure HPSGP middle and high schools exceed the level of pupil support staff with respect to other school groups. The difference is most striking relative to comparison schools. At the high school level, comparison schools have an average of 0.21 pupil support FTEs per 100 students versus 0.28 observed in Pure HPSGP schools (a difference of 119 students per FTE). This pattern does not hold for Pure HPSGP elementary schools, however, which have a lower level of pupil support staff in relation to the other school groups.

Variations in administrative personnel resources between groups and school levels appear less of an issue. The most consistent pattern is among schools scoring above API 800, which show fewer administrators than the state average for all school levels. Among elementary schools, comparison schools have the greatest level of administrative staff, while differences in administrators are minimal at the middle school level. Among high schools, all school groups show lower levels of administrative staff in comparison to the state average.

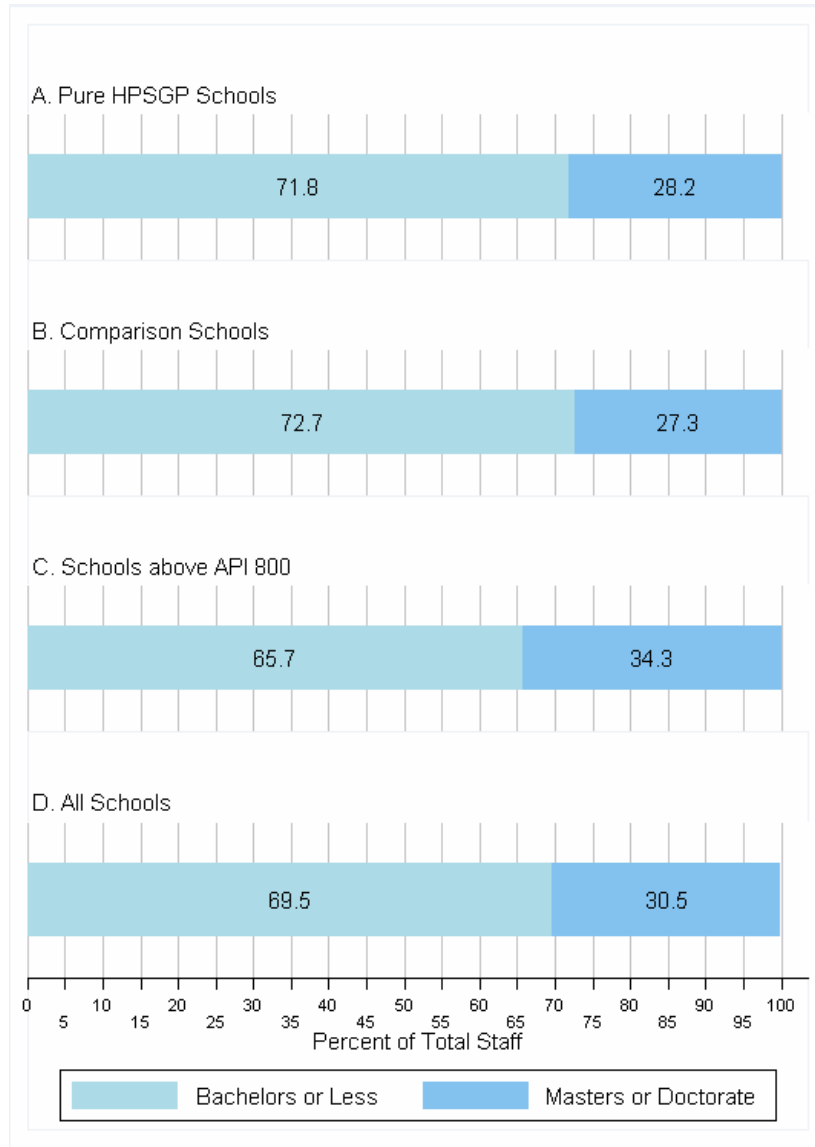
Levels of Teacher Education

This section reviews the education levels of teaching staff by school group. As with the previous section, data across all school types are featured, with information by school level shown in Technical Appendices C-6 through C-9. For simplification, we grouped the education levels into two categories: bachelor degree or less and a master or doctorate degree.⁴⁰

Exhibit 3.5 displays the average percentage of teaching staff with varying levels of education across school groups. Overall, with 28.2 percent of teachers holding advanced degrees, Pure HPSGP schools do not appear to differ greatly from comparison schools with 27.3 percent. However, both groups are below the state average of 30.5 percent, and this pattern holds for elementary and middle schools. At the high school level, 35.5 percent of teachers in Pure HPSGP schools hold advanced degrees compared to 30.8 percent in comparison schools and 35.3 percent across the state. Perhaps the most salient observation from this analysis is that schools scoring at or above 800 on the API show a higher percentage of teaching staff with advanced degrees (34.3 percent) relative to the state average, and an even greater difference is observed relative to HPSGP and comparison schools. An acute difference is observed at the high school level, with nearly 47 percent of teachers in schools scoring at or above 800 holding advanced degrees compared to only one-third in Pure HPSGP high schools.

⁴⁰ The “bachelor degree or less” category includes staff with a bachelor degree and who have completed 30 or more semester hours (but who have not completed a master degree).

Exhibit 3.5 Overall Percentages of Teachers by Education Level by School Grouping, 2004-05



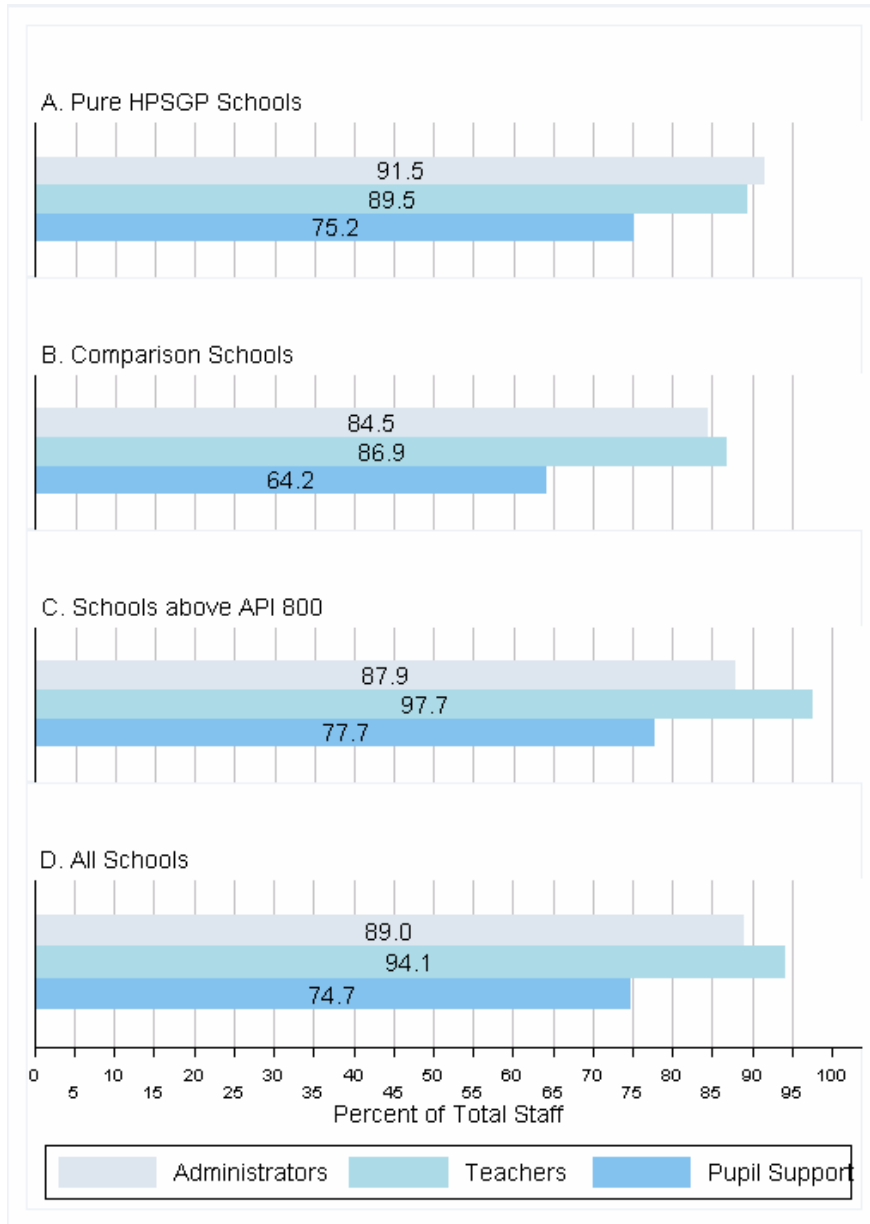
Source: CBEDS PAIF, 2004-05.

Full Credentials

Exhibit 3.6 displays the average percentage of staff that are fully credentialed by personnel category and across school groups (see Technical Appendices C-11 through C-13 for school-level analyses). With nearly 92 percent of administrative staff holding full credentials, we observe that administrators in Pure HPSGP schools are more likely to be fully credentialed than administrators in all other school groups. This trend changes when looking at teaching staff. Averaging approximately 90 percent of teachers who are fully credentialed, Pure HPSGP schools are below the state average of 94.1 percent and even further below the average of 97.7 percent observed in schools above API 800. Relative to comparison schools, however, a higher

percentage of teachers are credentialed in HPSGP schools. With 75.2 percent of pupil support staff holding full credentials, Pure HPSGP schools are on par with schools scoring at or above 800 on the API, above the state average, and substantially above the average of 64.2 percent observed in comparison schools. In summary, while HPSGP schools appear to have higher rates of credentialed administrators and pupil support staff in relation to the state average, they do not fare as well with credentialed teachers.

Exhibit 3.6. Average Percentage of Staff with Full Credentials by School Grouping, 2004-05



Source: CBEDS PAIF, 2004-05.

Annual Reports: Principal Experience and Training

For all schools participating in the HPSGP, districts were required to report annually on behalf of the schools on topics such as instructional materials, parent involvement, various after school intervention programs, teacher and principal training, and impact of the implementation of the HPSGP. This section presents descriptive statistics regarding principal experience and training derived from Annual Report data submitted from 2002-03 to 2004-05. Since comparative data are not collected statewide, this section discusses findings for Pure HPSGP schools overall regarding principal experience and credentials, as well as patterns that emerge when comparing elementary and secondary HPSGP schools.⁴¹

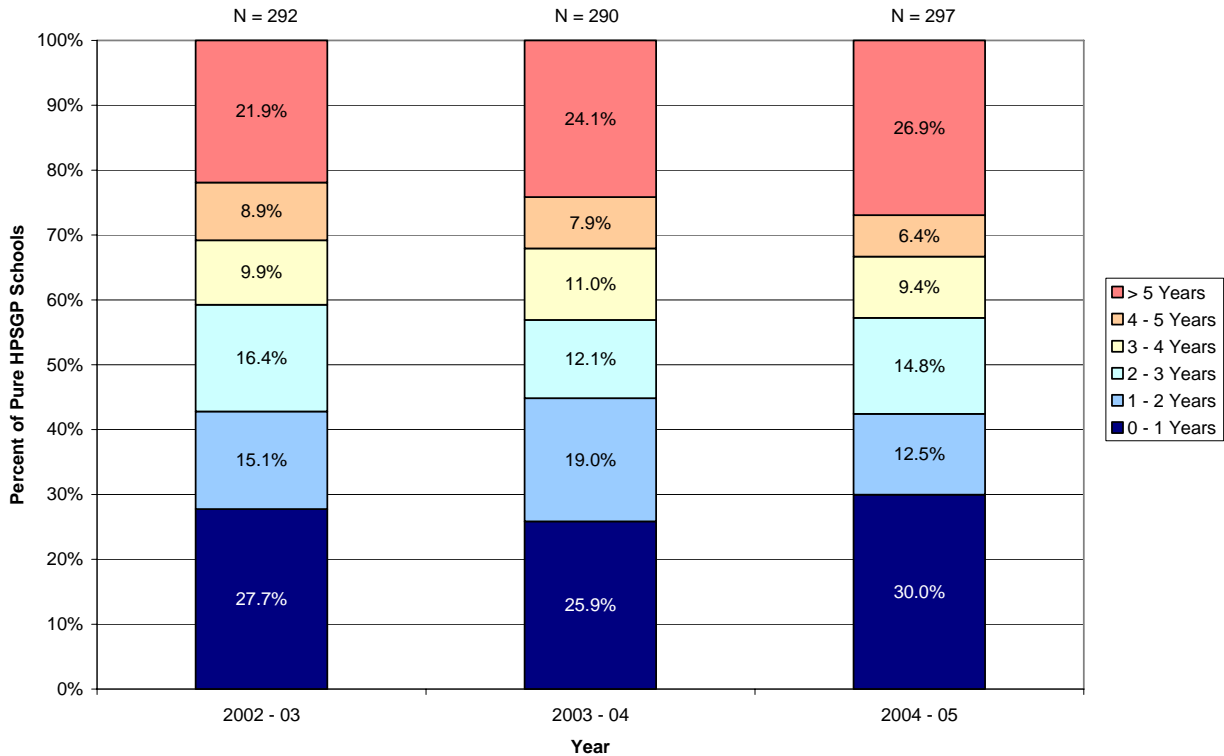
Years of principal experience

A 2003 RAND study examining the 1999-2000 School and Staffing Survey (SASS) found that although national and state averages for years of principal experience on average suggest relative stability for school administrators, certain types of schools and districts encounter challenges in recruiting and retaining principals. For example, some urban, low-income schools were found to have trouble keeping experienced principals, although this pattern was not seen across all urban, low-income schools (Gates, Ringel, Santibañez, Chung, & Ross, 2003). Consistent with these results, a study by Roza, Celio, Harvey, and Wishon (2003) which surveyed 83 urban school districts (including 29 California districts) found that districts and schools with the fewest applicants for positions are typically “high need”—with lower median community income levels, higher concentrations of minority students, and lower principal salaries as compared to less high need schools and districts.

Providing information on principal stability, Exhibit 3.7 displays the percentage of Pure HPSGP principals by number of years that they have been at the current school across all school levels (elementary, middle, and high schools) from 2002-03 to 2004-05. These data suggest that a substantial percentage of HPSGP schools have principals who are fairly new to these schools. Across all years, nearly 30 percent of principals had been at their current school for less than a year, indicating a high degree of turnover. The percentage of principals with up to three years of experience hovered around 60 percent. A more encouraging sign is the increase in the percentage of HPSGP principals at their school for more than five years, from 22 to 27 percent. While these general patterns for years of experience at current school hold when examining these data by school level, secondary schools show a larger shift in the percentage of principals remaining for more than five years. For middle schools, this figure rose from 24 to 32 percent between 2002-03 and 2004-05; for high schools, this increased from 11 percent to 32 percent. The school-level exhibits are presented in Technical Appendices D-1 to D-3.

⁴¹ As with the prior analyses, the overalls presented in this section do not include alternative, continuation, special education, state special, juvenile hall, community day, and adult education schools.

Exhibit 3.7. Percentage of Principals by Experience by Years at Current School, 2002-03 through 2004-05, for Pure HPSGP Schools



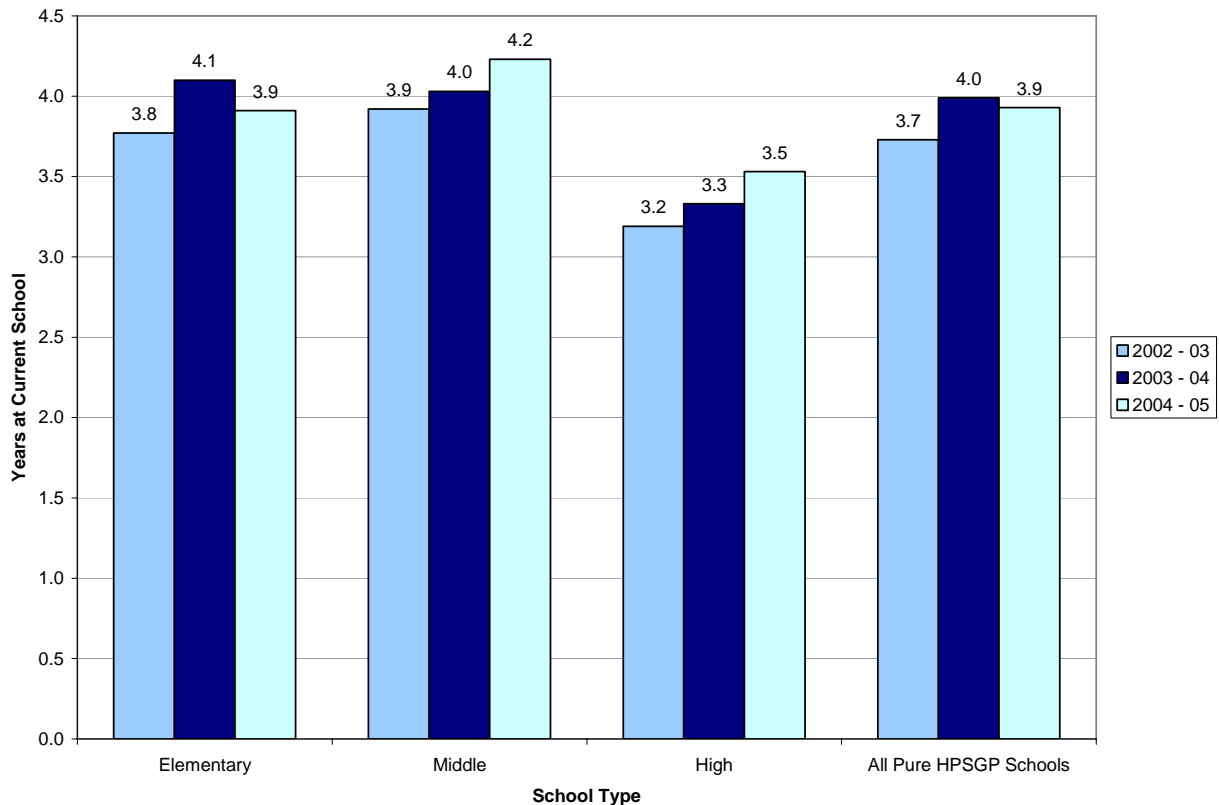
As discussed later in Chapter 4, some of our case study schools experienced chronic principal turnover, with a new principal at the site every one to two years. To understand whether this degree of turnover was characteristic of the larger Pure HPSGP population, we analyzed schools that had new principals (e.g., 0 – 1 year at current school) *across* the three years presented in Exhibit 3.7. Between 12 and 21 percent of Pure HPSGP schools that reported data for all three years had a new principal for two of the three years analyzed, while between 0.6 and 7 percent appeared to have a new principal each year.⁴²

Exhibit 3.8 looks at the average number of years principals have been at the current school by school type and for Pure HPSGP schools overall. Overall, we observe a gradual increase in the number of years at the current school. HPSGP elementary and middle school principals have, on average, been at their current school between 3 to 4 years. While high schools show a small increase between 2002-03 and 2004-05, nonetheless, they remain below the average for all Pure

⁴² The ranges presented here reflect the results of two analyses. The first analysis (n = 242) considered all schools that reported data, even if the school reported zero years of experience at the site in a given year. In this approach, it is possible that a school could appear to have a new principal two years in a row (e.g., a new principal could report “0” in one year, and “1” in the next), and therefore represents an upper-bound percentage. The second analysis (n = 177) excluded schools reporting a zero in any of the years, to eliminate this potential double-counting. It is important to note the large number of schools which did not report any information for this question. About 15 percent of Pure HPSGP schools did not report data in either 2002-03 or 2003-04. This level of missing data raises concerns about validity of the Annual Report data collection.

HPSGP schools. These figures are slightly lower (more so for high schools) than what has been reported nationally. Data from the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) show that public schools principals nationally have been principal at their current school for an average of 4.3 years; this national figure remains stable by school level, with 4.3 years for elementary school principals and 4.2 years for secondary school principals (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006). We will continue this analysis in Year 2, by examining the 2003-04 SASS data to calculate the average years at the current school for a principal in California.

Exhibit 3.8. Average Number of Years of Principal at Current School, 2002-03 through 2004-05, by School Type (Pure HPSGP Schools)



In terms of overall experience as a school principal, 2003-04 SASS data show that elementary principals nationwide have on average 7.9 years of experience and secondary principals have 7.5 years (Strizek et al, 2006). Including years as principal at current HPSGP school and other schools), the average number of years of overall experience for principals serving Pure HPSGP schools is lower than the national averages. Across all school types, HPSGP principals averaged about seven years of experience in principal positions in 2003-04, with a slight increase to 7.6 years the following year (see Technical Appendix D-4). Examining these data by school type, elementary and middle school principals are fairly consistent over time, averaging about seven years as principals. High schools, on average, show growth from 6 years to more than 7 years of experience as principals. Comparing this information to Exhibit 3.8, principals appear to bring with them between 3 to 4 years prior experience as principals in other schools before serving in a Pure HPSGP school.

Given that 30 percent of principals at Pure HPSGP schools have been at their school for less than one year (89 of 297 principals in 2004-05), we examined the prior administrative experience of these new principals (see Technical Appendix D-5). These prior administrative experiences include positions as principals in other schools and additional administrative positions such as assistant principal or program administrator. While these principals are new to the school site, the data suggest several years of experience in other administrative positions. Overall, new HPSGP principals sustained between 8 to 9 years of total administrative experience between 2002-03 and 2004-05, with a small decrease over time. Looking at school levels, however, different patterns emerge for elementary, middle, and high schools. New HPSGP middle school principals show the greatest years of administrative experience, averaging 13 years in 2002-03 and falling to 10 years in 2004-05. On the other hand, new principals in HPSGP elementary and high schools averaged about 8 and 9 years, respectively, of administrative experience during that time period.

Principal training and credentials

As specified in the HPSGP application, principals of HPSGP schools must participate in the Principal Training created by AB 75, a 160 hour professional development training focused on building principals' leadership skills and capacity to serve effectively as instructional leaders. Both principals and vice principals are eligible to participate in the AB 75 training, which focuses on six content areas including: establishing and communicating goals for student-focused instructional improvement; creating awareness of state standards across instructional staff; guiding the implementation of approved instructional programs and materials; directing and supporting professional development and training on instruction and materials; managing data and assessment to guide decisions regarding student interventions and instructional practices; and using resources to support student academic success.⁴³

Overall, 95 percent of the principals at HPSGP schools have enrolled in or completed AB 75 training from 2002-03 to 2004-05. However, more variation is observed by school level. Between 95 and 96 percent of elementary school principals have enrolled in or completed the AB 75 training across all three years. For middle school principals, about 98 percent of principals had done so in 2002-03, falling to 97 percent in 2004-05. Compared to the other school levels, high school principals show a lower percentage enrolling in and completing the required training, with 92 percent in 2002-03, 86 percent in 2003-04, and 91 percent in 2004-05. It should be noted, however, that AB 75 training is provided only for State Board-adopted materials. Given that high school textbooks are not adopted by the State Board, the only AB 75 training available for high school principals is for adopted algebra textbooks or intensive interventions for students reading below 4th grade level. Overall and school-level exhibits are presented in Technical Appendices D-6 to D-9.

Similar to the general pattern of high rates of completion for the AB 75 training, a high percentage of HPSGP principals possess a valid and clear California Administrative Services credential – greater than 97 percent across all three years. While at least 97 percent of elementary and middle school principals possess this credential in 2002-03 through 2004-05, HPSGP high

⁴³ Retrieved June 29, 2006 from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r12/ptp04faqs.asp>.

school principals showed greater fluctuation. In 2002-03, all were credentialed, and 97 percent were credentialed in 2003-04 and 2004-05. Overall and school-level exhibits are presented in Technical Appendices D-10 to D-13.

Conclusion

The personnel analyses presented in this chapter suggest that HPSGP schools, despite serving the state's most challenging populations, may be at a resource disadvantage. For instance, Pure HPSGP schools exhibit a lower percentage of credentialed teachers in relation to the state average, and this is reinforced by the finding that less than 40 percent of the districts had upheld their pledge to raise the percentage of fully credentialed teachers to the district average. These analyses also show that Pure HPSGP schools have lower levels of overall FTE personnel than the statewide average and comparison schools, and fewer teachers at elementary and high schools in relation to other groups. In addition, there appears to be a high degree of administrator turnover in Pure HPSGP schools, with 30 percent of the principals having been at the site for less than a year (and among those schools, as many as 21 percent have had more than one principal over the three-year period analyzed). Without comparable data on principal experience, however, we do not know whether the high percentage of new principals observed in Pure HPSGP schools is characteristic of other schools in the state.

Overall, the school personnel analyses presented in this chapter raise important questions about whether schools participating in the HPSGP do indeed operate at a short term resource advantage as compared to like schools not participating in the program. The theory underlying the HPSGP is that substantial *supplemental* resources are pumped into participating schools. This short-term "shot in the arm" is designed to give them a "jump start." If in fact the short-term infusion of HPSGP funds only temporarily and partially diminishes long-standing resource gaps between these schools and their counterparts, the theory underlying the HPSGP intervention is subject to question.

If HPSGP schools are *not* advantaged in terms of the total personnel resources available to them as compared to similar schools during the period of this intervention, it may not be reasonable to expect performance that exceeds that seen in similar schools. Beyond this, it may be reasonable to hypothesize that *sustained* growth, or continued growth after HPSGP funding ends, should be considered *more* likely in non-participating schools, as the resource advantage they hold at the time of the HPSGP intervention can be expected to grow larger once HPSGP ends.

This chapter is not able to fully address this question because it focuses solely on personnel resources. It considers personnel resources in a broad sense, however, both in terms of quantity and attributes. These analyses ignore other things that the HPSGP might be used to support such as equipment, training, materials and supplies. However, it does suggest that this is an issue that warrants further investigation in Year 2 of this study.

Chapter 4: Case Studies

A major focus of the first year of this evaluation was case study visits to 16 schools in 9 districts. This chapter provides an overview of how these districts and schools were selected, the data collection methods used during these site visits, and how the information obtained was analyzed. The chapter concludes with a summary of initial observations from this site visit component of the study.

Overview

Our primary methodology for gathering qualitative data in Year 1 consisted of visits to 16 Pure HPSGP schools (e.g., schools not participating in II/USP or CSR) nested in nine California districts. Data collection conducted through the case studies was designed to help inform evaluation questions 1, 3, and 5. In other words, how effectively did participating schools and districts implement the HPSGP; what has been the overall impact of participation in the HPSGP; and what unintended consequences have resulted from the implementation of the HPSGP?

Our purpose was to better understand the context in which HPSGP schools operate and explore the implementation and impact of the program in schools that experienced either consistent growth or recent low growth. Interviews with key personnel at the school site, external assistance providers and district personnel associated with the school, as well as focus groups, were designed to inform the following:

1. Stakeholders' reform-related attitudes (e.g., commitment to the reform, trust in the processes and leadership guiding the reform) and their motivation to initiate, participate, and sustain changes that may be necessary to improve student achievement;
2. Strategies used to create positive teaching and learning environments;
3. Types and intensity of professional development opportunities and other supports to teachers, administrators, and staff;
4. Factors that facilitated or hindered the implementation of the HPSGP and school reform efforts; and
5. Role of the district and external evaluator in providing technical support and assistance in schoolwide reform and improvement, as well as district strategies and supports for HPSGP schools.

In addition, the themes and key implementation issues emerging from the studies will further inform the development of the phone surveys to be conducted on a larger sample of administrators during Year 2 of the evaluation.

Sample selection criteria

As noted above, we sought to purposely select improving and non-improving schools as a key feature of our sample design. Our primary selection criterion was centered on whether or not schools had met their annual growth targets over the past three years and a relatively high or low cumulative API growth over the past two years (2004 and 2005). Although some schools received planning grants for 2001-02, the first implementation funding was not released until June 2002. Accordingly, we treated 2002-03 as the first year of participation in the HPSGP and identified schools meeting or not meeting the API growth targets in that year and onwards. Our definitions for these schools are as follows:

- *Consistent Growth Schools* are defined as those meeting API schoolwide and comparative improvement growth targets every year, starting with the first year of the implementation of the HPSGP. In order to target higher performers within this group of schools, we gave preference to schools that demonstrated relative high cumulative API growth across 2004 and 2005.
- *Recent Low Growth or No Growth Schools* are defined as those that did not meet both API growth targets in 2004 and 2005. Within this group, we sampled schools that demonstrated negative or relative low cumulative growth across 2004 and 2005.

Case study recruitment

In November 2005, the CDE sent a letter on AIR's behalf to the district superintendent of each of the case study schools to obtain district approval and permission to contact case study schools regarding participation in the study. AIR staff then followed up with district staff associated with the oversight and implementation of the HPSGP to secure approval. The districts of two of the originally sampled schools declined to participate; as a result, two replacement schools with similar achievement patterns were drawn, and their district offices were contacted in February 2006.

Once district approval was obtained, AIR staff sent a letter outlining the study purpose and site visit overview to the case study school principal and followed up by telephone call to obtain the school's permission to conduct the site visit. AIR staff worked with the principal or other school staff to coordinate the site visit schedule. This included scheduling interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations. Participating school staff included randomly selected certificated staff in core subject areas and classified staff, as well as respondents selected for their experience and knowledge of the HPSGP grant and implementation process. For the parent and student focus groups, schools were asked to invite participants representing a cross-section of the school population. Case study schools received an honorarium of \$500 to help cover the cost of substitute teachers associated with the site visit.

Sample characteristics

Exhibit 4.1 shows the distribution of the final sample in relation to the HPSGP population and all public schools in California in regard to region and urbanicity. Two schools declined to participate in the study, which were replaced.

Exhibit 4.1. Distribution of Geographic Location and Urbanicity of Final Case Study Sample, Pure HPSGP Schools, All HPSGP Schools, and All California Public Schools

	N in Case Study Sample	Sample % (n=16)	Pure HPSGP Schools % (n=351)	All HPSGP Schools % (n=658)	All Schools % (n=10,423)
Southern	6	38%	66%	61%	56%
Central	8	50%	25%	25%	18%
Northern	2	13%	9%	14%	26%
N Missing	.	.	35	46	4,961
Urban	9	56%	59%	62%	43%
Suburban	6	38%	38%	35%	48%
Rural	1	6%	3%	4%	9%
N Missing	.	.	22	30	3,396

SOURCE: CBEDS, 2004-05.

It is important to note that the schools selected for the case studies are not intended to be fully representative of the larger HPSGP population. Given the intensity of case study methods, a case study sample will almost always be too small to allow generalization to the full population. Rather the goal of these analyses is to obtain in-depth qualitative information on the implementation and impact of the HPSGP, and to help identify issues to be explored further through the larger phone survey sample, which will include enough sites to be considered representative of the full population of HPSGP schools.

Exhibit 4.2 provides average two year API growth figures for the sampled consistent growth schools and recent low or no growth schools by school level alongside comparison data for Pure HPSGP schools and all HPSGP schools. The average API growth for the consistent growth and recent low or no growth schools differs somewhat across school levels.

Exhibit 4.2. Average Total Two Year API Growth (2004 and 2005)

	Sampled Consistent Growth Schools	Sampled Recent Low or No Growth Schools	Pure HPSGP Schools	All HPSGP Schools
Elementary	91	-18	36	35
Middle	73	11	50	45
High	108	20	52	56

Many HPSGP schools have also been identified under the federal accountability system for Program Improvement (PI). Nine of the 16 sampled case study schools had been identified for PI, ranging from Year 1 to Year 5 status, meaning these schools may face sanctions from two different accountability systems if targets are not met. As the state and federal systems use different criteria for accountability, four of the eight schools selected as consistent growth schools under the API are currently identified for PI status (six of the eight schools selected as

recent low growth schools are also PI). These mixed signals from the accountability systems are discussed further in Chapter 2.

As described in Chapter 1, the HPSGP is targeted to the lowest 10 percent of California schools in terms of performance on the state accountability system, which overwhelmingly serve high poverty, high minority, and high English learner (EL) populations as compared to the state average. While demographic characteristics were not used as sampling criteria, the resulting case study sample shows some variation on key student demographics such as poverty, minority, and ELs.

Displayed in Exhibit 4.3, the student population in the case study schools ranged between 50 and 100 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (Column B), and between 85 to 100 percent minority (Column C). A wide variation was found in the EL populations, with between 6 and 73 percent of the student population identified as EL, ranging from majority Spanish speakers to a heterogeneous mix of languages other than English (Column D). Student mobility (Column E) ranged from 4 to 57 percent of students first attending the school in the 2004-05 school year. As context for these figures, the statewide student population is 50 percent eligible for free or reduced price lunch, 69 percent minority, 25 percent EL, and 20 percent first attending the school in 2004-05.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ These data reflect statewide averages in 2004-05. In comparison, Exhibit 2.6 in Chapter 2, which includes statewide averages for 2000-01, shows that some change has occurred over time in the state's student demographics. For example, 47 percent of students were eligible for free and reduced price lunch in 2000-01, as compared to 50 percent in 2004-05.

Exhibit 4.3. Demographic Characteristics of Case Study Schools, 2004-05

	Total student enrollment (A)	Percentage poverty¹ (B)	Percentage minority students² (C)	Percentage English learner students³ (D)	Percentage student mobility⁴ (E)
Elementary Schools					
High Growth	<500	100	96	31	24
High Growth	<500	99	100	6	24
High Growth	<500	100	100	73	21
Low Growth	500-1,000	100	94	54	21
Low Growth	500-1,000	93	85	48	18
Low Growth	1,000-1,500	90	100	72	17
Middle Schools					
High Growth	500-1,000	100	96	44	57
High Growth	>1,500	93	100	45	14
Low Growth	500-1,000	97	90	47	8
Low Growth	>1,500	87	91	42	24
High Schools					
High Growth	<500	95	97	40	8
High Growth	500-1,000	50	94	26	4
High Growth	1,000-1,500	60	94	19	5
Low Growth	500-1,000	99	100	54	12
Low Growth	>1,500	77	94	43	15
Low Growth	>1,500	67	99	48	16
Case Study Average	1,370	88	96	43	18
Statewide Average	674	49	68	25	20

Source: CBEDS and Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR), 2004-05.

¹ Percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch is used here as a proxy for poverty level.

² Percentage minority students refers to the percentage of students identified ethnically as other than white.

³ Percentage EL students refers to the percentage of students classified as English learner as a percentage of the total school enrollment.

⁴ Percentage of student mobility refers to the percentage of students who first attended this school in the current year; students in the lowest grade were excluded.

Data collection

During the 1 to 2 day school visit, we collected in-depth qualitative data through interviews and focus groups with a broad range of stakeholders associated with the case study schools, including district and school-level staff, school board members, school site council members, external assistance providers, parents, and students. Site visits were designed to be conducted with one day spent at each school site, followed by a half day spent at the affiliated district office. Individual interviews were conducted at the district level with up to two administrators (including individuals responsible for the oversight of state and federal intervention programs and/or those with expertise in curriculum and instruction, assessment and evaluation), up to two

school board members, and external assistance providers affiliated with each of the case study schools.

At each school site, on average, we interviewed the principal, four teachers, and two paraprofessionals. In addition, we conducted focus groups with teachers, parents (parent focus groups were conducted in either English or Spanish, with additional translation services provided either by research or school staff as needed), School Site Council members, and students (at the middle and high school level only). Two- to three-person research teams conducted the data collection activities, and we requested permission to audio-tape to ensure accuracy of notes (these tapes were not transcribed). The research team also conducted approximately 30-minute observations of interviewed teachers in their classrooms. Though the limited number and duration of classroom observations could not allow us to formally study variations in instructional practices, they provided valuable contextual data for each school. All respondents involved in interview, focus groups, and classroom observations were informed that no individual or school would be identified in this report. Additionally, the HPSGP applications were collected and reviewed for each case study school prior to the site visits to provide contextual information prior to our visits to the schools.

The case study data collection instruments were designed to address the evaluation questions while not burdening respondents. As a first step, we reviewed relevant literature and refined our conceptual framework to identify key constructs and variables at the district, school, and classroom levels. Based on literature of best practices of high-performing schools (just4kids.org; Kannapel et al., 2005) and findings from the II/USP continuation study, the instruments were organized around 6 broad themes: leadership and capacity building (including professional development); school culture; perspective on HPSGP implementation, sustainability, and consequences; school strategies implemented to improve student achievement; district role and support for school reform efforts; and observations regarding student and school outcomes.

We also reviewed AIR instruments previously developed and used for collecting similar information (for example, II/USP and Proposition 227 studies), and these prior efforts provided important guidance for this study. To the fullest extent possible, we attempted to triangulate data so that when possible, information gathered was not solely based on a single source. The resulting categories of instruments (which are included Technical in Appendix G) are as follows:

- **Interviews with District Administrators, School Board Members, External Assistance Providers, Principals, and Teaching Staff:** The administrator and principal interviews focus on the HPSGP requirements (with particular focus on the development of the Action Plan and fidelity of implementation), school improvement strategies, resource allocation, instructional practices, professional development, other supports available for teachers, use of data, parent involvement, monitoring of implementation, and school culture. Interviews with school board members focus on gaining a better understanding of the political context and other local influences on decision-making. Teacher and paraprofessional interviews provide information on the background of the staff member, professional development, goals and objectives of the school, instructional materials and strategies, the coherence of the school's instructional program, and school environment. The instruments include inquiries about what direct support teachers receive to fully implement the adopted materials and instructional strategies (e.g., coaches, time to collaborate on assessments and lesson planning, etc.). A

major focus of these interviews is to understand what factors facilitated and/or hindered the implementation of the HPSGP and school reform efforts, as well as how this occurred and why.

- **School Site Council, Teacher, Parent Focus Groups:** School site council member, teacher, and parent interview protocols were designed to reveal their involvement in school practices and policies, their understanding of the resources and assistance provided to their school through the HPSGP, and any observed effects of the HPSGP.
- **Student Focus Groups:** Student interviews included questions on the school climate and culture, what expectations they and their teachers have of their performance and their future, the degree to which schools support parent involvement, the challenges that students face and how the school addresses those challenges.
- **Classroom Observations:** Classroom observation protocols were designed to provide a snapshot of activities in the classroom useful for providing context to the above data collection activities. They focus on classroom environment, lesson content, assessment activities, instructional resources and strategies.

In addition, at the end of each interview and focus group (excluding student focus groups), we asked each respondent to provide individual ratings on the following five questions:

1. With zero meaning not at all, and 10 meaning highly effective, please rate how effective your school's improvement strategies have been in increasing student achievement.
2. With zero meaning not at all, and 10 meaning highly confident, please rate your confidence in your school's ability to continue its improvement strategies after the HPSGP grant ends.
3. With zero meaning no impact, and 10 meaning greatly helped, please rate how helpful the planning year (if applicable) was to your school's ability to use HPSGP resources effectively.
4. With zero meaning no impact, and 10 meaning greatly helped, please rate how helpful the implementation of the High Priority program has been to your school's improvement efforts.
5. With zero meaning greatly hurt, 5 meaning no impact, and 10 meaning greatly helped, please rate the district's support of your school's improvement efforts.

Exhibit 4.4 displays the numbers of respondents participating in this data collection by respondent type; in total, 400 respondents participated in data collection activities across the 16 case study schools.

Exhibit 4.4. Numbers of Respondents Participating in Case Study Data Collection

Respondent Type	Number of Respondents
School Level Interviews	
Principals ^{<1>}	15
Assistant Principals	5
Teachers	56
Paraprofessionals	23
External Evaluators ^{<2>}	4
School Level Focus Groups	
Teachers	73
School Site Council Members	53
Parents	85
Students (middle and high schools only)	70
District Level Interviews	
District Administrators ^{<3>}	14
School Board Members	3
Total Respondents	400

¹15 principals were interviewed across the 16 visited schools because one school's principal position was vacant.

² This figure does not include local district administrators who serve as a school's external evaluator.

³ This includes a former district external evaluator.

Analysis of case study data

In addition to the data gathered through the interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations, we asked each site visitor at the end of each site visitation day to complete a form summarizing their overall impressions at the site. These called for each site visitor to independently respond in writing as best as they could, based on what they had seen and heard that day to the following points:

- The school's clarity of vision,
- The greatest facilitating factor in the school's improvement efforts,
- The greatest challenge in the school's improvement efforts,
- The role of HPGSP in the school's improvement efforts,
- Critical incidents that seem particularly apt in describing the school, and
- Practices implemented at the site that seemed particularly innovative and making a difference.

This was followed by a brief discussion among the site visitors in regard to their perceptions of the school while the day's experiences were still fresh in their minds and allowed an opportunity to compare notes in regard to what had been observed and heard. Although the degree of

consensus among the site visitors on these instruments was generally high, these post-visit debriefings were effective for checking for uniformity in perceptions and observations, to share what one visitor may have heard and another had not, and to probe deeper in regard to each visitor's conclusions from the day and the evidence to support them.

In addition, a detailed school summary was created for each school by the site visit team based on interview and focus group notes taken during the visit. Using interview notes, classroom observations, Action Plans, and other documents collected at each school, site visitors summarized what they had seen, heard, and read across several overall themes:

- Facilitating and challenging factors in relation to academic progress,
- HP impact, implementation, and sustainability, and
- The role of the district in regard to fostering academic progress at the school generally and specifically in regard to HP implementation.

Findings were summarized by school, and we then created a cross-case matrix organized by these primary constructs across schools to identify patterns and examine commonalities and differences across the sample of schools. Additionally, the five rating questions asked of each respondent (see above) were analyzed by respondent type and summarized by school (see Technical Appendix E). All of these qualitative sources were used in deriving the preliminary findings discussed below. While the primary focus of the discussion below is thematic rather than on presenting tabulations of responses, to the extent that they add to the discussion below, specific tabulations and counts of types of response are included.

The following preliminary findings draw primarily from what was observed and heard by the visitors at each site and draw most heavily from the interviews with district staff, school administrators, and teachers, including the ratings completed by each respondent as described above. While other categories of interviewees, such as board members, parents, students, and site council members sometimes provided valuable context information, they are viewed more as secondary sources of information of the reform efforts being attempted at the school and the role of the HPSGP. Board members and parents tended to lack specific information in regard to the school. Student interviews were only conducted at the secondary school sites, and random selection of respondents, as would be desired for students and parents, was not possible. Paraprofessionals for the most part were only able to provide very general information. Some of the external evaluators were district staff and therefore fell more into that respondent category, and the non-district evaluators generally tended to be fairly removed from the schools and were limited in number (e.g., four sites). Sometimes they could provide valuable information regarding what had occurred during the planning year, but were generally removed from developments at the school since then. School site council focus groups sometimes added new information, but were generally comprised of administrators, teachers, parents, and students, and tended to reflect an amalgam of the views of these respective groups.

Preliminary Findings

The findings from this section are considered preliminary for the study overall, because even though the site visits are complete, the study will continue for another year and will feature a major data collection effort across a much broader range of schools through phone surveys.

An important purpose of the site visits was to gain knowledge regarding the district and school context in which the HPSGP was being implemented to allow a better understanding of barriers and facilitating factors in realizing the program's goals. The "emerging themes" cited in this section of the report will be further explored across the much broader sample of phone survey sites and further discussed in the final report for this evaluation.

Concerns Regarding the Role of the District

One of the most predominant themes surfacing from the case study analysis is the critical and substantially varying role of the district. This clearly affected the visited schools' (both those identified as consistent growth and low growth) ability to address challenges in implementing the HPSGP, their success in improving student performance, and the ability of the HPSGP to contribute to this. Given that all of the visited schools were selected for participation in this program due to low performance and that a substantial financial commitment with important sanctions are associated with this program, we expected a certain degree of special attention to and focus on these schools by their district offices. Often, however, this seemed not to be the case, raising important questions about the ability of interventions like the HPSGP to make an impact on a school even on a short-term basis without clear supporting action on the part of the district. It raises even more important questions about the long-term sustainability of realized gains in the absence of substantial district buy-in and involvement.

Among the districts included in the case study component of this study, a third were perceived as quite helpful in assisting schools to address their academic challenges and specifically in regard to HPSGP implementation. Note that these districts served both consistent growth and low growth schools in our sample. Four of the nine districts visited, however, were generally not perceived as helpful, three of which were or recently had been in some form of crisis. In these cases, the district office seemed to constitute one of the major challenges the school faced regarding its efforts to improve student achievement. In the remaining districts visited, the general relationship between the district and school seemed to be largely one of the district being neither a major help nor detriment. In these schools, the general sense seemed to be that areas of assistance were fairly evenly offset by areas in which the district was seen to be holding them back.

These overall observations are generally corroborated by respondent ratings on a scale of zero to ten in response to the question of degree of district support for their school's improvement efforts, with ratings below five indicating a negative perception of the district. As might be expected, overall concern in this regard was more likely to be expressed by school administrators and teachers than by district administrators. In addition, the parents and school board members interviewed were generally less likely to rate district support as a problem. Of the four external evaluators interviewed who were not employees of the district, two respondents rated the district as having had a negative impact on their school's efforts (i.e., a rating of 2 or 3), while a third

external evaluator gave the district contribution the highest possible rating (the fourth evaluator interviewed by phone did not return the question ratings).⁴⁵

Among the district and school administrator and teacher respondents, unanimity that the district had helped the school's improvement efforts across these three respondent groups was only found at 2 of the 16 visited sites. On the other hand, the majority of the principals rated the district as having been helpful (e.g., rating of 7 or above). At the same time, many of these principals were relatively new and sometimes had a very different perspective from the teachers interviewed at the site, and sometimes even from the district office. At one site, the principal rated the district contribution toward improvement efforts very highly, while six of the eight teachers interviewed gave the district a poor rating, and even the district official interviewed rated the district's efforts in regard helping the school as minimal. At 5 of the 16 schools, at least three of the teachers interviewed (out of a total number of six to eight teacher respondents) rated the district as having hurt their school's reform efforts.

At the district level as well, the self-assessment of the job they had done in support of the HPSGP schools we visited was not always positive. Respondents at two of the nine districts rated the district as not being an overall help to the school in their efforts to improve student performance. District officials from three of the nine districts visited rated their districts as having been a substantial help in their school's improvement efforts (e.g., 9 – 10 rating).

In summary, overall perceptions of district support seemed lacking in relation to what might be expected for some of the state's most academically challenged schools. However, as indicated above, this was not uniformly the case. Below, we describe some of the most predominant areas in which districts were seen as being a support or a hindrance in regard to school improvement.

Supportive district practices

Ongoing provision of student assessment data. One supportive practice from the district cited by school respondents in four districts was ongoing student assessments which were described as instrumental in assisting the schools to assess strengths and weaknesses of individual students, classes, grade levels, as well as the school as a whole. As an example of data support, one principal cited the helpfulness of an online database developed by the district's research department. The system was said to provide easy access to school, teacher, and individual student records and to be increasing accountability at all levels including students being responsible for their own performance. School site members said that they had worked with a district research team "to change our culture around data-driven decision-making using the district data system to focus on nationally recognized instructional strategies." Another site described the district as having changed its data policies to currently give quarterly tests to help teachers determine if they are teaching effectively and on track.

Professional development. This was cited as an important and sometimes effective role for the district by approximately half the teachers on average across all district sites. While teachers

⁴⁵ Please note that the scale used for rating district support was different, in which ratings below 5 indicated a negative rating (e.g., zero meaning greatly hurt, 5 meaning no impact, and 10 meaning greatly helped).

cited its potential importance, some questioned the effectiveness of the district-level professional development. For example, internally or collaboratively provided professional development through local teacher collaboration was seen as more useful than one-day trainings from external providers. At one site where collaboration was especially noted by teachers and considered effective, the district had forged a strong relationship with a neighboring university, offering student teaching positions to many of its students and receiving various forms of technical and training support from its faculty. Also cited as particularly helpful by respondents at this site were district workshops led by teachers for first and second year teachers. This site commended their district for giving the school the freedom to “make choices and pilot new programs.”

Efforts to assign and maintain strong staff. In response to the question of whether any specific efforts were made to allocate some of their strongest administrators and/or teachers to sites struggling the most academically, respondents from seven of the nine district offices visited said they did not have such a program in place. An assistant superintendent from one of these districts reported that they were just now emerging from a period in which “the district would work when it could with low performing schools, but that support was infrequent.” Now, however, the district stresses its commitment to get all of its low performing schools staffed with “highly qualified teachers.” This same district administrator conceded that while the district does not make a concerted effort to re-distribute teaching staff, which it was said would “run into resistance from the union,” it prioritizes assigning new staff to lower performing schools and involves principals of lower performing schools in the recruitment process. In regard to school leadership, it was said, “I have the best principals I can find in my underperforming schools. I just put an excellent principal in one of our SAIT schools – she’s the best I’ve got.” Unfortunately, this degree of special attention followed by specific action was rarely mentioned by other district officials interviewed for this study.

District practices accentuating local school challenges

Principal turnover. In cases where this was especially problematic, it was uniformly referred to by school administrators, teachers, district officials, and sometimes by students and parents. While 8 of the 16 schools we visited had reasonably or quite well established leadership and continuity, half of the schools (in six districts) did not.

In four cases, changing leadership was a chronic problem. This included schools with four principals in the last three years; ten in the last twelve years; five in the last three years; and six principals in the last five years. This corroborates the finding in Chapter 3 that a considerable percentage of Pure HPSGP schools appeared to have more than one principal over the three-year implementation period. Three other sites had new, first-year principals, and one site had not had a principal at the school thus far in the school year and did not expect one to be appointed until the next school year. While new HPSGP principals (i.e., a year or less at the site) reported an average of eight years experience as a principal or administrator elsewhere on the 2004-05 Annual Report, the degree of new leadership at these schools seems exceptionally high. While five of the eight sites with unstable leadership were actually making their annual API targets, the lack of leadership was cited by a number of respondents as a major disadvantage in relation to what might have been accomplished.

District fiscal and/or managerial crisis. This was another major source of difficulty for some of the HPSGP schools visited through this study. When the district is in disarray, it is a substantial

burden on schools already facing pressures with regard to low student performance. Of the nine districts visited for this study, one-third (three districts) were or recently had been in financial or managerial disarray, and all three were lacking a permanent superintendent at the time of our visit. For example, one of the districts had been without a superintendent since it was found to be in substantial financial arrears about a year ago. Virtually all funding for this district was being held up by the County Office of Education (COE). At the time of the site visit, HPSGP and virtually all other funds or resources were not apparent at the school. The library was largely void of all materials; the biology lab had no supporting materials such as beakers or specimens; and the teachers reported they were not allowed to use the school copy machine in preparation for their classes due to budget constraints.

While another of the visited districts had recently emerged from its financial problems, district respondents acknowledged their inability to pay anything other than periodic attention to their lowest performing schools until just this past year. The third district was being virtually completely run by temporary administrative staff. All three district leaders had been appointed on a short-term basis by the school board. The two district-level interviewees at this site attested to the high degree of dysfunctionality of the district over the past several years, and the school visited in this district cited lack of support from the district as the biggest barrier it faced in regard to school improvement. This also clearly appeared to be the case in regard to the first district cited above.

Not targeting low performing schools. As described above, when HPSGP schools were targeted by the district for special treatment or attention, such as assignment of strong and proven leadership and instructional staff, this was considered a major plus. However, such targeted actions were cited for schools in only two districts. Earlier, we described a school that went a full academic year without a principal. At another site, where academic progress clearly was being made, the principal noted that she had to put in exceptionally long hours at the school, completing her paperwork after school, due to a lack of playground supervision and office administrative support. Although she had approval for the positions, when she selected candidates for employment the district was so slow in processing the needed paperwork that the applicants had found other jobs. She had finally given up and was attempting to perform all these routine tasks herself, as well as serving as the instructional leader for the school. At about a third of the other sites, principals, teachers and sometimes students pointed out that they felt as if their schools did not have the same level of resources provided to other schools in the district. They would point to the physical plant (especially the library) as one indicator of this, as well as referring to frequent turnover in local leadership where this was a problem.

Lack of district HPSGP implementation support. As pointed out above, 4 of the 16 visited sites had experienced considerable principal turnover during the HPSGP implementation period, while an additional three schools had first-time principals and another had no principal. This lack of stability in local leadership generally seemed to complicate and confound program implementation. Beyond this, as mentioned above, three of the nine districts visited were, or recently had been, in some form of serious fiscal and/or management crisis. This also made it difficult for schools to focus on program implementation in a coherent way.

In some of the sites, this translated into a lack of timely knowledge from the district about the expected or actual arrival of HPSGP funds. In one form or another, this was a major concern

expressed by respondents (especially principals) in three of the nine districts included in these case studies.

Issues Regarding HPSGP Implementation

A second set of over-arching issues in regard to the HPSGP relate to program implementation. To a large extent, they are nested in the concerns listed above in regard to inconsistent district attention to and support of low performing schools. The theory of action that appears to underlie the HPSGP is that schools would have an opportunity to assess their needs and reasons for prior low academic performance, and by applying to the program signal their willingness to use HPSGP funds as a springboard to long-term improvement. Outside assistance would be brought in through the external evaluator/outside entity, and a planning year (if the school chose to do this as a part of the program) would be spent developing a comprehensive action plan that would guide subsequent reform over the next several years that would place the school on the path to ongoing improvement. If the targeted gains were realized, there would be a reward in the form of a fourth year of HPSGP funding. However, if the specified targets were not met, there would be sanctions at the end of the program that could have important implications for the school.

Lack of program awareness

In a number of ways, this sequence of events seemed to break down. A majority of respondents (but not all) at each school site had some level of understanding that the school was receiving funding from the HPSGP. Most knew that there was money associated with this program, were grateful for the resources it had added to the school, and generally felt these resources had been useful.

However, partly due to the instability of leadership and teacher turnover noted in half the visited sites, relatively few teachers and school administrators (and rarely parents) had an understanding of what a program of this financial magnitude and importance entailed with respect to expected results and possible sanctions. For example, approximately a quarter of the teachers interviewed seemed unaware of the program or that the school was participating. Others knew of the program, but not exactly why the school was in it (e.g., they attributed it to demographics or the school's Program Improvement status) or the program's expectations.

Action plan

While some teachers and principals remembered creating an HPSGP Action Plan, continuity of the plan was complicated by teacher and school leadership turnover at a number of visited schools. As a result, relatively few respondents believed that the Action Plan was still meaningful and was actively guiding current practice in the school. The Action Plan seemed to be a living document guiding practice in the school in an ongoing way in a third of the schools. Even in these schools, however, it was sometimes noted that while the plan was still adhered to, it really was not evolving.

To be fair, most sites had some type of plan in place, particularly the Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). Even though they could not directly connect strategies to the HPSGP Action Plan, per se, this does not mean that the plan did not influence current practice in important ways.

External evaluator

In addition, there was considerable confusion regarding the external evaluator, and relatively little in the way of positive comments that this had been a helpful component of the school's reform efforts. Knowledge of the external evaluator/outside entity was either non-existent or negative across the vast majority of the 16 schools visited through this study. While a positive experience with the external evaluator, or at least partly positive, was described at two sites, and a somewhat positive experience at another, principal and teacher respondents from the remaining 14 sites were generally unaware that there had been such a person associated with their school, or generally reported that this person had not been helpful. One respondent commented, "No one is happy to see her." Another expressed concern that the external evaluator had been a waste of money.

Under the HPSGP, the external evaluator only needs to be involved in the first year, and then may or may not be continued. This role may be played internally, e.g., by the district office, and in those cases, the support appeared less clear cut. For one site, we interviewed the person listed on the application as the district external evaluator, who had no knowledge of this designation. Along with the considerable turnover in administrative and teaching staff, as noted above, this may contribute to the general lack of knowledge observed across the visited schools. Overall, however, it is hard to conclude from these case study findings that the external evaluator model, as currently conceived, has been an effective component of the HPSGP intervention.

Spending provisions

Fourth year funding. The provisions associated with the receipt of fourth year HPSGP funds were also problematic. The way the law is currently written, it was not possible to know if sites would be eligible to receive fourth year funding until after the third year test scores were received and fully analyzed by the state.

Accompanied by the general confusion described above, this component of the law is especially problematic. Even in the case of perfect communication (i.e., help from knowledgeable and supportive districts), schools were not notified until the fall as to whether they would receive fourth year funds. Several schools, not knowing they might receive these funds, had released key personnel paid for with HPSGP resources who had been instrumental to the school's academic progress (e.g., coaches). Even when there was knowledge of the funds, they did not arrive until late fall (and even as late as January, for some schools lacking valid scores in the fall).

This late notification and arrival coupled with the June time limit for spending were reported as major concerns by principals, and some district administrators. They said they felt considerable pressure to spend these funds in a hurry, and therefore in not as thoughtful a way as they would have liked.

Carry-over of funds. This was reported as a problem at four of the visited sites where arguably the money had not been fully utilized in prior years. This under-utilization seemed exacerbated by insufficient information from the district in regard to availability and use of HPSGP funds, as well discontinuity in programs and strategies due to high principal turnover. For example, one newly arrived principal at a large site (the fourth principal to head this site over the past three years) was faced with the challenge of spending more than \$2 million in HPSGP funds by the end of the year (that is, within approximately three months at the time of the visit). He stated that

he was “appalled” with the limited timeframe in which he had to spend this money and that it would not allow him to spend these funds in any coherent way aligned with his plan for improvement at the school. He noted that each former principal had had a particular vision of how the money was to be used, and consequently the school was constantly changing direction.

Yet another school had \$2 million between the fourth year funding and carry-over from prior years – more than double their annual grant – and departments were scrambling to prepare “wish lists” and purchase orders before the spending deadline. The school site council members directly attributed the carry-over to the constant disruptions in the school leadership, which undermined attempts at school reform. Another school had carried over funds from prior years and accumulated \$1.4 million to spend in the final year – nearly three times their annual grant award. The large residual or the need to spend out by June did not arise during our visit, which may suggest that the school was unaware of these issues (even though they were very real at the time).

This raises questions about why schools that were generally “resource poor” (as a whole) sometimes had surplus HPSGP funds. It can be argued that if they had spent all the funds available to them through the HPSGP, they might have appeared less resource poor.

On the other hand, the HPSGP is designed to be a short-term program, rather than a long-term solution to over arching resource deficiencies. In addition, resource poor refers to more than the availability of textbooks, supplies, training, and supplemental interventions. The major resource category in public education is staff, and one way (although not the only way) in which the visited schools were resource poor is that they did not have the benefit of consistent leadership. This lack of leadership seemed a major factor preventing a more coherent spending plan for the school. This is also an area in which the district might have provided more support in terms providing implementation assistance in regard to the HPSGP – especially at schools with considerable changes in leadership.

Note that the CDE subsequently announced to HPSGP districts and schools in May 2006 that schools could request that the June deadline for spending fourth year HPSGP funds be extended. However, as some schools faced earlier internal district deadlines and the fact that the notification from the CDE came quite late in the school year, it is not clear what impact the extension had on spending patterns.

Sanctions

Sanctions were also a point of confusion for the school, with some principals and approximately half of interviewed teachers (across all school sites) being relatively unaware that sanctions were possible under the state program and often confusing their school’s state versus federal status regarding academic progress. This lack of information may be due to high teacher and administrative turnover, which further brings into question the viability of an intervention like the HPSGP absent greater staff stability. It is also likely partly due to the confusion inherent in dual accountability systems.

Other Facilitating and Challenging Factors

As mentioned, an important role of this study in addition to assessing the HPSGP in the aggregate is to better understand the underlying factors, conditions, and strategies that seem most

associated with program failure and success. Even if the overall program impact appears statistically significant but educationally small, these average findings mask a great deal of variation. The purpose of this section of the qualitative case study findings is to describe other facilitating and challenging factors beyond those listed above under district role and implementation issues.

Facilitating factors

It should be noted that the facilitating factors (described below) that were reported by the respondents in this study and observed by the research teams visiting the schools align well with what has been found in other recent studies examining school performance and factors facilitating school improvement (Bitter et al., 2005; Parrish et al., 2006; Williams, Kirst, & Haertel, 2005). It is also interesting to note the extent to which these factors were noted by respondents and by site visitors across visited sites that we had pre-selected for exhibiting low and consistent API growth. One purpose of stratifying the sample in this way was to identify factors that may be related to higher and lower student achievement. However, what we found often cut across these definitions, suggesting that there is no single clear criterion by which to distinguish *a priori* schools that clearly seemed on the path to success in regard to improved student outcomes and those not.

Some of the more predominant factors reported to facilitate academic success across the sites include the adoption and use of a common curriculum; a stable, strong, and collaborative teaching staff and administration; professional development opportunities; use of data to drive instruction and intervention programs; and the increased focus brought about through the scrutiny of accountability standards. Even though thorough knowledge of all of the particulars of the HPSGP was not commonly found across sites, there was fairly uniform agreement that the HPSGP funds had been an important catalyst in enabling some of these facilitating factors, or in allowing the school to continue to hold them in place, particularly in light of limited resources and lack of discretionary funding.

While none of the elements listed below were cited by all of the visited schools, all, however, were consistently reported across a range of respondents and school types, as important factors contributing to the progress of the school.

Common curricula. This was cited by respondents at about a quarter of the sites as a factor facilitating school success. It allowed them to work as a team using a common basis, assisted grade-level and cross-grade planning, and made transition from one class and one grade to another easier for students. One particularly successful secondary site cited their common curricula and the collaboration that it enabled as the most central feature to the realization of its mission. They described this collaboration as departmental, interdisciplinary, and school-wide, and that they were able to make it an integral part of the school day through the use of flexible scheduling.

Joint planning time. At the majority of sites, teacher respondents tended to describe lack of joint planning time as a concern. However, at about one-third of the sites, they had found a way to build this into the school day, and joint planning was cited as especially important and effective in enabling their ability to work together to enhance student performance at the school. This was made most productive through common curricula and the provision of ongoing assessment data.

Use of data. As described earlier in the district role, ongoing assessments and use of data were cited as important elements in improving school academic performance. This pertained to about one-half the schools, and was specifically referenced in four of the nine districts. As an example, one district was cited as providing data that allowed ongoing periodic evaluation of assessment information that could guide subsequent instructional adjustments as needed.

Improved discipline. Approximately a quarter of the sites pointed to the progress they had made and the importance of improving the overall atmosphere and discipline at the school as an important precursor to academic progress. Respondents attributed their progress in this area to strong and consistent leadership that had made discipline a top priority and staff that worked as a team to consistently enforce these policies. At the same time that discipline was enforced at these schools, the overall emphasis seemed much more on developing a caring community than an “iron-hand” approach. Discipline was said to be emphasized not so much as the end objective, but as a necessary precursor to the development of a cohesive community of teachers and students.

Staff empowerment. All of the factors above were said to contribute to a sense of efficacy among staff in a collective sense at a school site. When staff are empowered, and given the time to work together to seek common goals (and especially when they are starting to see some success), it is said to strengthen their identification with the site and to encourage leadership among the local teaching staff as well as longevity. This also seems to be an important factor in engaging students. A stable and committed staff was often cited as having major dividends in terms of student achievement, and was said to be one of the major enabling factors in schools that appear to be firmly on the path to academic progress.

In the majority of schools visited, this was more of a concern than a cited strength. However, in about a third of the sites, principals pointed to their teachers as among their most valued assets at the school, and teachers said they felt empowered by school and district administration to be as effective as possible in meeting their students’ learning objectives. Where staff were clearly valued and uniformly on board with the learning goals of the school, this was noted by students and parents as well.

Professional development. Although this was often cited by teacher respondents as potentially important to their school’s academic progress, the effectiveness of the development received was often perceived as mixed. Time for staff within the school to cross-train, and jointly plan, using the types of common curricula and information described above was cited by teacher respondents at approximately one-third of the sites as perhaps the most effective time spent in regard to their professional development.

Although not broadly mentioned, AB 466 training was cited as important by some of the teachers interviewed at a couple of the sites. For example, at one site there was consistent reference to the school’s enhanced commitment to instructional coherence and “teaching to the standards,” which they said had been substantially bolstered through their AB 466 training.

Accountability emphasis. While some concerns were expressed about the amount of time spent on testing and the strong emphasis on reading and math sometimes at the expense of other subjects, the overall sense across the sites was that the emphasis on school accountability had

provided a useful “wake up” call for the school. Over half of the teacher and administrator respondents pointed to heightened accountability at the school level as a positive development. Teachers described it in terms of having sharpened their focus and created a greater sense of urgency in their work.

Challenges

Respondents also discussed the challenges they face in improving school academic performance. In addition to lack of district support, as described above, these included administrative turnover at the district and school; lack of teacher buy-in and teacher turnover; inordinate large school size; year-around school schedules; and in several cases, conflict between the school’s version of bilingual or dual immersion programs and the testing requirements in English. A final set of important challenges dealt with the inability of these schools to retain a strong core of able teachers in historically low-performing sites.

School-level respondents often cited the characteristics of their students as their greatest challenge. However, as these are the types of students – to a large extent – who attend “low-performing” schools, this section focuses on factors more within local control.

It should be noted, however, that perhaps the biggest potential source of impact on school performance is a major shift in the number and types of students in attendance. Fairly substantial recent shifts in student population were noted at several of the visited schools. The degree to which this is occurring across HPSGP sites generally in relation to other schools, and the potential impact of these changes on measures of how the school is performing over time will be explored in greater depth in the second year of this study.

School characteristics. The school context in which the HPSGP is being implemented is important. For example, three of the schools we visited had year-round calendars. District and school administrators, and some teachers, cited this as a major detriment to meeting heightened academic expectations. Multi-track calendars were reported to make it difficult to provide consistent professional development and to design supplemental programs for all students, with each track able to provide some interventions and not others. One of the districts we visited reported that they had decided to remove all year-round programs by building new schools (and using portables in the interim) to better assist school reform efforts.

As another context variable, 4 of the 16 visited schools had long-term bilingual programs that seemed to complicate progress at the school as well as ongoing methods for assessing progress. One of the schools, where academic progress had stalled over the past several years, was divided into two bilingual and two English-only classes at each grade. This division had historically created some dissension at the school between the bilingual and non-bilingual classes and teachers. Parent involvement is seen as high in one strand, but not the other. This division is clearly a challenge to the school in regard to creating a coherent school-wide program. At the same time, it is a rallying point for many at the school, and the existence of this program seems to retain strong teachers who might not choose to stay there otherwise. Another site, also stalled in regard to performance gains, has a bilingual “school within a school” for their dual immersion program. This tended to divide their school, but also attracted a much academically stronger cadre of students to the school. A third school became a charter school for the sole purpose of allowing them to maintain their dual immersion program. However, the majority of the students

in the program speak English, so there were few Spanish speaking models which are needed for a dual immersion model to work. The fact that they were largely conducting classes in Spanish for these English speakers, even though they will be tested in English, resulted in a lack of district support in regard to their school improvement efforts.

Also, the size of two of the schools we visited was reported by many respondents, and by a variety of respondent types at these schools, as being an obstacle to reform. With student enrollments exceeding 2,600 students and as much as 5,000, it was reported to be especially difficult for interventions like the HPSGP to make a significant impact.

District administrative turnover. Principal and teacher respondents in four of the nine districts visited through this study mentioned administrative turnover at the district level posed a major challenge in their efforts to make academic progress.

Teacher turnover, morale, and burnout. Although CBEDS does not allow tracking of teacher or principal turnover at a school, which is an unfortunate omission, teacher turnover was generally cited as a concern by principals and teachers across the vast majority of the sites visited. Low teacher morale was also commonly cited as a concern by teachers and principals at a majority of sites. On the other hand, at about a quarter of the sites where considerable progress was clearly observed, it often seemed to be the result of a very dedicated core of instructional and administrative staff at the school, who were putting in extremely long days on a consistent basis. In addition, many of the types of interventions being employed at these schools involved longer school days and longer school years for students, often further extending demands on existing staff. Given that one important path to success (perhaps the most important) observed at some of the schools making the most progress was very hard work and extremely long days, one challenge for sustained academic growth at some schools will be how to stem teacher turnover and burnout.

Perceived HPSGP Impact

While there was a striking lack of awareness of the particulars of the HPSGP at many sites, the general sense of the program was very positive. At most sites, the funds had been used to acquire resources considered instrumental to newly developed instructional programs. Staff expressed appreciation for HPSGP resources and were concerned about the school's capacity to sustain these programs beyond the grant period. Based on the respondent ratings, perceptions differed little across the consistent and low growth sites. Consistent growth school respondents averaged a rating of 8.8 on the helpfulness of the HPSGP to their school's improvement efforts, while low growth schools rated an average of 8.4.

Sites reported differing philosophies in regard to the use of these funds, with some generally reporting investments in personnel resources, and others seeming to place greater emphasis on non-personnel items. While a preference was often expressed for more investments in staff, the temporary nature of the HPSGP funds and uncertainty about when they would arrive (as well as if they would arrive in the case of fourth year funds) led some schools to direct funds toward items that would still be on-site after the funds ran out.

Non-personnel investments predominately included technology (computers, projectors, software); extra textbooks, supplemental books, and materials; motivational prizes for students; and science supplies, as well as specialized testing programs and curricula. While most of these non-personnel investments had the advantage of still being at the school after the program ends, in several instances they were not well thought out and ultimately were not used. One site pointed to a substantial investment in hand-held computer “wizards” that could serve as a form of tutorials for students. However, because the material was not well aligned with the core curriculum, it ended up not being used. At another site, a fairly heavy investment was made in a school-wide reform program that was ultimately dropped by the district and was consequently not used at the school site. Overall, however, other types of supplemental materials were seen as very helpful to the site and instrumental to the academic gains they had been able to make.

Some decisions to invest in non-personnel resources seemed entirely driven by timing. As mentioned above, some sites reported that due to changes in leadership at the school, poor communications by the district, or just the particulars of the program (e.g., with fourth year funds), principals sometimes found themselves with large amounts of funds that had to be spent in a hurry. One principal at a very large site reviewing expenditures made with the three years of HPSGP resources prior to his arrival concluded, “We have not used these resources effectively.”

Schools in districts that could help them better plan for the arrival and effective use of HPSGP resources, and that were sometimes able to provide an advance on the money prior to its actual arrival, were in a much better position to make well-planned, strategic decisions about the use of HPSGP resources. These sites were able to invest more often in supplemental staff to bolster what the school could provide during the regular academic day and also to provide additional services after school or during an extended school year. For example, several sites used HPSGP funds primarily to provide after-school and Saturday interventions.

At another site, the funds were used to provide what might be considered a vital component of the infrastructure for a school that size – a vice principal. This vice principal had been a former teacher at the school and was highly touted across virtually all staff interviewed and by parents as having been instrumental in turning the school around. He was attributed with greatly fostering discipline at the school in a way that freed up the principal to become a much more effective instructional leader.

Other sites hired staff to reduce class size, to provide instructional coaches, AVID tutors, additional counselors, and to allow enhanced teacher preparation and time for collaboration. Training around such strategies and curricular approaches as Open Court, High Point, and Early Success were also often mentioned. Considerable new focus on staff development was also cited as possible through the use of HPSGP funds. Training was provided internally by reading and math coaches, as well as by other teachers, by county consultants, and through AB 466.

HPSGP expenditures across the case study sites as reported on reports⁴⁶ submitted to the CDE for the three year period of 2002-03 to 2004-05 show somewhat larger investments of HPSGP funds on personnel (55 percent) than on non-personnel items (45 percent). However, this balance

⁴⁶ HPSGP schools are required to submit year-end expenditure reports that report on the amount of HPSGP funds spent on the following categories: Certificated Salaries; Classified Salaries; Employee Benefits; Books and Supplies; Services and Operating; Capital Outlay; and Indirect Cost.

varied broadly with nine sites spending the majority of their HPSGP funds on personnel, and seven spending most of these funds on non-personnel. Five sites spent over 75 percent of the HPSGP funds received during this three-year period on personnel, as opposed to two sites spending more than 75 percent of these grant funds on non-personnel. Among the sites investing HPSGP grant funds heavily on personnel (75 percent or more), three sites were among those pre-identified as consistent growth schools and two as relative recent low growth.

Unfortunately, data on how HPSGP funds were expended at *all* participating schools have not been fully reconciled by the CDE. We will attempt to learn more about how HPSGP resources were used and perceptions about the relative cost-effectiveness of some of these alternative investments through our phone survey in Year 2.

HPSGP Sustainability

Where academic school progress appears to have resulted from the HPSGP, how likely is it to be sustainable after the program ends? The perspectives of staff across sites in regard to this question were fairly split. Although individual staff at the same site did not necessarily have the same view on this, in the aggregate, staff at about half the sites generally expressed optimism in regard to their ability to carry on upon the termination of the HPSGP and the other half were less, or not at all, optimistic.

Interestingly, confidence in sustainability did not differ appreciably between schools shown to be experiencing success under this program as opposed to those not showing success. Principals at consistent growth schools rated their chance of sustained progress somewhat higher than recent low growth schools, with five out of the seven principals rating their confidence as high (e.g., 8 or above).⁴⁷ At the low performing schools, four of the seven principals rated themselves as highly confident.⁴⁸ Teachers at the consistent growth schools were actually slightly less confident than those at the recent low growth sites.

The degree to which the school had invested in personnel versus non-personnel resources might be expected to influence respondent perspectives on sustainability. While personnel investments may have the capacity to bring about more profound and immediate change, investments in staff may also be the most subject to fall off in regard to returns on achievement if these staff can not be maintained after program funding ends. Conversely, schools investing in equipment and materials may be less concerned about an immediate fall off in impact upon the program's end. However, based on the sustainability ratings for the three schools spending 70 percent or more on non-personnel and the five schools spending 70 percent or more on personnel, this did not seem to matter much. Perceived sustainability was actually somewhat higher in schools investing in personnel (7.1 vs 6.7). This is more pronounced when just looking at principal perceptions, with an average principal rating of 9 in regard to sustainability at the five schools investing primarily in personnel, as opposed to 6.5 at the three schools investing primarily in non-personnel.

⁴⁷ One consistent growth school did not have a principal at the time of the site visit.

⁴⁸ One principal of a recent low growth school did not provide a rating for this question.

The extent to which staff training can have sustainable results is uncertain. If the training is effective and useful, and the staff receiving the training remain at the school, the impact may outlast the grant award. However, as staff and administrative turnover are known to be a problem at these schools, this is not assured. Teachers who pointed to the importance of professional development noted that the knowledge gained from this effort could be sustained only if a core group of teachers remained to share this training with new teachers. Yet that strategy was in doubt, given the already heavy workloads and teacher burnout described earlier.

In a sense, the schools that became most invested in the program and strategically spent the funds in whatever way they felt would have the most immediate impact may be at greatest jeopardy in regard to a sustained effect once the program ends. The principal of a school that relied heavily upon the HPSGP responded to the question of sustainability by saying, “When [the grant] ends, we will drop off the end of the earth.” While the teachers at that school generally seemed to feel they could sustain progress within their own classes, they were less confident about the whole school. At another school, which had used HPSGP resources to invest in a vice-principal position that respondents believed was vital to the school’s progress, the vice principal said that he was already searching for a position elsewhere for next year due to the grant’s end.

The notion of sustainability of a program effect appears especially problematic when districts are currently in crisis (which was the case in two of the nine districts we visited), or when the district provides relatively little support. This concern seems corroborated by analyses showing that HPSGP schools have fewer personnel resources than the average California school. The fact that HPSGP schools have greater student needs and fewer personnel resources raise important questions about the degree to which districts are targeting these schools for supplemental support, or are even equally attending to them in relation to other schools. Without district support in maximizing the use of HPSGP resources at the school level when they are available and district help in transitioning reforms initiated during the program into the post-program period, sustainability of an HPSGP effect may be seriously in question.

Conclusion

As noted at the onset to this chapter, the preliminary case study findings can not be generalized to the larger population of HPSGP schools as the sample was too small. Rather, a major purpose of case study findings is to provide texture and depth of understanding of the context and implementation issues at participating sites. This form of in-depth probing allows a much better understanding than can be gleaned from larger scale data collection.

As mentioned, an important reason for case study analyses is to provide a basis for the much more streamlined set of topics to be explored on a much larger scale through the telephone interviews that will be conducted in Year 2. Through these phone interviews, we will be able to include many more schools than we were able to visit, but we will also need to be much more efficient in regard to the questions we ask. The themes emerging from the case study analyses, as presented in this chapter, will provide a primary basis for the development of the phone interview protocols that will provide information generalizable to the full population of HPSGP schools.

Chapter 5: Summary of Year 1 Findings and Preliminary Recommendations

Summary of Findings

Overall performance of low-performing schools (both those participating and not participating in the HPSGP) is, by many standards, improving in an era in which state and federal accountability systems have been introduced. The accountability movement in general, and interventions like the HPSGP in particular, have cast an important spotlight on traditionally underperforming schools with the clear expectation being conveyed to state, district, and school administrators that the sometimes long standing status quo for these schools is no longer acceptable.

At the same time, analyses of school- and student-level achievement for this evaluation to date show no substantial additional improvement in schools participating in the HPSGP. Likewise, two prior evaluations of the II/USP program found that while it successfully focused attention on student achievement and low-performing schools, there appeared to be only negligible overall impact on student achievement in participating schools (O'Day & Bitter, 2003; Bitter et al., 2005).

One reason for lack of substantial HPSGP impact may result from the basic design of the program, i.e., a relatively short-term injection of funds may be insufficient to substantially affect school performance. Another over-arching theme from the case studies was that in the absence of certain “pre-conditions,” successful program implementation was not likely. Other possible reasons that have been discussed in the report include implementation breakdowns, insufficient district commitment and support, principal turnover, and the fact that HPSGP schools may be in fact operating at a resource deficit in relation to other schools even after the addition of HPSGP funds. Added to these contextual issues is the fact that HPSGP schools on average serve higher percentages of educationally challenged students (i.e., those in poverty and those who are EL) than other schools. To better understand the findings from this evaluation and their implications for future state policy, it is important to assess the degree to which observed breakdowns are occurring due to program design, implementation issues, or from underlying systemic causes.

The preliminary findings regarding the HPSGP impact as discerned through the case study observations, which are not generalizable to the population of HPSGP schools, are fairly consistent with these prior II/USP studies, as well as what has been found to date from analyses of student-level assessment and statewide resource data. The case study findings appear supported by the analysis of student achievement at Pure-Pure HPSGP sites in relation to comparison schools. Here we saw a statistically significant, but educationally small, impact from the HPSGP. The personnel resource allocation findings, based on data from CBEDS, also seem to corroborate case study concerns regarding the lack of any special (or perhaps even equal) district treatment for its lowest performing schools. One reason HPSGP schools may not show

greater improvement in student achievement in relation to the comparison sites is because they actually have fewer personnel resources even though they are receiving HPSGP funding. The expectation of greater student growth as a result of greater resources at HPSGP schools may be unreasonable if total personnel resources at these schools are actually less than at comparison sites. We know that not all HPSGP resources were spent on staff. At the same time, staff are the most critical school resources affecting school outcomes. This is a critical issue to explore further in Year 2 of this study.

Given this context, our interim assessment of the impact of the program is mixed. No substantial gain in student achievement is seen in HPSGP sites in relation to the comparison sites. On the other hand, given the way the HPSGP recipients are selected (i.e., taking the lowest performing schools in the state), there is no way to select a completely acceptable comparison cohort. In addition, we are testing whether the HPSGP as a funding supplement (as well as its other provisions) is able to bolster student achievement. But the fact that HPSGP schools appear to have fewer staff resources than the comparison sites, or the average school in the state (as well as higher percentages of students at risk for academic failure), raises the question of whether the HPSGP really does provide a financial *supplement* for these schools. While the program does provide short-term funds that these schools would not have otherwise, it does not appear to raise them above the level of personnel resources that exists in the average school across the state on a permanent basis.

The picture is complex. The case studies left the site visitation teams with the impression that the HPSGP resources were making a difference in schools where the types of implementation issues discussed throughout this report did not interfere. Ideal conditions included receiving the funds in a timely manner, full and accurate knowledge about the funds and how they could be spent, as well as sufficient constancy of leadership and staff in the school to allow for long-term planning that is needed for supplemental funds of this type to be strategically spent. Under these conditions, school staff and leaders were able to use HPSGP resources to purchase combinations of personnel, non-personnel, and contracted services (e.g. external training or conference participation) to make a substantial difference in the academic experience and outcomes of students. Given the temporal nature of these resources, however, their ability to sustain this impact is open to question.

HPSGP schools were selected to be the very lowest performing schools in the state, tend to enroll the most educationally challenged students, and on average have fewer personnel resources than most schools (even after the receipt of HPSGP funds). These facts, coupled with numerous and often serious implementation breakdowns, make it somewhat striking that the program *does* show on average a statistically significant but educationally small advantage over the comparison sites included in this study. When considered in the aggregate, these findings suggest that something positive appears to be coming from this program. Even with this somewhat encouraging note, however, substantial program modifications are recommended below.

Preliminary Recommendations

These recommendations are intended to increase the chances of future HPSGP success, as well as the ability to measure program outcomes. They include increased assurances of district involvement and accountability in the form of at least equal resources at targeted schools *before* adding HPGSP funds and the provision of stable site leadership as preconditions to participation. They also include provisions designed to make the Action Plan and the external evaluator components of the HPSGP more effective.

While we have attempted to make these recommendations fairly specific, they also must be considered preliminary given that we are currently at the mid-point of this study. These preliminary recommended changes are areas of focus for the major data collection activity in Year 2 of this study, the phone surveys.

The personnel resource analyses included in this report further emphasize the need for an overall K-12 funding plan in the state that is much more effective at targeting resources to the schools where they are most needed. The HPSGP does not replace this need. However, with some of the provisions outlined below, we believe its chances of positively affecting student performance in participating schools may be substantially enhanced.

District role: The role of the district must be explicitly enhanced and the district held accountable for school progress and for establishing and maintaining “conditions” for success.

We recommend that bolstered assurances, against which districts will be held accountable, be a prerequisite for school participation in the HPSGP. The analyses from this study to date suggest that active engagement of districts is an important pre-condition for program success. This recommendation mirrors the guidelines developed by the CDE for the second cohort of HPSGP schools, which institutes a continuous improvement process facilitated by a District/School Liaison Team. The guidance also calls for the Action Plan to demonstrate a clear support role for the district in the development and implementation of the plan and shared responsibility for school progress.

In fostering district accountability, we recommend that the CDE develop a system of rewards and sanctions at the district level that are associated with the success or lack thereof of participating schools. For example, in regard to the assurances above, district compliance should be especially closely monitored in cases where participating schools are not showing success. Initially, districts should be reminded of their responsibilities in regard to program implementation and that these assurances must be fulfilled to allow for continued program participation. Ultimately, if districts do not comply and schools are continuing to fail, ongoing program funding should be withheld. School success in the program appears much less likely absent district support, and district assurances of support mean little in the absence of accountability measures specifying the consequences of long term failure to meet program conditions.

As mentioned in the case study section, in some instances certain pre-conditions for successful program implementation appeared lacking. Capacity building at these schools must be

considered a district priority. The types of pre-conditions for application could include additional assurances that applying schools will receive assistance from the district in the following areas:

Assurance 1: Applying schools are already at, or preferably above, the district average in regard to levels of personnel and non-personnel resources, or will be before the end of the first year of implementation. Extant state data could be used to develop indices measuring this.

The resource analysis in Chapter 3 demonstrates that HPSGP schools, on average, are behind the statewide average in terms of overall personnel resources. There is already a district assurance in the original HPSGP application requiring that the percentage of fully credentialed and experienced teachers at the school increase at least to the district average by the end of the second year of implementation. According to this assurance, the increase after the first year of implementation will be at least one half of the total increase needed. A quicker timeline for this requirement may enable schools to better progress towards their goals. In addition, it is important that personnel beyond teachers be included (e.g., administrative and support staff), and that a non-personnel resource equity measure be added. The resource allocation analysis completed for this report might provide some basis for these personnel measures.

Assurance 2: Districts should also assure that schools have, or will be assigned, a principal with some evidence of prior school success. It would be incumbent on the district to provide such evidence; some waivers may be available for rural and/or small districts.

Assurance 3: The district should also take steps to ensure reasonable continuity of staff during the grant period. Principal and teacher turnover was inordinately high at many of the case study schools, and an analysis of principal experience suggests that about 30 percent of HPSGP principals have been at the school site for less than one year. This continual disruption in staff was often cited as a major challenge for establishing and progressing towards a clear vision. Districts might develop and institute policies and programs to encourage stability, such as financial or professional development incentives.

Assurance 4: HPSGP Schools will be favored over other schools with regard to selecting replacement staff in the case of personnel openings (e.g., an HPSGP school would receive first choice for a literacy coach opening).

Additional monitoring: The CDE should enhance its monitoring of non-achievement related measurements, such as compliance with the district assurances and expenditures.

Along with these district assurances must come regular reporting and monitoring to assess whether districts are indeed fulfilling their commitments. To the extent that these kinds of district assurances are required as a basis for participation in the program, it will also be necessary for program provisions to be clear as to the consequences for non-compliance and to clearly charge some agency with monitoring and carrying this out. If the CDE is charged through legislation for allocating HPSGP funds, they should also be given the responsibility and authority needed to ensure that the program is implemented as designed and to terminate the program in a given school or district-wide when this is clearly not the case.

For instance, HPSGP schools have a lower percentage of fully credentialed teachers than the statewide average, as shown in Chapter 3. More specifically, it is important to note that the current district assurance regarding percentage of credential teachers has not been fully implemented. Less than 40 percent of districts with HPSGP schools appear to have met this requirement in 2003-04 – the second year of implementing the program (note that this declined slightly the following year).

While we will attempt to better understand some of the underlying reasons why districts are not complying, one reason may be simply that there are no real consequences for districts failing to make changes in what are often long standing policies in regard to such things as teacher and principal assignment. Moving teachers and administrators from succeeding to struggling schools will not necessarily be easy for districts. It may actually be less difficult for them if they can demonstrate that this is something that is clearly required by the state.

In order to ensure that districts do not lose sight of this obligation, the Annual Reports should include data that will enable districts and the CDE to assess progress towards this goal and any other assurance (e.g., districts should report the percentage of fully credentialed teachers at the district and for each of its HPSGP schools). Districts that are not showing progress within the expected timeframe should be required to provide a brief report to the CDE on what steps the district will take to address these discrepancies. In short, there should be some degree of state monitoring of compliance with measurable agreed-to assurances.

This monitoring process could also include flagging schools for review if they under spent the annual grant by more than 50 percent. In our case studies, under spending was usually an indication of other systemic problems, such as a high degree of administrative turnover. The CDE could require the District/School Liaison Team (DSLTL) with the school site council to submit an explanation as to why the schools did not fully utilize the funds, how the accumulation in funds will be effectively utilized in the future, and what – if any – implications this has for the Action Plan.⁴⁹

External Evaluator: The long-term role of external evaluators should be explicitly clarified, and some measurement of their effectiveness be incorporated into the program.

From the perspective of many of our case study school respondents, the external evaluator component was vaguely defined, and it showed the greatest variation in implementation (even when it was not the district). The role of the external evaluator beyond the development of the Action Plan is described in the pending guidelines as, “provide ongoing technical assistance to the school site administrative and teaching staff.” However, it is not clear if this refers only to the first year, or for the duration of the grant (e.g., three years). Establishing annual activities for external evaluators, such as required meetings with the DSLTL and joint reports to be submitted to the CDE (e.g., for schools that do not make their growth targets), may encourage greater consistency and heightened presence of the external evaluator in the school reform process.

The regular cycle of the continuous improvement process described in the pending guidelines should also include an assessment of the effectiveness of the external evaluator, as currently there appears no accountability for these individuals who share a large responsibility in assisting

⁴⁹ A District/School Liaison Team is required under the provisions for the new HPSGP cohort.

the lowest performing schools in the state. While it is not clear exactly how this should be done, it seems important that these evaluators in some way be held accountable for the future progress of the schools they have been hired to assist.

One indicator would simply be whether the school makes progress. This should clearly not be the sole criterion, however. Beyond this, ratings on the part of those being assisted in regard to what the evaluator actually did, whether this was perceived as helpful, and whether they would recommend them to other similar schools might be considered. Exactly who has authority over external evaluators seems unclear, and it may not be possible for the CDE to provide this form of oversight. If true, perhaps these types of assessments could be conducted independently under contract to the state, or legislation may be altered to clarify what measures are in place to assure that external evaluators are actually assisting schools.

It is also not clear if the participating schools are required to replace external evaluators if the evaluator ceases support (e.g., retires) or is ineffective, or if the relationship is mutually terminated. Given the variability observed with this component and the importance that this role plays in the HPSGP (as described by the legislation), we believe that it is critical to provide explicit directives regarding this role, including an assessment of effectiveness.

Under the first HPSGP cohort, district personnel could serve as external evaluators at their participating schools, or it could be someone external to the school and the district. Based on the case study results, it is not clear whether one approach is more effective than another. Concerns were expressed in regard to both situations. This is a potential topic for further investigation in Year 2 of this study.

Target “failure” early: The CDE should monitor the performance of HPSGP schools annually and identify actions for schools that do not meet their API growth target in a given year.

When schools are not showing progress annually (e.g., they do not meet their API growth target in a given year), there should be an increase in oversight, such as requiring ramped-up support from the district and possibly a required continuing role for the external evaluator.

Another possible component of the accountability provision listed above is that external evaluators might be required with input from the DSLT and school site council members to issue a status report for their schools that did not meet their growth targets within four months of the release of the API scores. The report would detail factors that are preventing the school from progressing and list specific steps that need to be addressed by the school and/or district to overcome observed impediments to success at the site. In the interests of efficiency, the CDE may want to target HPSGP schools whose growth is “red” (e.g., zero or negative growth) in a given year. In the first year of implementation of the HPSGP (2002-03), only six schools made no or negative growth on their API; in 2003-04, 137 schools were “red.” While this rubric is not the only way to identify schools not making progress, and we encourage the examination of additional measures, we believe that it provides a reasonable starting point for considering which schools to target early in the process.

After another year of not meeting the API growth targets, schools might be required to ramp up external support even more, possibly with a different external advisor who can provide prior

evidence of success with other low performing schools. Or, perhaps in these cases it would simply be more expedient to accelerate the SAIT process. Overall, however, it seems important to increase intervention, guidance, and support as early as possible for schools that are clearly not making expected progress through the HPSGP. It also seems important to convey a sense of accountability for the external evaluator, as well as the district, in regard to the school's performance. They need to be seen as a team, jointly responsible and jointly accountable for school improvement.

Conversely, when schools are showing progress, it may be advisable to add additional rewards such as relaxed requirements (e.g., increased independence or flexibility to carry over funds beyond the final year of the grant).

Predictable funding: The timing of the funds should be carefully considered for the next cohort, with clear timelines to allow for effective school planning and expectations for transitioning out of the HPSGP.

The state and districts should provide clear directives and assurances as to exactly what funds will arrive at the school at what time and with what degree of flexibility in regard to carry-over. Districts with sufficient resources should support schools in implementing the program (e.g., allow schools to plan in the spring/summer) when state funds are delayed, and schools should be allowed time extensions in meeting their performance targets if the funds do not arrive at the school in a timely fashion. For instance, if resources do not arrive at the school until mid-year, it may be unreasonable to expect that substantial academic growth will be realized through the program in that year. Or, perhaps districts could be assured in some binding way regarding the state's commitment to forward these funds and be directed to fund the school from other monies in the meantime.

As the achievement analysis shows, sustainability of realized gains is questionable for the HPSGP, and this was the case also with the II/USP evaluation. To facilitate the continuation of reform, the CDE should provide clear expectations about a transition phase. For instance, districts and schools (through the external evaluator and DSLT) should submit a transition plan at the beginning of the third year of implementation. This plan would assess the reforms/changes attributed to HPSGP funds, identify which strategies have been most effective, and identify the necessary resources (e.g., financial and personnel) that will allow the schools to continue key strategies beyond the HPSGP. This recommendation, however, is based on the premise that there is a clear "end year" – which was problematic with the first cohort (in that schools were not notified of the fourth year funding until the fall). One district respondent called for three years of full funding, followed by two years of partial funding to facilitate alignment of budgets and discussions between schools and districts about sustainability issues.

While we see the merits of a set funding amount over the course of the grant (e.g., same total amount across three or four years regardless of enrollment changes) which may encourage more effective planning, the state may want to consider modifications in the funding amount if schools exhibit a dramatic increase (or decrease) in school enrollment (as shown in Exhibits 2.4 and 2.5 in Chapter 2).

As it funds a new cohort of HPSGP schools, the state should allow schools with demonstrated success from prior cohorts to apply for some level of continued funding in exchange for providing mentoring and support to a partner school in the new cohort. Ongoing continuation funding for these schools might be contingent on their continuing progress, as well as that of the site they are mentoring.

Action Plan: Clear guidance on how to meaningfully integrate the HPSGP objectives and API growth targets into Single Plan for Student Achievement.

One of the case study observations was the lack of a current, distinct HPSGP Action Plan beyond the plan narrative that the school and/or district had submitted as part of the application process. The predominant plan, if not the *only* plan, in place at the schools was the Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA), in which HPSGP funds were identified as a funding source to reach the educational objectives outline in the plan. As the California *Education Code* and NCLB require each school to consolidate all school plans for various other programs⁵⁰ into the SPSA, the CDE had encouraged schools to also integrate the HPSGP Action Plan. However, as the focus of the SPSA appears primarily on the percentages of students reaching the varying proficiency levels, the CDE should provide clear guidance on how the consolidated plan should address both the needs of meeting the AYP and the API. While the stated objective of both the state and the federal accountability system can be simply stated as bringing all school children to proficiency, they do have different ways of measuring progress and differing criteria for determining when a school is failing to meet the goal. The SPSA should include how the school will meet the objectives under the state accountability system and HPSGP requirements, as well as AYP.

The Annual Report data collection should be redesigned to collect data necessary to monitor assurances and school progress in a form that is meaningful, and be reviewed on a regular basis by the CDE to ensure that the data are valid and updated yearly.

As described above, we recommend enhance monitoring, and an important step in this direction is the modification of the current data collection under this program. Minor changes to the Annual Report data collection could make the data a more powerful and meaningful tool for monitoring HPSGP schools and districts. As noted above, the majority of districts with Pure HPSGP schools did not meet the requirement regarding the percentage of fully credentialed teachers. Information that will allow the CDE to track this assurance on a yearly basis should be included in the Annual Reports, as well as reasons for why this requirement was not met.

In some cases, the data were not collected in a meaningful manner. For instance, counts of parents or teachers alone are not helpful in measuring the degree of parental involvement or teacher training in relation to other schools. These would need to be converted to percentages to determine the degree of parental involvement or trained teachers. However, it is not clear what the denominator should be for the parent group. While we can use the counts of all teachers from a different data source (e.g., CBEDS), the reliability of this method for calculating the percentages of trained teachers is uncertain.

⁵⁰ Plans for programs funded through the School and Library Improvement Block Grant, the Pupil Retention Block Grant, the Consolidated Application, and NCLB Program Improvement.

In conducting the principal analysis presented in Chapter 3, we identified variations in the way the years of experience were recorded, with several observations of zero. As we cannot verify this information against other statewide data sources (e.g., CBEDS), we are unable to determine if it meant the school was currently without a principal, or whether principals were at the site for less than a full year. To enhance the reliability of this data, questions of this type should be modified so that the current year clearly counts as one (as is done in the national Schools and Staffing Survey, SASS), or provide space to enter months as well.

Furthermore, there is evidence that the information is not being updated on a yearly basis, or is inaccurate. Taking the principal question as an example, there are records that show declines in years at the current site (i.e., 4 years at the site in one year, and 3 years the next), or records that show the same information across all three years.

Perhaps the greatest concern, however, is the high percentage of missing data, which may be an indicator of a lack of district or school focus on the HPSGP, or other organizational issues. For the years of principal experience at the school site, 15 percent of the Pure HPSGP schools were missing data for this question in either 2002-03 or 2003-04. Examining missing values across other selected questions (see Technical Appendix F), we found that as many as 33 and 20 percent of Pure HPSGP school records were missing data in for certain questions in 2002-03 and 2003-04, respectively. Progress, however, seems to have been made in 2004-05, as the percentage of missing data declined significantly.

Given the degree of missing data and questions regarding the validity of some information, the CDE should review the data annually to ensure completeness and accuracy. With modifications, the Annual Report data could serve as an important tool in monitoring schools and districts participating in the program.

Foster data-driven decision making. Many of the successful schools we have encountered (through our HPSGP case studies, as well as our evaluations of Proposition 227 and II/USP) at least partially attribute this success to the regular assessments and review of data to drive instruction. Many of these systems were said to be locally developed. The state may want to encourage broader development and dissemination of such systems in districts and local schools.

Enhance the power of CBEDS. Several of our case study sites exhibited alarming principal turnover, and the teacher turnover was also noted as a particular challenge to their reform efforts. However, we were not able to compare this reported turnover to our designated comparison schools or other groups of interest. Although the Annual Reports gather data on how long an HPSGP principal has been at the current school site and years of prior experience, this critical information is lacking in CBEDS. While this information can be analyzed for the whole state and by school level using data from the national Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS),⁵¹ the SASS is not administered every year, and will not allow for more sophisticated comparisons. We recommend modifying CBEDS to include questions on the number of years that the respondent has been at the current school, and number of years in that same position in other schools. These questions can be applicable to principals, teachers, and other respondents, and can serve as a powerful tool to understand staff turnover in schools with various characteristics, and

⁵¹ This will be done in Year 2.

implications for student achievement. This enhancement to the database will be useful in future evaluations of state education programs.

Require participation in future evaluations. As a grant precondition, districts and schools should agree that they will participate in state-approved evaluations of the program. Soliciting the participation of districts and schools for the case studies took some persistence, and even with the support of the CDE, two of the original nine districts declined participation. From prior experience with CDE evaluations, the forthcoming phone survey component will pose similar, if not greater, challenges. As the state is making a considerable investment in this program, a reasonable pre-condition for participation is the state's right to collect data regarding whether this investment is cost-effective.

Continue to strive for greater alignment between the state and federal accountability system. As mentioned in Chapter 2, a significant proportion of HPSGP schools are receiving mixed signals regarding their progress under the state and federal criteria. As there are up to 57 ways to potentially fail between the two systems, success may seem unattainable at some schools, particularly those with the most challenged student populations. The study team acknowledges work currently underway to negotiate better alignment between these two systems. While we do not have an answer to this problem, we consider it important to encourage continued efforts in this regard.

At the Year 1 case study sites for this study, we often encountered school staff somewhat overwhelmed with the many daunting challenges they face. While it is true that many did not perceive the two systems as a problem, there was considerable evidence that they did not understand the state system very well. Greater alignment between the two systems can only enhance the likelihood of realizing sustainable school reform.

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