

“They Are All Our Kids”

CalSTAT Leadership Sites Emerging Models and Practices

December 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This summary of cross site analytical findings is based primarily on information gathered in interviews conducted with Leadership Site personnel in 2006. Without their generous contributions of time, the report would not have been possible.

The full cross site analysis can be found on the CalSTAT website, www.calstat.org. The full-length individual profiles of Leadership Sites on which the cross site analysis is based can be found on the website as well.

The report was prepared by Casey J. Murrigan Associates (www.cjmurrigan.com) on behalf of CalSTAT and the CA State Improvement Grant (SIG). CalSTAT is a special project of the California Department of Education, Special Education Division.

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Seventeen Leadership Sites received awards through CalSTAT in 2005 and 2006 to support research-based approaches to a unified model of education. In 2006, CalSTAT commissioned a set of site profiles and an accompanying analysis to explore the common characteristics that have emerged from the sites' implementation of these approaches.

The profiles and analysis are based on information gathered from interviews and follow-up research conducted by CalSTAT in spring 2006 on the history and current implementation of what is termed, for this paper, "inclusive collaboration." The full version of the cross site analysis, and an executive summary of its findings, are available from CalSTAT at www.calstat.org.

Following is a listing of the schools and districts interviewed.

TABLE 1		
LEADERSHIP SITES INTERVIEWED IN SPRING 2006		
Middle and High Schools (11 schools)	Districts (5 districts)	Behavioral Support Site (1 school)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atascadero Jr. High School • Big Bear Middle School • Iron Horse Middle School • Marine View Middle School • McKinleyville Middle School • Pine Hollow Middle School • Rancho Middle School • Rincon Middle School • Sanger High School • Valley View Middle School • Vista View Middle School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elk Grove Unified School District • Hesperia Unified School District • Paradise Unified School District • Point Arena Union District • Richmond School (with district Special Day Classes on an elementary school campus) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mesa Verde Middle School

Prior to undertaking the changes that led to their selection as Leadership Sites, all the sites without exception provided special education in traditional models. Interviewees at Leadership Sites noted that, prior to collaboration, their schools were often characterized by lower academic and behavioral standards for students in special education than for those in general education, and deteriorating relationships between schools and parents regarding special education issues. Communication between general and special educators was infrequent.

The Impetus for Change

In each of the sites, as a prelude to implementing inclusive collaboration, a group of factors came together to prompt reexamination of the site's approach to special education. In the resulting changes, general education was affected as well. Factors mentioned by sites included:

- The advent of **standardized testing** was mentioned universally as a key element in reexamining "business as usual."
- The ongoing **costs associated with special education**, and the associated **lack of positive results**, were also noted by interviewees as important prompts toward change.
- Related to the costs of special education were the issues of how schools or districts were meeting the needs of **children who needed support in their learning, but who were not qualified** for special education.
- Special education teachers felt isolated from the rest of the school and staff **turnover rates for special educators were high**
- Many sites noticed that the traditional structure of special education seemed to promote **negative social relationships** that sites were **no longer willing to tolerate**.
- At a few Leadership Sites, **events outside the schools or districts arose** that impelled them toward considering inclusive collaboration, such as pressure from full inclusion practices elsewhere in the area, or accreditation issues.

In all cases, a **period of reflection and planning** followed a site's trigger events. During this period, **leaders emerged to initiate and shape next steps**. Leaders shared a strong, even passionate, commitment to change at their sites. This commitment would be the fuel for planning processes that often demanded many volunteer hours and a willingness to rethink the status quo.

Almost all sites involved teachers in their planning efforts to design and implement changes, and this "**leadership from the middle**" encouraged educator ownership of inclusive collaboration.

While educators were a vital part of all planning processes, teachers alone did not bring about needed change. **Teachers needed administrative support to make long-term or systematic change**. This support came from site level administration, the district, the local SELPA, or some combination of the three. The longevity of committed administrators and teachers often served to provide a stable platform for change to evolve. In some cases, however, leadership emerged only after administrative or educator staff turned over.

Many leaders - whether principals, teachers or others - drew on the organizational change principles based on Margaret Wheatley's writings as taught by Sharon Keating and Steve Zuieback at **CalSTAT Leadership Institutes**. Peer-to-peer technical assistance facilitated by CalSTAT provided opportunities to talk with and observe others implementing inclusive collaboration.

Inclusive collaboration took time to fully develop. The time frame to achieve full implementation was unique to each site, but ranged from **four to ten years**.

Early Implementation

With the exception of one site, early implementation was **voluntary** in nature. Initial efforts were **small in scale**: a single classroom; a small group of students; a selected subject. All the elements that would characterize the core of inclusive collaboration - collaboration, data-driven decisionmaking, blended and team-taught classes, and more - were present at most sites early on, but were "piloted."

Technical assistance provided by CalSTAT provided a framework for change cited by several sites. Many cited the use of TA from CalSTAT in the selection and implementation of research-based literacy interventions. Most sites used these literacy interventions as an integral part of their initial collaboration efforts.

Later Implementation

While there was no firm line that separated “early” from “later” implementation, at most sites “later” implementation meant a move from more casual, small-scale and experimental change, to broader-scale commitment of resources, and a shift toward inclusive collaboration as the standard method of operation at the site. While participation of individual teachers continued to be voluntary under later implementation, **traditional methods of special education delivery became the exception** rather than the rule.

The foundation of most inclusive collaborations was **a set of classroom and instructional approaches** paired with a collaborative planning process to support changes seen in the classroom. The changes described by sites included most or all of the following:

- Team teaching by special and general educators and paraeducators
- Creation of ability groupings (usually for language arts or math) for part of the school day
- Maintenance of grade-level groupings of blended student populations (classroom populations inclusive of students in both general and special education) to ensure coverage of grade-level curriculum
- Creation of a Learning Center or Lab where classroom instruction was augmented in a variety of ways
- Other flexible academic support options

These classroom and instructional changes required continual planning and review by teachers and administrators to operate smoothly. This planning and review generally took place in **collaborative meetings**. While each site’s collaborative operations were unique, all collaborative meetings included a variety of tasks to support instructional innovation, such as:

- Case conferencing regarding individual students
- Planning instructional approaches
- Systems change, such as planning for larger-scale change, generating and using data for planning, and purposefully creating a collaborative or cooperative school culture

A focus on **ongoing professional development** was viewed by interviewees as a vital part of inclusive collaboration.

Whether behavioral issues were an initial impetus to change, or an ongoing concern, many sites adopted **positive behavioral support** programs after implementing inclusive collaboration.

Some sites, though not all, had financial **resources** to draw upon to support their inclusive collaboration. When funds were not available, sites often utilized staff in non-traditional ways, or drew on volunteer time.

Replication and Expansion

As sites settled into full implementation of their collaborative changes, they employed a myriad of unique ways to expand, deepen, or replicate their new approaches. These included:

- Expanded use of “teaming and blending” to other subjects, other grade levels, or to additional student populations
- Expanded use of assessments and tier placement
- Expanded academic supports to new subject areas
- Creating pressure on schools “upstream” and “downstream” to move away from a traditional special education delivery model

The Role of Literacy Interventions

Many sites selected research-based literacy interventions as part of the quest to improve the academic achievements of all students. These interventions proved to be a good fit for sites focused on data-driven, results-oriented instruction.

Common Challenges

Sites universally found that there was **resistance by teaching staff** to the changes brought about by inclusive collaboration. Over time, resistance tended to subside, usually due to early and positive results with students. It was also a challenge to **carve out sufficient collaborative planning time** in the school day. And, while this was an issue limited to early implementation, some sites **did not at first communicate proactively with parents** about new models, leaving parents with the impression that their children were not receiving the interventions or special education that they needed. The **increased workload in assessment and tracking** associated with literacy interventions was a challenge at some sites; this was met by finding parent volunteers or hiring substitutes to support teachers. All sites struggled with **adequate staffing** to team, collaborate, and remediate.

Successes and Results

Sites reported experiencing positive results that they attributed to having implemented inclusive collaboration.

Most sites reported **positive changes in:**

- **test scores**
- **grades**
- **student behavior**
- **school culture**

Many sites also reported that the **numbers of students receiving special education services dropped or leveled off**, due to fewer students entering as well as **increased rates of exit from special education**.

Finally, Leadership Sites reported nearly universally that **inclusive collaboration fostered a sense of accountability for all students**, whether in general or special education. This sense of accountability was in contrast to the prevailing culture prior to inclusive collaboration, in which teachers felt responsible only for their own classrooms or students. The sense that **“they are all our kids”** was attributed to the joint effort expended in teaming, blending classrooms, and creating interventions to assist all students in succeeding.