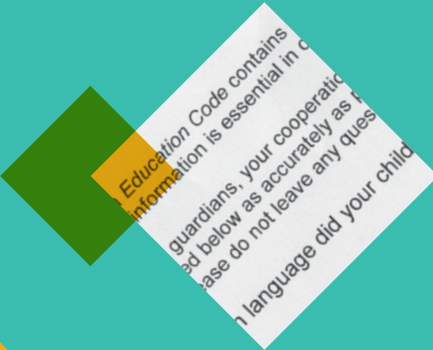


ONE SCHOOL FOR ALL

Common Core for Unique Student Populations

May 2016



“

The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.

Martin Luther King, Jr.



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To the Families, Future Teachers and Supporters of our Students:

As teachers, we all know and believe in this common refrain: all kids can learn. All students deserve access to great schools, colleges, careers and opportunity. We also know that not all kids are created the same or have equal access to opportunity. Our students have unique needs and abilities and some are more vulnerable than others.

Yet, the fact is our education policies and classroom practices could be doing more to reach all our students. In fact, we know that some students are currently sinking rather than swimming in our education system. English Learners and students with disabilities arrive in our classrooms with many strengths and assets, but unfortunately our current approach in implementing Common Core standards and curriculum does not build on these students' strengths. As we move forward, we must make certain that all students, including English Learners and those with disabilities who have historically been underserved, are able to thrive in the new era of Common Core.

The Common Core standards require increased critical thinking and problem solving skills that are more rigorous than previous standards, and this level of learning is not only possible but crucial for all students to be college ready. This charge is a courageous and important undertaking, one that will require all of us—teachers, families and community members—to have honest



We have a huge opportunity and moral imperative to better serve our most vulnerable students by addressing achievement gaps that fall along lines of race, economics and learning abilities.

conversations about learning differences and equitable resources. We need to grapple with questions like: How do we prepare all students—both those who have historically struggled and thrived—to swim farther and faster in the sea change that is Common Core? And, are we being accountable to our most vulnerable students when we set priorities and spend money?

In order to help students see their unique abilities as assets and not liabilities, we must bring more creative ways of thinking and problem-solving into our education systems, schools and communities.

Our ideas in this paper are examples of the creativity, collaborative learning and problem solving we hope to see not only from all of our students but also from the policymakers governing education laws and policies at every level. We have studied academic research, identified best practices and involved our colleagues and students in conversations that informed and validated our ideas in this paper. We hope continued, focused conversations about the needs and skills of unique student populations will bring to life our guiding refrain: all kids can learn.

We must push for the support and accountability that these students undeniably deserve, and there's no better time to expand educational access than in the Common Core era.

*The 2016 E4E-Los Angeles Teacher Policy Team on Common Core
for Unique Student Populations*

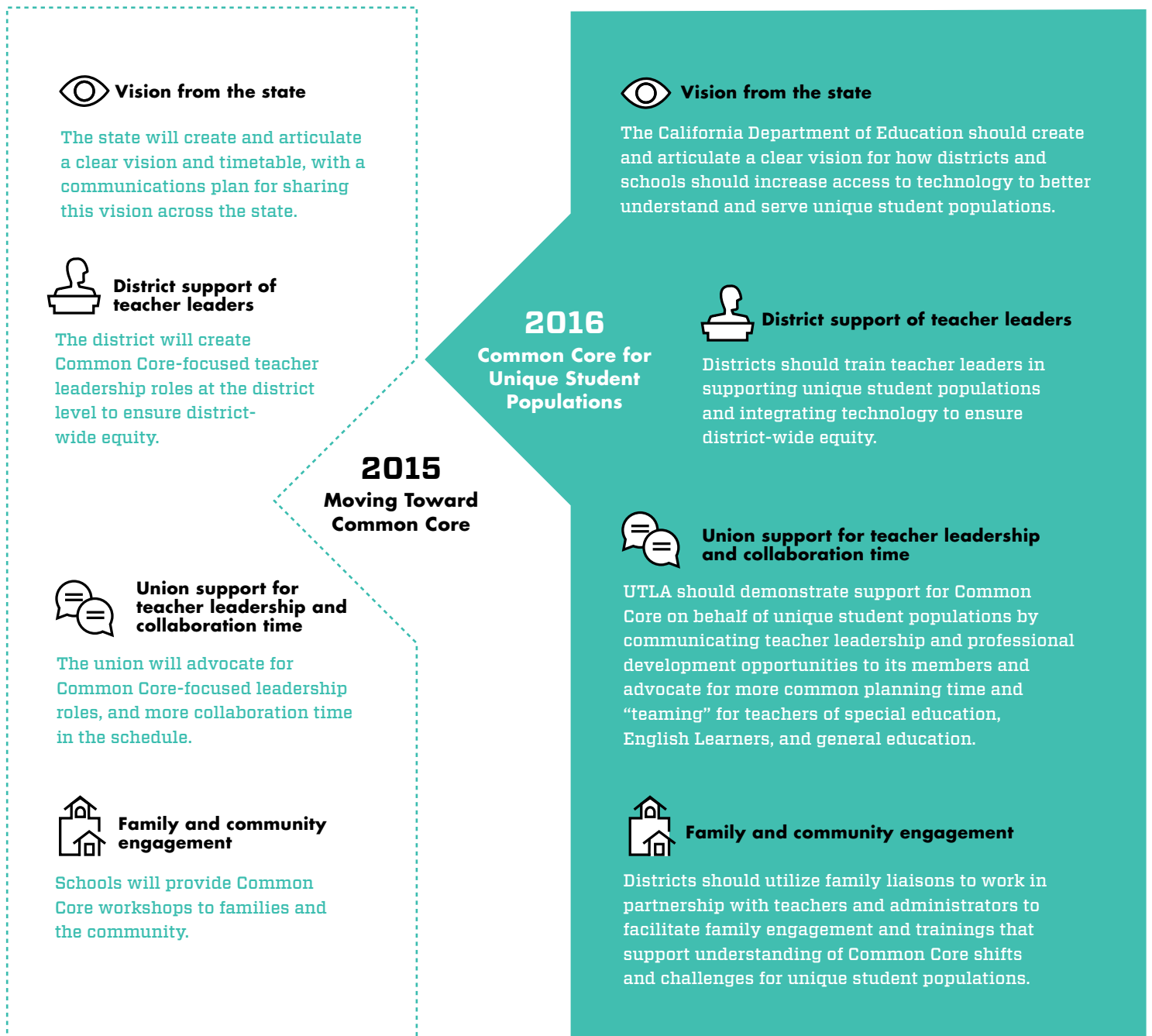
Making Common Core More Accessible to Unique Student Populations



	LEVERAGING Time	LEVERAGING Teachers	LEVERAGING Resources & Partnerships
STATE		The state legislature should require teacher preparation programs to develop more rigorous coursework on unique student populations for pre-service teachers.	The California Department of Education should create and articulate a clear vision for how districts and schools should increase access to technology to better understand and serve unique student populations.
DISTRICTS	District leaders should provide funding for joint professional development for general education or single-subject teachers and teachers of unique student populations.	Districts should train teacher leaders in supporting unique student populations and integrating technology to ensure district-wide equity.	Districts should utilize family liaisons to work in partnership with teachers and administrators to facilitate family engagement and trainings that support understanding of Common Core shifts and challenges for unique student populations.
UNIONS	United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) should advocate for more common planning time and “teaming” for teachers of special education, English Learners, and general education.	UTLA should identify and communicate to its members teacher leadership and professional development opportunities in adapting Common Core for unique students.	

The Common Core Teacher Policy Team Continuum

The 2015 and 2016 E4E-Los Angeles Teacher Policy Teams created recommendations for improving Common Core implementation—first on the transition to Common Core, then on elevating outcomes for unique student populations. While these recommendations overlap in many ways, we must also consider learning differences and the equitable distribution of resources when implementing Common Core so that we are accountable to our English Learners and students with disabilities who have been historically underserved.



Progress to Date on Common Core in California

The Problem

In response to the clear need for higher standards to remain internationally competitive, a bipartisan coalition, led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, brings together educators, researchers, and policy-makers. The coalition commits to creating a set of common standards, with the intention of ensuring all students receive the same high-quality education focused on 21st century skills, regardless of their home state.¹

Nov. 2007

Beginning Implementation

California begins the implementation process by drafting frameworks, creating key committees and joining the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) to create Common Core-aligned assessments.³

June 2011

Integrating Funding

California passes the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), a more equitable system of school funding that provides per-pupil funding for all students with additional money directed toward high-need students—low-income children, English learners, homeless students and foster children—to ensure that districts increase or improve services for these students.⁵

The State Board of Education identifies eight areas where LCFF funding should be directed, including a focus on implementing Common Core and the new ELD standards for English learners.⁶

Aug. 2013

Aug. 2010

The Solution

California, along with 38 other states, adopts the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts and Mathematics.²

Nov. 2012

Integrating Policy

California State Board of Education adopts revised English Language Development (ELD) standards that integrate into Common Core State Standards and address English language and literacy skills English Learners need in key content areas.⁴

After California's adoption of Common Core State Standards, the California Department of Education and the State Board of Education developed an implementation plan. Subsequently, these bodies and the California State Legislature considered how these new standards would be adapted for English Learners and students with disabilities.

Partnering with Unions

The California Teachers Association (CTA) and Stanford University begin a groundbreaking partnership to provide professional development and expertise to 160 California teachers who would serve as peer trainers, helping to lead Common Core instruction and foster deeper learning across the state. They become one of the largest unions leading the charge for smart and supportive implementation of Common Core.⁸

Nov. 2014

Hearing from Community

In the first year of LCFF, Communities for Los Angeles Student Success (CLASS), a coalition of civil rights, community and education groups including E4E-LA, issued a report that found only 18 percent of the additional funding intended to directly serve students with special needs was actually set aside for investment in these students. The same report found that staffing decisions and training failed to prioritize schools with high populations of students targeted by LCFF.¹⁰

Sept. 2015

Oct. 2013

Providing Differentiation

California Assembly Bill 484 establishes California's new student assessment system, now known as the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). This law instructs school districts to amend the Individual Education Plans of students with disabilities to align with accommodations and modifications allowed on the SBAC.⁷

Spring 2015

Assessing Progress

Students across California take the Smarter Balanced Assessment in both math and English and will receive results later in the year. However, schools and districts will not be held accountable for results until at least 2016, if not later.⁹

2015-16

Continued Progress

California school districts fully implement the revised ELD standards.¹¹ This change leverages California as one of the first states to combine English language arts and English language development into a curriculum.¹²



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEVERAGING TIME

The Role of the District or Charter Network in Education

The responsibilities of large urban school districts often include:

- Data collection and analysis
- School accountability
- Administrator oversight
- Professional development
- Family engagement
- Ensuring equity
- Disseminating district-specific information

The Challenge for Districts

Our education system has moved away from relegating students to “self-contained” or segregated classrooms that function outside of general education classes. Today, students with disabilities and English Learners spend 80 percent of their school days in integrated classrooms led by a general education teacher.¹³ Additionally, most general education teachers teach at least one English Learner in their classroom. This trend is magnified in Los Angeles Unified School District (LA Unified), which serves more English Learners than any other school district in the nation.¹⁴

While inclusion is a good thing, general education teachers are not always equipped with the specialized knowledge and skills needed to teach the incredibly diverse learners in their classroom.¹⁵ Considering the general education classroom composition, general education teachers need to be knowledgeable and confident about different disabilities, learning needs and instructional strategies for unique student populations. They also need to understand and

utilize various adaptations and modifications that support achievement in Common Core standards and socio-emotional learning.

Research shows that a majority of general education teachers do not have access to professional development opportunities and resources that support the integration of English Learners and students with disabilities. Even resources that do exist—such as specially trained teachers or scheduled planning time—have limited impact because general education teachers have little time or opportunity to collaborate and connect to improve their skills or planning. The impact on students is clear. There is a wide and persistent achievement gap where students with special needs lag woefully behind their peers.¹⁶

Our Vision

Our schools should leverage human capital in new ways that recognize and elevate the talents of teachers who bring specialized training and unique expertise. Our districts, charter networks and union should encourage and support more collaboration and skill-building among both general and specialized teachers by implementing common planning time as a means of team-teaching and resource-sharing to better address the needs of unique students.



District Solution: Professional Development Opportunities for All Teachers

Districts or charter networks should provide joint professional development and resources for all general education, English Learner and special education teachers to ensure that all teachers have the tools they need to teach all students.

“ **Opening access to professional development for all teachers would allow teachers to adjust to their students’ needs and learn how to raise student achievement for all of our students. It’s about recognizing how to do better until we are at our best.** ”

Janet Powers, Prekindergarten, Charnock Road Elementary School, Los Angeles Unified

What it looks like: All teaching staff at district or charter schools should have access to online learning courses that enable them to personalize their professional development and increase their confidence with new curriculum. For example, online courses such as the ones provided through LA Unified’s Learning Zone, empower teachers to develop instructional strategies that support diverse learners. In Learning Zone, there are specialized courses already available that provide free or low-cost opportunity for general education teachers to gain this knowledge. However, some general education teachers in LA Unified do not have full access to Learning Zone courses that target specialized teachers. With the district’s support, these professional development opportunities could be expanded and made available to all teachers regardless of the teaching credential or role they hold. These online classes offer the flexibility in regards to time and location Los Angeles teachers need. Additionally, virtual classes create a valuable alternative to on-site professional development courses for teachers who seek to enhance their skills. While districts or charter networks should expand access, they should also evaluate the quality of these courses and make efforts to improve the caliber of these offerings.

Districts and charter networks should also work to ensure that pre-existing professional development structures and trainings are available to all teachers. Often, professional development workshops for specialized teachers of students with disabilities or English Learners contain information, strategies and skills that would be helpful for general education teachers who were not invited as participants. Districts and charter networks should expand these opportunities to invite and include both general education teachers and specialized teachers so the professional development is dispersed among all school staff instead of concentrated in one department or segment of teachers. For example, if the Multilingual and Multicultural Education Department within LA Unified is providing on-site professional development to teachers of English Learners within a Local School District, that opportunity should be open and publicized to general education teachers as well. This may require district or charter network professional development facilitators to amend their professional development calendars and methods to reach all teachers.

Expanding professional development opportunities helps teachers better understand how to adapt Common Core-aligned curriculum to the needs of diverse learners. With greater access to specialized courses and opportunities, general education teachers would be able to implement the Individualized Education Programs (IEP) of students with disabilities and understand how California’s newly redesigned English Language Development (ELD) standards impact English Learners.

Measuring Success: The effectiveness of professional development should be measured by inputs, outputs and outcomes. Districts and charter networks should be responsive to these measures to ensure that professional development outcomes positively impact teacher practice and improve student learning.

93%

of educators agree

that it is very important or important for the districts or charter networks to provide funding for joint professional development and trainings for all general education teachers and special education teachers to foster collaboration among teachers and ensure all teachers have the knowledge and resources to effectively teach students with disabilities and English Learners.

LEVERAGING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Many important community partners have already begun the work of creating teacher professional development opportunities specifically focused on Common Core and unique student populations. Below are a few examples of the partners and resources who can and should be consulted as the district takes on this work.

American Association of Colleges
for Teacher Education (AACTE)

California Department
of Education (CDE)

George Lucas
Educational Foundation

National Center for
Learning Disabilities

National Center on Universal
Design for Learning

The Partnership for
Los Angeles Schools

UCLA Graduate School of
Education & Information Studies

Teachers should have the opportunity to anonymously evaluate all professional development trainings they receive to ensure the trainings meet their needs in supporting unique student populations. If survey data from school-based professional development shows poor outcomes, the district or charter network should intervene to coach facilitators and provide support to improve quality.

Evaluation systems should assess the effectiveness of all general education teachers in achieving results with diverse students, including students with disabilities and English Learners. If the evaluation shows that the teacher is less than effective in teaching unique student populations, the teacher should be connected with a coach to receive targeted assistance.

Caveats and Considerations

- In a district as large and diverse as LA Unified, it is important to use data on student and staff needs to inform in-person professional development offerings. While one school might have a large population of English Learners, another school might need more support in teaching students with learning disabilities. School leaders should have the authority to use relevant student data and teacher-identified professional development needs to craft a school plan that meets the needs of both teachers and students. To ensure cohesiveness with other strategies leveraged by the school, this plan should be captured on the school's Single Plan for Student Achievement.
- Should a professional development class offered by a district or charter network be taught during the school day, teachers should be encouraged to attend without having to use personal leave.

The Role of Our Union in Education

The responsibilities of a large urban teachers union often include:

- Supporting its members
- Negotiating contractual benefits
- Engaging in political and community affairs
- Being the voice of its members in media and the community

The Challenge for Unions

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found that American teachers spend 80 percent of their workday teaching.¹⁷ In countries such as Denmark and Japan, places praised for their strong

education systems, teachers spend about 40 percent of their workday teaching, which leaves more time for planning and collaboration that supports students.¹⁸ This breaks down to just three to five hours of planning a week for American teachers compared to 15 to 25 hours per week for teachers in Asia and Europe.¹⁹

Budget constraints affecting the state, districts and charter networks in California may make it impossible to drastically reduce the teaching workload to that of teachers in Asia or Europe, but establishing district-wide common planning time requirements for all schools could make a considerable impact.²⁰ In a 2013 survey by United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), a majority of teachers reported feeling unprepared to teach Common Core standards, but their confidence levels increased after receiving professional development.²¹ When teachers were given one day of Common Core professional development, two-thirds of teachers found their colleagues aided their understanding of Common Core.²² This number jumped to 90 percent after six days of professional development.²³ Notably, after this professional development, Los Angeles teachers reported feeling more prepared to serve English Learners, students with disabilities, low-income students and at-risk students.²⁴

Our Vision

Our schools should structure the master schedule to allow for teachers to collaborate with one another and share their specialized training and unique expertise. This dedicated time will build the skills of all teachers to reach unique student populations and improve the school climate for teachers and students.



Union solution: Advocate for Common Planning Time

Our union should advocate for schools to incorporate common planning time into master schedules to allow general education teachers to regularly meet with specialized teachers of students with disabilities and English Learners.

What this looks like: Common planning time enables teachers to meet in interdisciplinary teams that deepen their understanding of students' needs and best teaching practices. Interdisciplinary teams should be composed of at least one general education teacher plus the teachers of students with disabilities and English Learners.²⁵ These teams could also include more general education teachers, which would increase the impact of this collaborative work. This common planning time could focus on a core

85%

of educators agree

that it is very important or important for our union to advocate for common, collaborative planning time between general education and teachers of special education and English Learners in order to better serve students.

LEVERAGING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Here are a few examples of models, partners and resources our union can look to in training its members:

ABC Unified School District

All Things PLC

CalTURN

EngageNY

Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association

value—a standard, literacy skill, or thinking strategy—that could be applied to all academic subjects. The overall purpose would be to allow teachers to bring their unique training backgrounds and expertise together to discuss student needs and teaching practice in the implementation of Common Core. This strategy also elevates the power of schools by increasing the capacity of all teachers to support students with special needs.²⁶

Teachers don't know how to collaborate effectively because they've never been trained. Training and practice in how to effectively plan lessons together from week to week would change our schools for the better.

Marisa Crabtree, English teacher, Lincoln High School, Los Angeles Unified

Common planning time gives teachers the opportunity to reflect on the learning barriers affecting a student, share their teaching strategies and discuss instructional supports that would maximize the success of students with special needs. This would help all teachers adapt curriculum and instructional strategies to suit the strengths and needs of diverse students in Common Core.²⁷ Middle schools using this strategy found less isolationism among teachers and “higher levels of teacher commitment, satisfaction, efficacy and improved student outcomes.”²⁸ For students with special needs, this strategy also leads to higher levels of achievement, increased self-esteem and more positive perceptions of school climate.²⁹

Measuring Success: Schools, districts and charter networks are actively engaged in improving student outcomes through a variety of methods, which should include increasing common planning time for teachers. To measure the impact of this strategy on its members, the union should survey its teachers to evaluate levels of engagement, usefulness and general satisfaction.

Caveats and Considerations

- In schools that effectively implement common planning time, teachers respond positively when provided with dedicated space for their collaborative work where they are unlikely to be interrupted, can readily access student data and communicate with students, families and community partners.³⁰
- In addition to making school schedules more conducive to collaboration, our union could advocate for compensated summer planning time as a way to give teachers space to collaborate with minimal impact on already crowded school year calendars.
- There are many demands on a teacher's time during the school day. To help teachers protect common planning time, our union could provide information to school chapter chairs about the benefits of common planning time and its positive impact on students, teachers and school communities. This would help chapter chairs work with school leaders to explain the importance of prioritizing common planning time.
- A strong school-level accountability system should be created to ensure that goals are set for common planning time and objectives are achieved.
- In order to set up interdisciplinary teams for success, districts should provide training for these teams on best practices of teaming.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEVERAGING TEACHERS

The Challenge for Districts and Unions

Common Core requires new teaching methods for effective implementation. However, the support is not in place to properly train teachers to adapt and implement these strategies to meet the needs of unique students. Despite California's early adoption of Common Core State Standards, teachers feel unprepared to implement the new standards, especially for unique students populations.³¹ As recently as December 2014, former Stanford University researcher Linda Darling Hammond estimated that school districts were only about 20 to 80 percent prepared to implement Common Core.³² Additionally, teachers feel unprepared to use new technology, which is especially powerful for unique student populations. While teachers understand the value in using new technology tools, only half of teachers surveyed by the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) reported feeling comfortable experimenting with new technology.³³

Part of the problem is that most teachers experience only traditional, workshop-based professional development that is led by external experts instead of classroom teachers.³⁴ In fact, more than 90 percent of teachers nationwide report having participated in this

style of "drive by" professional development in the past year.³⁵ Yet, teachers and researchers agree that teachers learn best from other teachers.³⁶

Our Vision

Instead of an outsider or district administrator sharing what "could" or "should" work in a classroom, teacher leaders have the ability to explain how they implement this skill or knowledge in the classroom. This connection makes professional development even stronger.

Teacher leaders trained by the district or charter network should provide more effective and ongoing support for teachers in the integration of unique student populations and new technology tools into Common Core instruction and teaching methods.



District Solution: Elevate Teacher Leaders

Districts and charter networks should leverage teachers to serve as coaches who offer relevant professional development for teachers to better integrate the needs of students with special needs into Common Core curriculum planning and the use of technology in these lessons.

88%

of educators agree

that it is very important or important for the district or charter network to train and leverage teachers to be instructional and technology coaches for the teachers of English Learners and students with disabilities.

LEVERAGING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Here are a few examples of models, partners and resources that districts or charter networks can look to in implementing Common Core coaches for unique student populations and technology.

Alliance College-Ready Public Schools

California State University Los Angeles Instructional Technology Program

Clayton Christensen Institute

EdSurge Tech for Schools Conference

Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce

Los Angeles Education Partnership

MIND Research Institute

The Children's Partnership

“

I want to provide the best possible learning experience for all of the students and to give them the necessary tools to be successful in the future.

Vivian Wang, first grade, Broadway Elementary, Los Angeles Unified

What this looks like: Teacher leaders are classroom teachers who have demonstrated a significant impact on student achievement and who take the reins on initiatives and projects in their schools. As also recommended by the 2015 E4E-Los Angeles Teacher Policy Team on Common Core, teacher leaders are the key to improving the ability of teachers across the district to implement Common Core. The argument in favor of teacher leaders is even stronger when considering the need to prepare all teachers to reach unique student populations. Across Los Angeles, some schools currently leverage teacher coaches to support Common Core implementation. However, we need to bring the needs of unique student populations to the forefront of conversations about implementing Common Core and improving student outcomes. These on-site teacher leaders should assist the development of other teachers who need to improve their instructional practices to better support students with disabilities and English Learners.

Thus, as we seek to improve outcomes for these unique students, there are two essential roles for teacher leaders: coaches dedicated to supporting unique student populations in general education classrooms and

coaches dedicated to improving technology integration in classrooms. Regardless of the type of teacher leader, they should be nominated and selected by their peers. Additionally, these teacher leaders should have received the "exceeds standard performance" overall rating on their two most recent Teacher Growth and Development Cycle (TGDC) evaluations. Two specific proposed teacher leader roles are outlined below:

Unique student population coaches: The strategy of providing ongoing, in-class support allows teachers to practice implementing new knowledge and gain feedback about their improving skills. Although states, districts, charter networks and schools have established some professional development trainings to support these changes, an instructional skills gap exists among teachers that is detrimental to students with special needs.³⁷ Teacher leaders can mentor their colleagues through ongoing professional development that is customized to meet the needs of the teacher and students. Some of the responsibilities of teacher leaders could include co-teaching a lesson with a teacher who struggles to differentiate instruction for English Language learners, observing and offering input on classroom lessons, modeling a new instructional strategy for a group of teachers and meeting with teachers one-on-one to refine their lessons or curriculum.

Technology coaches: Teacher leaders can also be used as technology coaches who develop the skill and practice of their fellow teachers by showing diverse and alternative methods to present information.³⁸



For instance, technology coaches could help teachers adapt instructional materials in ways that help students unlock the standard. These coaches could also model ways colleagues can use assistive technology devices and services to help diverse learners better access the curriculum.³⁹ Technology tools like these can provide individualized and hands-on learning and help students be more engaged in their own education.⁴⁰ For English Learners, technology tools can create richer collaboration opportunities with classmates to complete interactive tasks, which can result in improved language learning and teamwork.⁴¹ Western Heights Public School District in Oklahoma is a strong example of a district leveraging teacher leaders to improve technology integration.⁴² In this case, Western Heights district leadership cultivated a handful of teachers at every school to become site trainers.⁴³ These teacher leaders integrated technology in their own classrooms, trained teachers in their schools and served as a link between their schools and the district in regards to technology.⁴⁴ This structure empowered teachers to try new technology tools and improve teaching instruction.⁴⁵ Partly as a result of this effort, the district reports increases in high school graduation and middle school math and reading scores.⁴⁶

Measuring Success: To measure impact, as mentioned in previous Teacher Policy Team publications, these teacher leader positions need to have clear job descriptions and evaluations. Teacher leaders should be evaluated in part by the teachers they support through feedback about the type of support they offer and the focus of their coaching. Incorporating this information into evaluations will help ensure the methods used are meeting the needs of the supported teachers.

In addition, the district, charter network or a smaller division within either should schedule monthly meetings to reconvene and reflect on implementation effectiveness or conduct midyear evaluations and continually support teacher leaders who work in schools with the most

need. The retention and performance of these teacher leaders should then inform the evaluations of local superintendents to ensure robust accountability for implementation.

Caveats and Considerations

- Teacher leaders should be on-site teachers who have received the "exceeds standard performance" overall rating on their two most recent Teacher Growth and Development Cycle (TGDC) evaluations, nominated and selected by peers and trained during summer institutes in exchange for a stipend or salary points, similar to the National Writing Project Summer Institute.
- To ensure equity for students, this recommendation should be piloted first at schools that enroll the largest populations of students who are English Learners or students with disabilities.
- Schools should have the flexibility of deciding how to implement teacher leader positions within their school based on student and teacher needs. If school staff report a high level of comfort for integrating students with special needs into Common Core instruction, the school could choose to focus their teacher leader support on the integration of educational technology.
- Teacher leader roles should be for a period of two years, after which the teacher must reapply for the position. This limitation ensures that the teacher leader is still the right fit for the role and remains aligned with the needs of the other teachers at the school.
- To encourage teacher participation in these leadership roles, a teacher should not lose his or her seniority when serving as a teacher leader.
- In order to maintain quality support, the district or charter network should offer consistent train-the-trainer development to share updated knowledge or strategies that can be implemented at the school level.



Union solution: advocate for teacher leaders

Policy and contractual decisions about how to structure teacher time or teacher leadership positions are often forged through collective bargaining agreements. For this reason, UTLA should demonstrate support for Common Core on behalf of unique student populations by communicating teacher-leadership and professional development opportunities to its members.

“**When great teachers are empowered to teach their colleagues, the benefits are not just the transference of skills, there’s also a sense of group purpose that remains and binds the faculty as a team.**”

David Metz, high school Theater, Ramón Cortines High School for Visual and Performing Arts, Los Angeles Unified

What this looks like: To further support the continuation of teacher leadership opportunities, our local teachers union should communicate these opportunities to its members and more importantly, advocate for the hiring and training of these instructional and technology coaches in an effort to support members’ transition to Common Core standards. This recommendation is an opportunity for our union to advance its focus on peer-to-peer leadership as well as CTA’s demonstrated commitment to teacher leadership and Common Core implementation.

Our union could further the impact of teacher leaders by empowering them to lead afterschool or weekend professional development sessions through the Helen Bernstein Professional Development Center, through UTLA-approved advancement courses, or through Peer Assistance and Review. These sessions should reflect best practices in terms of creating effective professional development experiences that are useful to teachers and impactful for students.

In addition to aligning with our state union’s strategy, our local union can learn from strong union-district collaborations happening in other cities. Oakland Unified School District and the Oakland Education Association are powerful examples of union district collaboration around teacher-led professional development. In the current labor contract, “teachers on special assignment” serve as Common Core teacher leaders at school sites. In their role, these teachers work at least 80 percent of their time with students or in some teacher support role that furthers the school’s implementation of Common Core and ELD standards.⁴⁷ These teacher leaders facilitate ongoing professional learning and lesson study, coach teachers at their schools and help teachers interpret data to identify student needs and teacher growth areas.⁴⁸ Teacher leaders also observe teachers and provide feedback on how to improve instructional strategies.⁴⁹ In Oakland, these teacher leaders are specifically tasked with accelerating language and literacy outcomes for diverse learners.⁵⁰ When they are not leading teachers, these teacher leaders provide intervention support for English Learners and other targeted student groups. While it may be too early to see the impact of Oakland’s strategy, there is always great promise when our union and district collaborate to elevate teacher leadership in the service of student achievement.

Measuring Success: As discussed earlier in this paper, there are a few ways to evaluate the impact of teacher leaders on teaching practice and student outcomes. Considering this recommendation is about gaining our union’s support of teacher leadership, the measures of success should measure union members’ satisfaction with this union

75%

of educators agree

that it is very important or important for our union to prioritize the hiring and training of more instructional coaches focused on English Learners and students with disabilities so teachers have the support they need to address the unique needs of these students.

LEVERAGING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Here are a few examples of models, partners and resources our union can look to in elevating teachers as leaders in Common Core implementation:

CalTURN

Oakland Education Association

United Educators of San Francisco

advocacy and outcomes. To measure the impact of this strategy on its members, the union should survey its teachers to evaluate levels of usefulness and general satisfaction with coaches for unique student populations.

Caveats and Considerations

- In addition to advocating for teacher leadership positions during the bargaining process, UTLA could also build its own cadre of teacher leaders who develop training modules or serve as role models, similar to the program created as a partnership between Stanford University and the California Teachers Association (CTA).⁵¹
- As addressed previously in this paper, teacher leaders should be on-site teachers who have received the "exceeds standard performance" overall rating on their two most recent Teacher Growth and Development Cycle (TGDC), nominated and selected by peers.
- Districts or charter networks should train teacher leaders during summer institutes in exchange for a stipend or salary points, similar to the National Writing Project Summer Institute.
- In addition to paid training, teacher leaders should also be compensated with salary points or stipends if they already topped out their salary scale.

The Role of the State in Education

The responsibilities of large states with diverse local districts and charter networks often include:

- Data collection
- District accountability
- Maintaining minimum standards
- Ensuring equity
- Disseminating high-level information

The Challenge for the State

General education teachers are often the primary teachers of unique student populations.⁵² The majority of students receiving special education services spend more than half of their days in general education classrooms.⁵³ Plus, the number of English Learners in California schools is rapidly increasing.⁵⁴ Considering these statistics, California teachers need high-quality and uniform pre-service training to ensure they are prepared to teach these students daily.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, university-based teacher credentialing programs across California vary greatly in how they prepare pre-service teachers to teach unique student populations like English Learners or students with

disabilities.⁵⁶ This is concerning, considering that English Learners make up more than 22 percent of California students and students with disabilities comprise about 10 percent of students statewide—and an even greater percentage of students in Los Angeles.

As a result of these demographics, general education teachers are likely the primary teacher for students with special needs despite that teacher's lack of specialized training. Understandably, research shows that these teachers feel inadequately prepared to teach Common Core for special populations.⁵⁷ In a survey completed by the National Center for Education Statistics, only 27 percent of teachers said they were "very well prepared" to meet the needs of ELLs and 12 percent reported that they were "not at all prepared."⁵⁸ However, when teachers received more substantive academic training on unique student populations, they adjusted their attitudes towards these students and their own classroom practices.⁵⁹

Our Vision

All teachers who graduate from teacher preparation programs in California should have a solid foundation of knowledge, skills and experience in serving unique student populations. By developing teachers who are ready for the challenge of meeting the needs of diverse learners, we enable students with all skills and strengths to engage with Common Core curriculum and achieve success.

State Solution: Enhance Teacher Preparation Programs

The California State Legislature should require all teacher credentialing programs at institutions of higher education to develop a more rigorous approach to preparing highly qualified teachers by including more pre-service preparation for teaching unique student populations.

What this looks like: The California State Legislature should require all institutions of higher education in our state to include more rigorous training on teaching students with disabilities and English Learners. Revising program standards to better prepare graduates to teach unique student populations in a general education setting would include the addition of coursework or other experiential learning requirements focused on special populations. This is essential because—given the demographics in California and LA Unified—graduates of teacher preparation programs will undoubtedly be serving high populations of students with disabilities and English Learners.

“**The teachers coming into my school fresh out of credential programs lack the basic skills required to scaffold instruction to meet the diverse needs of unique special populations. Scaffolding for Common Core is already a challenge, but then scaffolding Common Core instruction for special education students is an incredible challenge that many of these new teachers face daily. They’re not being prepared for the classroom adequately.**”

Nikki Revell, *11th grade English, Los Angeles Academy of Arts and Enterprise*

Many other states across the nation have already established requirements for university-based programs to provide training on unique student populations for all pre-service candidates. States such as Massachusetts and New York require pre-service coursework on educating special education students in general education classrooms as part of their initial teacher certification process. In Massachusetts, state law requires all educators to have “training in strategies for effective inclusive schooling for children with disabilities,” including “practical experience in the application of these strategies,” as a requirement of initial licensure.⁶⁰

In addition to changes to coursework, this revision of teacher preparation standards should require two field placements in general education classrooms that are inclusive of students receiving special education services and English Learners. These field placements are critical given what we know about the efficacy of teacher professional development. For any training to influence teacher practice, and in turn student learning, it must be embedded in the real-life context of classrooms. Luckily, California can learn from states that already require training for unique student populations via field-based experiences. In these states, field-based learning must begin early in the preparation program and be integrated into the courses or seminars that address state educator standards.⁶¹ Although limited, the research on teachers who received training in special education—whether a degree, a certificate, or 30 hours of coursework—was found to produce higher reading levels for students with disabilities compared to teachers who lacked this preparation.⁶²

Despite the need and promise of changing teacher preparation, one of the biggest challenges is the cost of restructuring university programs. However, the need for better-prepared teachers in California far outweighs the initial cost hurdle that some universities might face, and other universities might have outstanding preparation programs. In addition, teacher preparation programs require significant cost and investment on the part of our graduate students, who are also education customers, expecting to graduate prepared to effectively tackle their new jobs as teachers. In the end, better-prepared teachers will make for better-prepared schools, classrooms and students.

Measuring Success: The efficacy of increasing the rigor of credentialing requirements for general education teachers should be evaluated by an independent inspector who would conduct program evaluation site visits and program evaluations.⁶³

A neutral university-affiliated research department or the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) should measure the impact of improved university-based teacher preparation programs on the outcomes of unique student populations. This post-implementation data should be aggregated and compared to current student outcomes data to evaluate the effect of teacher preparation on unique student populations.

89%
of educators agree

that it is very important or important for the state to require teacher credentialing programs to include more preparation for general education teachers in teaching unique student populations.

LEVERAGING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Here are a few examples of models, partners and resources the state can look to when revising teacher preparation requirements:

American Association of Colleges
for Teacher Education (AACTE)

Bellweather Education Partners

National Council on
Teacher Quality

New York State
Education Department

To measure how prepared graduates of university-based teacher preparation programs are to teach all students, universities should be required to survey their graduates and collect this data.

Caveats and Considerations

- The CCTC, with input from education stakeholders, should create the definition of a “quality” teacher preparation program at institutions of higher education and should communicate this to universities. This definition needs to explicitly include preparation for teaching students with disabilities and English Learners. This definition should help align the needs of districts, charter networks and students with special needs with teacher preparation programs.
- These options could include rewriting coursework or student teaching requirements that enable pre-service teachers to gain experience instructing diverse learners. These options could include adding coursework or student teaching requirements that enable pre-service teachers to gain experience instructing diverse learners.
- Graduate schools should be given adequate time to make the required changes to their programs. The CCTC reviews programs every seven years, so this might be an opportunity to allow programs to transition into the more rigorous standards. The CCTC could also prioritize their support of this program shift at universities that graduate a large number of urban teachers. Urban teachers in California typically teach a higher percentage of students with disabilities or English Learners, so by prioritizing this change at universities that produce large number of urban teachers, the impact on students would be felt faster.





RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEVERAGING RESOURCES & PARTNERS

The Challenge for State

In 2012, the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction created the Education Technology Task Force to update California's Education Technology Plan approved by the California State Board of Education in 2005. This Task Force reviewed research and literature on education technology, identified gaps between the state's technology plan and the U.S. Department of Education's National Technology Plan and assessed California's education technology infrastructure. The result of this herculean undertaking was a set of recommendations on what educational technology is needed to improve teaching and learning. The Task Force also made recommendations on equity of access issues to ensure all students could harness technology as a powerful learning tool. Despite the Education Technology Task Force's 2015 report, little progress seems to have been made in the last few years and teachers have not received any updates about the status of the report's recommendations.

Additionally, in the 2013-14 school year, the California State Legislature adopted the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), replacing the previous school finance system that had been in place for 40 years. This change required school districts, county offices of education and charter networks to develop, adopt and annually update a three-year Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) that outlines strategies and investments to address eight state education priorities.

Thus far, the state has not made education technology a stated priority across districts. As a result, technology has been underleveraged as a vehicle for propelling equity and preparing students for 21st century colleges and careers. Considering California has one of the largest shares of

high-tech workers in the United States, our education system needs better technology integration to prepare all students for success in the burgeoning tech economy that is expected to grow by more than 51,000 jobs in 2016 alone.⁶⁴

Undoubtedly, education technology is a powerful tool that has the ability to individualize learning and build deeper learning skills in all students.⁶⁵ For unique student populations, education technology is a tool that can make Common Core instruction more accessible and targeted. However, with competing funding priorities and no real accountability prioritizing and expanding technology, educators lack direction for implementing technology tools in the nearly 10,000 schools across the state.⁶⁶

Our Vision

The promise of technology is undeniable. It enables educators to deliver instruction in tailored and innovative ways to meet the unique and special needs of students. It enables practitioners to work more efficiently and collaboratively. Just as important, technology fluency is quickly becoming essential for students to thrive in colleges and careers both today and tomorrow. This technology should be widely available for districts and classrooms across the state.



State Solution: Integrate Technology in State Funding Priorities

The State Board of Education should update its Education Technology Plan and the Local Control Funding Formula priorities in order to communicate a clear vision around technology integration and create an accountability system for districts and charter networks.

“ **The technology divide is quickly becoming the new achievement gap. California has an opportunity to address this growing problem by providing schools with the right tools to be innovative in their instructional approaches while offering competitive 21st century learning environments that meet the needs of all our learners in our classrooms.**

Mario Echeverria, *fifth and sixth grade English and Technology, KIPP Academy of Innovation, KIPP LA Schools*

What this looks like: As articulated, the problem with technology integration is that there has been no strong guidance for how districts, schools and classrooms can harness technology to differentiate instruction and bridge the digital divide for students. As a result, we have a tapestry of schools implementing very different technology strategies and some schools struggling to implement any cohesive strategy at all. The consequence of this variability and ambiguity is inequity, particularly for students who would most benefit from the access and innovation that technology provides.

California began to address this problem when our State Superintendent of Instruction convened the Education Technology Task Force to study and define California’s education technology strategy. The results of this investigation were published in the Task Force’s 2011 report *A Blueprint for Great Schools*.⁶⁷ Sadly, the report’s recommendations, though updated in 2015, have not significantly shifted technology thinking, investments or practices for the thousands of schools in our state. To make this report a call to change actual systems and policies, the

state needs to update stakeholders on the status of the report and consider implementing actual policies based on the report’s findings.

To this end, our state can leverage this report to clearly outline a vision for how technology should be integrated within California’s eight education funding priorities. These priorities have been identified by the State Board of Education in its Local Control Funding Formula and Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). Both the formula and accountability plan should clearly articulate a vision for the role of technology in public education. This role should be broad enough to enable local customization that can meet the needs of our various types of schools. At the same time, this vision should be specific enough to provide all schools with guidance, expectations and accountability for ensuring equity. To strike this delicate balance, we encourage our state to partner with some of our nation’s leading technology thought leaders, institutes and companies that are housed in our state.

Incorporating technology priorities into LCAPs will ensure that districts and charter networks identify appropriate technology tools and develop a plan to expand access to those tools. Additionally, including a technology component in LCAPs will require districts and charter networks to prioritize funding for technology to meet the needs of at-risk students. As all LCAPs require, districts should create their technology plans with community, student and family input. Additionally, these plans should address the district’s plan for ensuring that technology tools make it into the hands of teachers. Incorporating technology priorities into LCAPs creates an accountability system that can be routinely evaluated and supported by the state.

96%
of educators agree

that it is very important or important for the state to identify and invest in technology and infrastructure to support Common Core implementation for English Learners and students with disabilities.

LEVERAGING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Many important community partners have already begun the work of expanding access to educational technology in the Common Core. Below are but a few examples—and certainly not an exhaustive list—of the partners and resources who can and should be consulted as the state takes on this work.

California Department of Education Technology Task Force

California Legislative Technology and Innovation Caucus

Connected Educators

Future Ready Schools

The Children’s Partnership

U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Technology

Measuring Success: The State Board of Education has the authority to review the LCAP of all schools in districts and charter networks. Like other state LCFF priorities, technology performance indicators and progress to goals data provided by districts and charter networks should be included in this evaluation. From there, the State Board of Education can identify strengths and weaknesses as well as areas where the state can provide additional assistance as needed.

Technology plans should be grounded in high-quality survey data that reveals the key technology gaps, problems and opportunities in the district or charter network. The district or charter system could solicit this input from teachers, families, students and other community partners as they do for other LCAP priorities. If a district or charter network also chooses to hire and train technology teacher leaders, these teachers could assist in providing professional development for their colleagues and soliciting feedback on current technology needs and implementation.

Caveats and Considerations: Districts, charter networks and schools should follow a state's vision for the adoption of 21st century tools, but they need to have the autonomy to choose tools that work best for the students they serve.

The Challenge for Districts

Although schools recognize the importance of families as educational partners, schools have difficulty connecting with the families of unique student populations or providing relevant information on Common Core curriculum and resources customized for these families. Although the benefits of family involvement are numerous and have been well documented, research shows that schools have difficulty fully implementing family engagement programs because, among other reasons, staff has not been trained, lacks the time to dedicate to building family involvement, or has misperceptions of a family's ability to engage.⁶⁸ On the other side, families of students with disabilities or English Learners also face challenges and barriers as they try to become informed or involved in their student's school.⁶⁹ Families most often cite a lack of time to become more involved in a student's education.⁷⁰ The lack of transportation and the lack of childcare also keep families from participating.⁷¹ Additionally, family members can feel intimidated and unwelcome at school or be unsure about the value of their contributions.⁷² Nevertheless, family engagement is particularly important for families of unique student populations in the transition into Common Core curriculum and instruction.



Invested families equal invested students and greater overall achievements.

*Joy DuBois, sixth grade Math, Science and Technology,
Van Nuys Middle School, Los Angeles Unified*

Our Vision

Districts and charter networks should task family liaisons, a position that many schools already have⁷³, with supporting families of unique students to better understand the Common Core transition, how Common Core affects their student, how their student's unique needs will be met and strategies to improve education involvement at home and school.



District Solution: Engage Families

Districts and or charter networks should ensure that family liaisons are trained to facilitate family involvement for families of students with special needs

What this looks like: In multiple studies, research has shown the undeniable impact of family involvement on student outcomes including improved academic achievement, lower dropout rates and lower truancy rates.⁷⁴ But, we have much work to do in ensuring families of students with special needs are informed about Common Core and its impact on their students. This recommendation ensures that family liaisons hired by schools will have the knowledge and skills needed to improve the engagement of families of students with special needs, namely English Learners and students with disabilities.

To support this increased responsibility, the district or charter network should provide ongoing training for family liaisons on how to engage families and on Common Core instruction and assessments for students with special needs. This information can then be shared with families who participate in engagement activities. These family liaisons will introduce families to community and school resources to help support their student's needs both in school and outside of school and develop parental support for their student's education.

Measuring Success: Teachers and administrators should evaluate the family liaison's efforts and success in improving relationships between the school and families of students with special needs. Family liaisons should also be observed by a supervisor to evaluate their success in facilitating family engagement activities.

79%

of educators agree

that it is very important or important for districts or charter networks to train family liaisons to support the families of unique student populations and improve their partnerships with teachers and administrators.

LEVERAGING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Here are a few examples of models, partners and resources that districts or charter networks can look to for improving family involvement:

California State University
Los Angeles Parent Academy

Families in Schools

Parent College by the Partnership
for Los Angeles Schools

Parents Education League
of Los Angeles

Saint John's Health Center Child
and Family Development Center

School site parent
committees and councils

Team of Advocates for
Special Kids (TASK)

Youth Policy Institute

Families of students with special needs should evaluate the family liaison's ability to provide relevant information regarding Common Core instruction and how it impacts their student.

In order to get a useful and representative sample size, the district or charter network should set a minimum bar for survey completion and tie that goal to administrator evaluations. This would incentivize greater outreach efforts to families.

Caveats and Considerations

- Schools will need to leverage LA Unified's robust translation services branch to develop materials and workshops tailored to the languages spoken by their community.
- Family engagement programs, like the ones leveraged at various Parent College and Parent Academy programs in Los Angeles, must be structured with strong support and incentives for staff and volunteers to operate high-quality outreach and services.

CONCLUSION

The conversation about Common Core is not new. Our state has been transitioning to Common Core since 2010, but these conversations and plans have overlooked the unique needs of an increasingly diverse student population. We know that all kids can learn, and English Learners and students with disabilities are no exception to that statement. Instead of reducing our education system to a one-size-fits-all approach, we owe it to our students to celebrate their unique needs, find their strengths and improve our system to better support their learning styles.

Transforming our education system to not just recognize diverse learners but truly embrace all students would unlock the creative and critical minds of students who have historically been underserved by our education systems and, as a result, underleveraged by our communities.

This metamorphosis needs the attention of not only teachers and school leaders, but also the families, communities and policymakers who have shaped our education system thus far. With your help, the ideas discussed in this paper would remarkably change our schools, communities and, most notably, the lives of the students who desperately deserve radical improvement.

Process & Methodology

Identifying E4E's Policy Focus

E4E held focus groups with teachers who serve our district schools and polled more than 520 teachers in Los Angeles to identify the most important and impactful policy issues. Common Core implementation for unique student populations emerged as one of the most important and impactful issues in our polling.

Reviewing Research

We met for nine weeks to review research on different national attempts to improving Common Core implementation for unique student populations as well as local strategies being proposed or piloted by LA Unified, Partnership for Los Angeles School, Youth Policy Institute and local charter networks. Additionally, we hosted conversations with leaders from Ed Trust West, LA Unified, local charter networks and other local and national experts.

Conducting Local Research

Our Policy Team conducted over 65 peer and administrator interviews and interviewed more than 75 students and families to gather critical stakeholder feedback. We also conducted a survey of more than 430 E4E-LA members and non-members including classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, principals, administrators and other school-based staff to understand the most essential strategies for improving Common Core implementation for unique student populations. Teachers accounted for 366 of these survey responses, 53 percent of whom were unionized. The polling data pushed our Teacher Policy Team to revise and rework policy recommendations to meet key needs and concerns among our peers.

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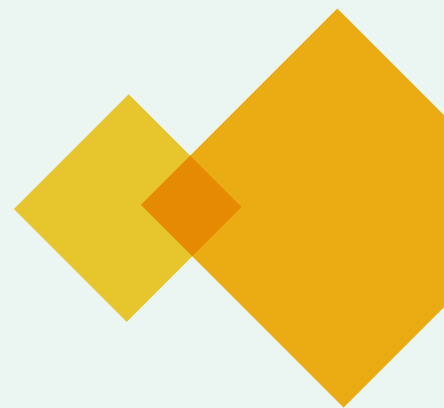
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