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# Evaluation Study of California's High Priority Schools Grant Program: Final Report

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# Executive Summary

## Background of the HPSGP Evaluation

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 established 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).

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 toward implementing improvement strategies. 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 2005, the California Department of Education (CDE) contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to examine the implementation, impact, costs, and benefits of the HPSGP. The CDE identified four primary evaluation questions for the study:[1]

1) How effectively did participating schools and districts implement the HPSGP?
2) 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?
3) What has been the impact from a school's participation in HPSGP on student performance?
4) What unintended consequences have resulted from the implementation of the HPSGP?

[1] The original contract for this evaluation included another question regarding the growth patterns of schools a) funded under both the HPSGP and Immediate Intervention and Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP), and b) funded under the HPSGP and the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program. This question was subsequently dropped by the CDE.

This final report summarizes evaluation activities completed during this two-year study and presents findings for these research questions drawn from a mixed-methods approach. To address the study's research questions, we:

- Analyzed extant data, including student- and school-level achievement data for HPSGP and non-HPSGP schools within California, HPSGP Annual Reports and expenditure reports for all HPSGP schools, and the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS),
- Conducted case study visits to 16 HPSGP schools in nine districts,
- Administered and analyzed data from surveys in 106 HPSGP schools, and
- Administered and analyzed data from phone surveys in 49 districts.

To better isolate the impact of the HPSGP in light of various funding sources, exit criteria, and prior participation in other school reform programs, the evaluation limited the analyses to schools that received HPSGP implementation funds and did not participate in II/USP or the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) programs — referred to as "HP Only" schools in this report. The achievement analysis focused on a subset of the HP Only schools that received planning grants and the first round of implementation funding. This subset of schools is referred to as "HP Only plus planning."

## Overview of Findings

- On average, HPSGP schools showed gains in student performance during the period of program implementation. However, the effect of participating in the program on student performance was negligible.

The evaluation explored the relationships between achievement trends and the participation of schools in the HPSGP using Academic Performance Index (API) and Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program results. Before interpreting these quantitative results, it is important to acknowledge the difficulties inherent in the selection of appropriate comparison schools. Because the state purposely selected the lowest-performing schools for the HPSGP, there were few schools with comparable levels of academic achievement that did not participate in the HPSGP, II/USP, or other school reform programs. As a result, 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.

HP Only plus planning schools, on average, showed gains in the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the California Standards Test (CST). The percentage increased from 9 percent to 24 percent in English language arts and from 12 percent to 29 percent in math from 2001-02 to 2005-06. The averages for comparison schools and all other schools showed similar trajectories.

When controlling for selected student- and school-level characteristics, the results show that HP Only plus planning and comparison schools performed virtually the same over the period of the program. This overall finding is supported by analyses of student subgroups and by longitudinally linked student data we obtained for this study from a large urban school district in the state.

In summary, while HP Only plus planning schools demonstrated academic progress during the period of program implementation, their gains were not statistically different from the gains of the comparison schools included in these analyses.

Using qualitative data collected for this study, we attempted to test the notion that more rigorous implementation of HPSGP had resulted in improved outcomes. However, examining the relationship between student outcomes and what we observed and heard at the case study sites as well as the perceptions of survey respondents did not yield clear results. Though in theory better implementation would lead to improved student outcomes, we could not document this relationship based on available data.

The survey data did yield many noteworthy findings, which included:

- Although more than 60 percent of school respondents reported that a plan for school improvement prominently guided their reform efforts, this reported impression was not reflected in measured academic gains.
- While nearly half of the school respondents described their external provider support as appropriate and effective, nearly 45 percent of the surveyed respondents reported that the school did not use, or reported that they did not know if the school used, an external provider in the development of the Action Plan, even though it was a program requirement.
- Although the vast majority of HPSGP school respondents indicated an effective use of funds, half expressed concern about the short length of the program, and nearly a third reported that the untimely arrival of funds did not permit appropriate planning and spending.
- Spending on personnel was reported as the most common and the most effective local use of HPSGP funds.
- HPSGP was perceived as having a major role in student achievement gains, despite nearly identical academic performance during this period between HPSGP and non-HPSGP comparison schools.
- A slight majority of respondents reported a lasting HPSGP impact in areas of school capacity.
- While 60 percent of school respondents indicated confidence in sustaining the impact of HPSGP, only 40 percent said they had been able to find funding to continue these reforms.

# General Observations

Overall performance of low-performing schools (both those participating and not participating in the HPSGP) is improving in an era in which state and federal accountability systems have been introduced. The accountability movement, including interventions like the HPSGP, has cast an important spotlight on chronically underperforming schools. An expectation is being conveyed to state, district, and school administrators that the status quo for these schools is no longer acceptable.

This increased attention paid to the state's lowest-performing schools is laudable, and has yielded some positive results for these schools on average as well as for all schools statewide. State and federal accountability efforts have likely made a substantial contribution to this improved performance, and it seems likely that in a generic sense, the HPSGP has contributed to these overall gains as well.

At the same time, analyses of school- and student-level achievement for this evaluation show no meaningful difference between schools participating in the HPSGP and comparison schools. Likewise, two prior evaluations of the II/USP (which was similar in many ways to the HPSGP) found that while the program focused attention on student achievement and low-performing schools, there appeared to be negligible overall impact on student achievement in participating schools.

# Recommendations

Based on our findings, it appears that a short-term categorical approach to school reform is insufficient to overcome much larger system inadequacies that fail to provide the kinds of long-term support and assistance needed to substantially and consistently improve student performance in the state's most challenged schools. We suggest terminating categorical interventions like the HPSGP in favor of more comprehensive statewide school reform that provides long-term administrative and resource support to the state's lowest-performing schools enrolling our most academically challenging students.

However, we also understand broad-reaching state reform to be an unlikely immediate alternative. In the interim, we recommend that the state consider alternative investments to bolster the performance of the state's lowest-performing schools, as opposed to relying on II/USP- and HPSGP-type interventions.

Within this overall context, we offer two categories of recommendations below. We begin with general state-level recommendations, irrespective of the future of the HPSGP, and conclude with specific improvements to the program that may foster a greater impact.

## General Recommendations

### *1. Keep the attention on student learning and low-performing schools*

State and federal standards-based policies have been very successful in capturing the attention of the education community and the general public and focusing that attention on student outcomes

system-wide and on low-performing schools in particular. We urge that this attention continue.

### *2. Consider the resources needed for sustained academic success in low-performing schools, and ensure that they are present and maintained in these schools and their districts*

The state should identify the resources needed in the state's most challenging, highest-poverty schools, fund them accordingly, and ensure that these resources are allocated effectively by districts to schools.

Since the district was found to be a key intermediary between state-level policy and school-level implementation, the state should ensure that districts have the resources to provide the necessary assistance and support to their schools, and that they allocate them to low-performing schools as needed.

### *3. Use data on an ongoing basis to identify the extent to which state-level programs make an impact, and use these data to inform and alter state-level policy and programs in support of low-performing schools as needed*

As the state sets expectations for schools and districts and encourages them to regularly use data as a basis for shaping policy and practice, we suggest the same process for the state. The state should attempt to actively determine fairly early on how well state-supported interventions are working.

We recommend early and rigorous assessment of a formative nature that can serve to guide and adjust implementation, and that is designed to compile evidence as early as possible about the extent to which anticipated outcomes are likely to be forthcoming. External evaluations provide a means to gain formative and summative information on programs. However, given the high-stakes environment and urgency to improve student outcomes, the state itself should establish more mechanisms to review policies regularly, assess what components of its policies are on the right track, and adjust policies on an ongoing basis as needed.

### *4. Enhance the power of CBEDS*

Several of our case study sites and survey schools exhibited alarming principal turnover, and teacher turnover was also noted as a particular challenge to reform efforts. However, we were not able to compare this reported turnover to our designated comparison schools or other groups of interest, as this critical information is lacking in CBEDS. We recommend enhancing CBEDS to include questions on the number of years that principals and teachers have been at their current school, and the number of years in that same position in other schools. This enhancement to the database would serve as a powerful tool to understand staff turnover and its implications for student achievement.

### *5. Foster data-driven decision making*

Many of the successful schools we encountered (through our HPSGP case studies, as well as evaluations of Proposition 227, II/USP, and high-poverty schools) at least partially attribute this success to 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. Unlike a number of other factors that have been repeatedly cited as making a difference in regard to school reform (e.g., strong leadership), data-driven decision making may be much easier to replicate.

6. ***Recognize the influential role districts play in facilitating or constraining school improvement, and incorporate mechanisms into accountability policies to encourage positive and productive actions at the district level***

One of the key findings of this study was the potential influence of district context on schools' achievement growth. Although the HPSGP attempted to increase the involvement of the district in these reform efforts in relation to the II/USP, the findings from this study show that there is considerable room for improvement. The state's District Assistance Intervention Team (DAIT) process should further clarify the role of districts and counties in regard to assisting the state's lowest-performing schools.

7. ***Consider methods to better align the state and federal accountability systems***

Site-level respondents in this study largely reported that while they consider the API to be a better outcome measure, they feel pressure to address AYP targets. This is not surprising given that 80 percent of the HP Only schools are in Program Improvement (PI), with nearly half of the PI schools in Year 4 or 5 of the sanctions. Given the conflict and confusion associated with two overlapping accountability systems, we recommend that the state focus further on their alignment.

8. ***Develop and foster policies that will strive for strength and continuity of school leadership, especially at low-performing schools***

Through the site visits and survey data, we have documented the common problem of excessive turnover in the leadership at low-performing schools. Conversely, where schools have appeared to thrive under these types of interventions, strong and ongoing school leadership was commonly found to be an integral part. While change in leadership may be the catalyst necessary to meaningful change, it appears very difficult for meaningful long-term planning and change to take hold without subsequent stability of leadership. We believe that a valuable role for the state, and a possible alternative investment to the HPSGP, would be to allocate funds for recruiting, training, and retaining strong principals in our state's most challenging schools.

9. ***Work with districts to develop learning networks where districts and schools in need of improvement can be linked with, and can learn from, districts and schools that have been successful in improving outcomes with comparable populations of students***

In light of the limited communication reported and evident among schools participating in our evaluation, we recommend that the state and districts consider working in tandem to create opportunities for districts and schools to learn from one other. This could enhance knowledge transfer from schools showing substantial progress under reform efforts over time to schools new to and struggling with reform. Such learning networks might feature pairing of schools ("sister" schools) or clusters of schools that would collaborate and work together toward the common goal

of enhancing student achievement.

***10. Look at other states' efforts to support their lowest-performing schools. Assess what investments they are making toward these ends and the degree to which they are experiencing results from these efforts***

As a result of national and state accountability systems across the country, many states are experimenting with interventions with the same basic intentions as the HPSGP, i.e., to improve performance in their most challenged schools and districts. We suggest an investigation into what other states are doing and what evidence they have found in regard to a return on these investments.

***11. Require participation in future evaluations***

As a grant precondition for any state program, districts and schools should agree to participate in state-approved evaluations of the programs. Soliciting the participation of districts and schools for this study took considerable persistence. As the state makes substantial investments in programs of this type, a reasonable pre-condition for participation is the state's right to collect data regarding whether this investment is cost effective.

## Specific HPSGP Recommendations

The following are recommendations if the state opts to continue with HPSGP-type interventions.

***1. 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 provider. 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).

***2. Enhance the district role: The role of the district should be explicitly enhanced and the district should be held accountable for school progress and for establishing and maintaining "conditions" for success.***

We recommend that bolstered assurances for which districts will be held accountable be a prerequisite for school participation in the HPSGP. The analyses from this study 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 continued program participation. Ultimately, if districts do not comply and schools are continuing to fail, ongoing program funding should be withheld. Rewards for gains in student performance might come in the form of increased local discretion.

3. ***Improve monitoring: The CDE (perhaps with the assistance of the County Offices of Education) should enhance its monitoring of non-achievement-related measurements, such as compliance with the district assurances and expenditures.***

Along with these district assurances, we recommend regular reporting and monitoring. As the CDE is charged with allocating HPSGP funds, they should also be given the responsibility and authority 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.

4. ***Redesign Annual Report: Collect data necessary to monitor assurances and school progress, and review on a regular basis.***

As described above, we recommend enhanced monitoring, and an important step in this direction is the modification of the current data collection under this program. The research team did not find the current Annual Report data to be particularly helpful in evaluating the program, nor had these data been analyzed in any systematic way prior to this evaluation. Changes to the Annual Report data collection could make the data more powerful and meaningful for monitoring HPSGP schools and districts.

While our survey collected respondent perceptions about key program components such as the external provider and district support, the fact that the evaluation was conducted at the end of (and even after) the program made collecting reliable measurements of implementation fidelity a challenge. We encourage the state to learn from evaluations of CSR model providers, such as *High Schools That Work*, that use ongoing survey measures to assess the extent to which participating schools are implementing the model with fidelity and how that relates to student outcomes. We recommend that the CDE redesign the Annual Report as a carefully constructed survey instrument that will provide indicators of implementation which can then be used, with other measures, to monitor schools as well as assess the relationship between implementation and student outcomes.

5. ***Ensure predictable funding: The timing of the funds should be carefully considered for the next cohort, with explicit timelines to allow for effective school planning and clear expectations regarding a transition phase prior to program completion.***

The state and districts should provide clear directives and assurances as to when the funds will arrive at the school, how much, and with what degree of flexibility in 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 on time. 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.

To facilitate the continuation of reform, the CDE should provide clear expectations about a transition phase. For instance, districts and schools (through the external provider and District-School Liaison Team) 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 resources necessary (e.g., financial and personnel) to allow the schools to continue key strategies beyond the HPSGP.

For the second cohort of HPSGP schools, CDE has prohibited annual carry-over. We strongly recommend that the CDE reconsider this restriction. While we observed considerable carry-over in all years of the program, our case studies suggested that carry-over was an indicator of more systemic problems, such as disruption in school leadership. As an alternative, we encourage closer monitoring of carry-over, such as requiring schools with substantial carry-over to submit an explanation of the reasons and the implications for future planning.

6. ***Ensure a supply of qualified external providers statewide, consistently describe the nature and duration of their role, and add measurements of their effectiveness to the program.***

Study respondents expressed concerns regarding the overall supply of qualified external providers. If this component is required as part of the HPSGP, the state has an obligation to be more proactive in ensuring an adequate and qualified supply. If the state does not have the capacity to develop this pool, then perhaps this component should not be required, or alternative options should be allowed.

In addition, a number of school respondents reported the external provider component as vaguely defined. This component also showed substantial variation in implementation. Although the external provider role is only required in legislation for the development of the Action Plan, it is further described in the second cohort guidelines as to "provide ongoing technical assistance to the school site administrative and teaching staff." This language seems to imply a relationship with the external provider for the duration of the grant. The requirement should be fully clarified and the supporting language made as consistent as possible.

Last, the regular cycle of the continuous improvement process described in the second cohort guidelines should include an assessment of the effectiveness of the external provider, as currently there appears to be no accountability for these individuals who share a large responsibility in assisting the lowest-performing schools in the state.

# Conclusion

On average, the state's lowest-performing schools progressed during the period of HPSGP implementation. Although the schools participating in this program did not show gains that statistically differ from non-participating schools, all of the schools — as well as the state — deserve credit for their advances. The findings from this evaluation should not in any way detract from these accomplishments.

The challenge facing the state's lowest-performing schools are daunting. Many of the educators who participated in the site visits and surveys convinced us of their dedication and determination in producing a brighter future for their students. It may simply be that the HPSGP was not enough. Ongoing systems of supplemental fiscal resources, selective staff placement, and other support are needed to substantially impact student outcomes in the state's most challenged schools.

Given the primary purpose of the program, some may say that the finding of no substantial difference in student performance between HPSGP and comparison schools is the only result that matters. As this is the third study issued on behalf of the state showing virtually no return in terms of enhanced student performance from the HPSGP and its predecessor II/USP, the question of whether to continue to invest in HPSGP-type interventions should be carefully considered by policy makers. Issues related to the need to improve student performance in the state's most challenged schools will not go away regardless of the future of the HPSGP.

We recommend that the state's commitment to low-performing schools not be diminished, but enhanced and re-directed. Because the current investments have not fully yielded the desired results, the need for a bolstered state commitment to equal educational opportunities for all children in California is perhaps greater than ever.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Background of the Evaluation

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 established 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).[2] A total of 658 schools statewide participated in the program, receiving over $740 million[3] in HPSGP implementation funds between 2002-03 and 2005-06. These schools compose 10.3 percent[4] 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. The California Department of Education (CDE) identified four primary evaluation questions for the study:[5]

1) How effectively did participating schools and districts implement the HPSGP?
2) 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?

[2] 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.
[3] Data obtained from CDE HPSGP Funding files for 2002-03 through 2005-06.
[4] Source: California Basic Educational Data System SIF Files for 2004-05.
[5] The original contract for this evaluation included another question regarding the growth patterns of schools a) funded under both the HPSGP and Immediate Intervention and Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP), and b) funded under the HPSGP and the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program. This question was subsequently dropped by the CDE.

3) What has been the impact from a school's participation in the HPSGP on student performance based on:
    b. Results of assessments used to determine whether or not schools have made significant progress towards meeting their growth targets as specified in the PSAA,
    c. 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, and
    d. Results of disaggregated student performance data for each of the following subgroups, as specified in PSAA:
        i. Major racial and ethnic groups
        ii. English language learners
        iii. Students with disabilities
        iv. Students with socioeconomic disadvantages
4) What unintended consequences have resulted from the implementation of the HPSGP?

This final report summarizes evaluation activities completed during this two-year study and presents findings for the research questions drawn from our case studies, surveys, and analyses of achievement and other extant data.

### Methods Used for this Evaluation of the HPSGP

The HPSGP study design uses a mixed methods approach, including:

1) 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);
2) In-depth case studies of 16 HPSGP schools in nine districts;
3) Web/paper surveys of a sample of HPSGP schools, and
4) District administrator phone surveys

This approach and supporting conceptual framework are explained in more detail in ***Chapter 2: Methodology.***

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 specific program components.

# Overview of Federal and State School Improvement and Accountability Programs

As the HPSGP was not implemented in isolation, 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 the II/USP, Comprehensive School Reform (CSR)[6], and NCLB. Nearly half of the schools participating in HPSGP participated in one of the three cohorts of II/USP or the CSR program. Given these confounding factors in assessing the impact of the program, the analyses in this report include schools that participated only in the HPSGP.

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.

## *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-1990s, states across the country have instituted performance-based accountability policies as part 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 AYP as an outcome measure to monitor student achievement across schools. In California, AYP encompasses several measures and targets, including participation and proficiency rates on state assessments including the California Standards Test (CST) and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE); the Academic Performance Index (API); 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.

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

[6] 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.

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. To meet AYP, all numerically significant subgroups, including English learners and students with disabilities, must also meet these expectations.

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. Local education agencies (LEAs) 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 LEA is the primary entity responsible for taking corrective action with underperforming schools.

Under NCLB, LEA can also be identified for PI by failing to make LEA AYP for two years in a row.[7] 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 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

[7] LEAs include county offices of education.

satisfied testing participation rate requirements; no funds have been appropriated for awards since 2002.

The cornerstone of the state's accountability system, the API is a numeric index that enables the monitoring and comparison of student achievement across schools. The API provides the basis for growth targets is used to identify 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 State 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.[8] 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 students, 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.

[8] This is known as the comparable improvement target and is set at 80 percent of the schoolwide target The target for numerically significant subgroups changed for the 2006-07 school year, at which point the subgroup targets were the same as the schoolwide target (i.e., 5 percent of the difference between the API base and 800).

As participants in the II/USP, 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)[9] 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 the II/USP was in its third year of implementation, the HPSGP was established as part of PSAA. Although schools ranked in 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 the 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:[10]

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 modify an existing plan) 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.

[9] 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.

[10] Although a second round of HPSGP schools have been approved, this evaluation considers only the first cohort of HPSGP (2002-03 to 2004-05, or 2005-06 for schools receiving fourth year funds).

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 the II/USP. Exhibit 1.1 provides a side-by-side comparison of the features of the HPSGP and II/USP.

**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 | ▪ Approves Action Plan | ▪ Participates in the development of the Action Plan<br>▪ Approves Action Plan<br>▪ Submits annual data on HPSGP schools<br>▪ Permitted to serve as an external provider |
| 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 Provider | Required. Schools selected from state-approved list. | Required. Schools had more flexibility in the selection. |
| Implementation period | 2 or 3 years | 3 years<br>(4th 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 combined API growth over 3 years, growth must be positive 2 out of the 3 years |
| What happened to schools after progress is evaluated? | *After 2 years:*<br>▪ Schools that made API targets for 2 consecutive years exited program; no additional funding.<br>▪ Schools that made significant growth 1 out of 2 years became under watch, and provided 3rd year of funding.<br>▪ Schools that did not meet targets and did not make significant growth entered SAIT process. | *After 3 years:*<br>▪ Schools that met targets, or did not meet targets but made significant growth received a 4th year of funding (2005-06)<br>▪ Schools that did not meet targets and did not make significant growth entered SAIT process. |

* A second cohort has been funded for 2007-08.
** Variations in funding sources will be described in the following section.

One important distinction between the 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 the 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.[11]

**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% |
| *Missing Rank* | *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 Growth 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.

[11] The distinction between Base and Growth can be found at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ay/glossary07a.asp. For instance, the 2006 Growth API is compared to the 2005 Base API to determine growth in the API from 2005 to 2006. The 2006 Base API summarizes performance on the spring 2006 STAR Program and California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE). It serves as the baseline score, or starting point, of performance, to be compared to the following year's performance.

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. In developing the plan, schools were also required to use technical assistance from an external provider which could be 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 the first round of implementation funds, 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.[12] 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 First Round HPSGP Implementation Funds <1> | Number of Schools Receiving Second Round HPSGP Implementation Funds <2> | Total Number of Schools in California (per Decile) | % of Total Receiving First or Second Round Implementation Funds (per Decile) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Decile 1 | 504 | 47 | 761 | 72.4% |
| Decile 2 | 16 | 47 | 711 | 8.9% |
| *Missing Rank* | *16* | *4* | -- | -- |
| **Total** | **536** | **98*** | | |

* This count does not include 17 schools that received the second round of funds from CSR and are regarded as participants in the HPSGP. Please refer to Exhibit 1.4 for further details.
<1> Selected in June 2002
<2> Selected in May, June, and November 2003.

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

[12] The term "second round" should not be confused with the second cohort of HPSGP schools funded in 2007-08.

2005-06 (excluding planning grant funds). The average value of implementation funds across four years of funding was approximately $1.1 million per school.[13]

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 HPSGP schools that did not participate in II/USP or CSR, which we refer to in this report as "HP Only" schools.[14]

**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%** |
| *Cohort I* | *48* | |
| *Cohort II* | *105* | |
| *Cohort III* | *89* | |
| **CSR-Funded II/USP** | **48** | **7.3%** |
| *Cohort I* | *21* | |
| *Cohort II* | *20* | |
| *Cohort III* | *7** | |
| **CSR-Funded HPSGP** | **17*** | **2.6%** |
| **HP Only** | **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 re-use 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.

[13] 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. Including 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.

[14] The Year 1 report for this evaluation referred to these schools as "Pure" schools. To make the label more intuitive, we call them "HP Only" in this report.

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, HP Only schools represent 53 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, the CDE and the advisory committee[15] for this evaluation advised that we limit the analyses in this report to HP Only schools. The II/USP and CSR are no longer funded, and as future HPSGP funding will no longer be split between these three programs, the CDE and committee members believed that evaluation efforts should focus only on schools that received all funding through the HPSGP – what we refer to as "HP Only" schools in this report. The student-level achievement analysis which examines the relationship between program participation and achievement focused on a subset of the HP Only schools that received planning grants *and* first round implementation funding (n = 229).[16] This subset of schools is referred to in Chapter 3 as the HP Only plus planning schools.

### What are HP Only schools?

**For the purposes of this report, we grouped schools that received HPSGP implementation funds into three broad categories:**

- **Mixed Program Schools:** Schools that were jointly funded by HPSGP and II/UPS or CSR. Among the 658 schools participating in HPSGP, 307 (46.7%) were mixed program schools.
- **HP Only:** HPSGP schools that received implementation funds and did not participate in II/USP or CSR. Of the total HPSGP schools, 351 (53.3%) were HP Only.
- **HP Only plus planning:** These schools are a subset of the HP Only group. These HPSGP schools a) did not participate in II/USP or CSR, b) received a planning grant, and c) received the first round of implementation funds. All three of these criteria must be met. In addition, this group was limited to schools with elementary, middle/junior high, and high school type in CBEDS. Of the total HPSGP schools, 229 (34.8%) were HP Only plus planning.

**Please note that the above schools may be participating in other non-specified programs, such as the federal Program Improvement and Reading First.**

[15] As part of this evaluation, the research team consults with an Advisory Committee comprised to state, district, and local stakeholders. The purpose of this committee was to provide input on the study design, including data collection instruments, sampling plans, and data analysis strategies.
[16] First round funding is illustrated in Exhibit 1.3.

## Report Overview

To address the research questions posed for this evaluation, we conducted case study visits to 16 schools in 9 districts; administered and analyzed data from surveys in 106 HP Only schools and phone surveys in 49 districts; carried out analyses of student achievement and data from CBEDS, the HPSGP Annual Reports, and HPSGP expenditure files. The results from these activities are presented in the following chapters. In the second chapter, we provide the methodology for the study. Chapter 3 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 2005-06.

In Chapter 4, we provide important school and district contextual factors primarily drawn from our survey results to better understand the conditions in which the HPSGP was implemented. Additional analyses of personnel resources presented in this chapter are derived from statewide data sources such as the CBEDS, as well as the HPSGP Annual Reports.

Chapter 5 examines the fundamental implementation components of the HPSGP: the development of the Action Plan with the assistance of an External Provider, district participation in the development, monitoring and implementation of the Action Plan, and the allocation and use of supplemental state funds.

Chapter 6 reports on the perceived importance and impact of the program on school improvement efforts. This chapter closes with an examination of respondents' views of their school's ability to sustain achievement progress and reforms initiated during the program implementation.

In Chapter 7, we conclude with a discussion of major findings from the study and their implications for policy and further research.

# Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology for the study, including the conceptual framework that guided our instrument development and qualitative data analysis. The methodology for the student achievement analyses is presented in greater detail in Chapter 3.

## Introduction

Due to similarities between the HPSGP and its predecessor II/USP, 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 support the development of our conceptual framework, data collection instruments, and methodological approach to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data.

Building on this prior body of work, the HPSGP study design uses a mixed methods approach that includes in-depth case studies, surveys, and analyses of extant data. These methods serve two broad goals: The first – assessing the impact of HPSGP – requires quantifying the association between program participation and student achievement. The second – assessing the implementation of the program – requires a qualitative understanding of school and district organization as well as the attitudes and perceptions of stakeholders towards reform. To address the first goal, we used statewide achievement data from various sources to analyze the differential growth between a subset of HPSGP and comparison schools from across the state. To address the second goal, we conducted case studies of 16 HPSGP schools in 9 districts in Year 1 of this evaluation (2005-06) and surveyed 106 schools and 49 district administrators in Year 2 (2006-07). We also used information from the HPSGP Annual Reports and End-of-Year Expenditure data (both reporting requirements under HPSGP) as well as personnel data from the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) to supplement our understanding of key aspects of the program and the context in which the program is implemented. Exhibit 2.2 summarizes how each of these methods relates to the four evaluation questions.

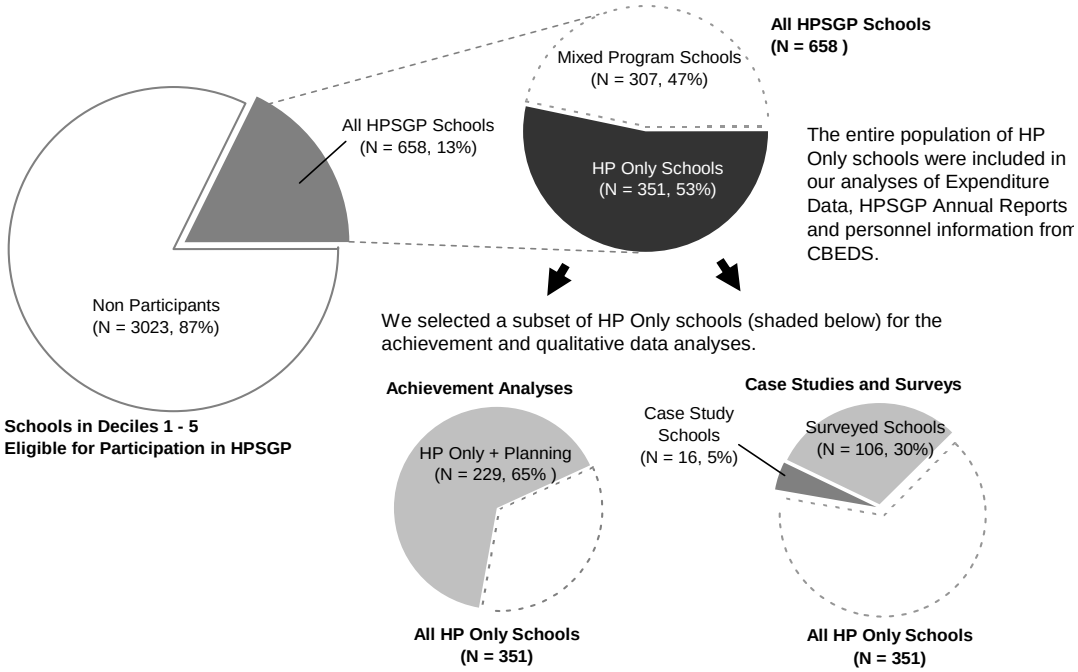
During the course of the study, we made additional modifications to our methodology. Several adjustments were made pursuant to discussions held during quarterly meetings with the CDE and biannual meetings with the HPSGP Advisory Committee. Based on these deliberations, one of the major decisions made early in the process was to focus the evaluation on HPSGP schools that had not previously participated in the II/USP or Comprehensive School Reform (CSR). The rationale for focusing the evaluation on this subset of HPSGP schools was manifold, but centered on the notion that to best understand the implementation and impact of HPSGP as it was

intended by policymakers, schools participating simultaneously in multiple reform programs (i.e., II/USP or CSR) needed to be excluded. This was particularly reinforced by the fact that future HPSGP funding will no longer be split between these three programs.

For the methodological purposes aforementioned as well as the need to identify sources of potentially influential differences between HPSGP schools, we grouped schools that received HPSGP implementation funds into three broad categories. Exhibit 2.1 shows how these schools relate to each other, as well as to the achievement analyses, case studies, and surveys.

- **Mixed Program Schools:** Schools that were jointly funded by HPSGP and II/UPS or CSR. Among the 658 schools participating in HPSGP, 307 (46.7%) were mixed program schools.
- **HP Only:** HPSGP schools that received implementation funds and did not participate in II/USP or CSR. Of the total HPSGP schools, 351 (53.3%) were HP Only.[17]
- **HP Only plus planning:** These schools are a subset of the HP Only group. These HPSGP schools a) did not participate in II/USP or CSR, b) received a planning grant, and c) received the first round of implementation funds. All three of these criteria must be met. In addition, this group was limited to schools with elementary, middle/junior high, and high school type in CBEDS. Of the total HPSGP schools, 229 (34.8%) were HP Only plus planning.[18]

**Exhibit 2.1: Breakdown of HPSGP Schools**




[17] The Year 1 report for this evaluation referred to these schools as "Pure" schools. To make the label more intuitive, we call them "HP Only" in this report.

[18] The Year 1 report for this evaluation referred to these schools as "Pure-Pure" schools. To make the label more intuitive, we call them "HP Only plus planning" in this report.

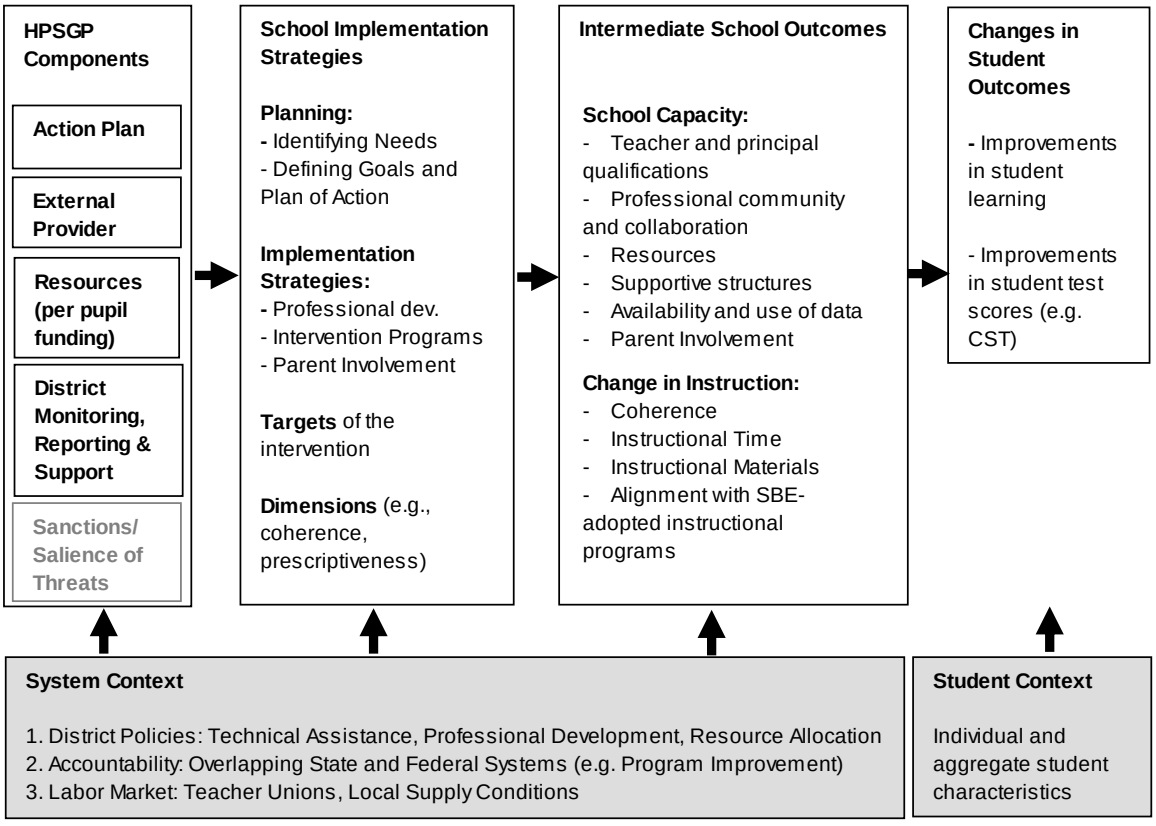
## Exhibit 2.2: Crosswalk between Evaluation Questions and Major Research Tasks

| Methodology<br>Evaluation Questions | Statewide Descriptive School-Level Performance Analyses (e.g., API targets) | Statewide Student-Level Achievement Analyses | Longitudinally Linked Student-Level Achievement Analyses | Case Studies | School and District Surveys | Other Extant Data Analyses |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.** How effectively did participating schools and districts implement the HPSGP? | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **2.** 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? | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **3.** What has been the impact from a school's participation in HPSGP on student performance 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. 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. Results of disaggregated student performance data for each of the following subgroups, as specified in PSAA:<br>i. Major racial and ethnic groups<br>ii. English language learners<br>iii. Students with disabilities<br>iv. Students with socioeconomic disadvantages | | ✓ | | | | |
| **4.** What unintended consequences have resulted from the implementation of the HPSGP | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **HPSGP Schools Studied** | HP Only plus Planning | HP Only plus Planning | HP Only plus Planning in large urban district | HP Only (Purposive Sample) | HP Only (Random Sample) | HP Only |
| **Schools studied as a percentage of all HP Only schools (n = 351)**<br>*Note that all analyses excluded 10 HP Only schools with non-traditional school type categories (i.e. alternative, continuation and special education) | 65% | 65% | | 5% | 30% | 97% |

# Overview of the Conceptual Framework

To help anchor the design and development of data collection instruments as well as frame the interpretation of findings throughout our study, we developed a conceptual framework (Exhibit 2.3) that builds on the program's theory of action and existing research of effective schools. We paid particular attention to research that examined contexts that may facilitate achievement growth in California's lower performing schools (EdSource, 2006; Education Trust-West, 2005). 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). As mentioned, prior AIR evaluations of the II/USP (O'Day & Bitter, 2003, and Bitter et al., 2005) also contributed to our framework.

**Exhibit 2.3. Conceptual Framework for the HPSGP Evaluation**




In regards to HPSGP, the conceptual framework focuses on its primary components: the content and effectiveness of the school Action Plan, the external provider; the targeting of resources to the lowest performing school, and district support and contribution to the implementation of strategies for improvement. These components were designed to guide, finance, and motivate the school's implementation of a coherent set of strategies for school improvement. The intermediate outcomes targeted by HPSGP included school capacity (including teacher and principal training and qualifications) and instruction (specifically the use of SBE-adopted and standards-based

instructional materials). While we were not able to explore each of these factors in depth, the conceptual framework helped guide our qualitative analysis efforts. Using this framework, we focused our efforts on delineating the strategies that underlie factors for "growth" among HPSGP schools, in order to inform policy recommendations on how to foster these factors through state and local policy.

In terms of contextual factors affecting schools, this study focused on the district's mediating role in the implementation of the program and school improvement strategies. A strong district effect was found in prior evaluations of the II/USP (O'Day & Bitter, 2003; Bitter et al., 2005), which was reinforced by the variability in the district role in the case studies completed in the first year of this evaluation. As mentioned previously, overlapping school accountability policies, primarily II/USP and CSR, had significant implications for our research design. Another salient and influential contextual factor affecting HPSGP schools in recent years, however, is the federal NCLB Act. Since 2002, both schools and districts are expected to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) targets. Many HPSGP schools were identified for Program Improvement during the implementation of HPSGP as a result of failure to meet their AYP targets, and some were subject to corrective action and/or restructuring sanctions as a part of this process.

# Overview of Methodology

This section provides a more detailed overview of the methods used in this study. The first part of this section outlines the achievement analyses used to estimate the impact of the HPSGP while the second part describes the methods used to qualitatively assess the program's implementation and impact. As noted previously, the scope of the evaluation was limited to HPSGP schools that did not participate in II/USP or CSR ("HP Only"), and the achievement analysis was further confined to HP Only schools that received planning grant and the first round of implementation funds ("HP Only plus planning").

## *Achievement Analysis*

To accurately and reliably estimate the impact of the program for HP Only plus planning schools, we needed to compare the performance of students attending those schools against the performance of students in a group of similar schools that did not participate in the program. The selection of *comparison* schools was the first, most critical, and perhaps most challenging task of the achievement analysis component of this study and is explained in more detail in Chapter 3. With the exception of the longitudinally linked student level analysis, the comparison group was the same for each of the following sets of analyses.

### Statewide School-Level Performance Trends

We conducted an initial assessment of performance between HP Only plus planning and comparison schools using outcome measures developed for the state and federal accountability systems. Although only descriptive in nature, these school-level analyses provided us with important context that enabled us to gauge the performance levels of HP Only plus planning schools relative to comparison schools and the state as a whole. Examining the state system, we looked at the percentage of schools meeting the schoolwide API growth targets and the distribution of schools by state rank from 1999-00 through 2005-06. To assess progress under the

federal system, we looked at the percentage of schools meeting all of the AYP targets from 2002-03 through 2005-06 as well as the percentage of students scoring proficient or above in the California Standards Test (CST), the metric upon which NCLB's Annual Measurable Objectives are set.

### Statewide Student-Level Analyses

In order to arrive at a more precise estimate of the relationship between participation in the HPSGP and student outcomes, we conducted a second set of analyses using student-level assessment data collected under the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) system. Using STAR assessments enabled us to control for key student demographic variables known to contribute to achievement (such as parent education). Controlling for individual background characteristics was important because students were not assigned at random to HP Only plus planning and comparison schools, and failure to take these characteristics into account could lead to biased estimates of the impact of the program.

These analyses used statewide Stanford Achievement Test (SAT-9) results in reading, mathematics, and language from 1998 through 2002, California Achievement Test (CAT/6) results in reading, mathematics, and language from 2003 to 2004, and California Standards Test (CST) results in English language arts and mathematics from 2002 to 2006. One of the challenges encountered in conducting this analysis resulted from having to take into account changes in the assessments used to measure student outcomes under STAR: in 2002-03, the SAT-9 was replaced by the CAT/6 and an additional test, the CST, was introduced in 2002. The approach taken to address these changes is explained in more detail in Chapter 3.

Using a Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) framework, we modeled student performance in each subject area as a function of time, student characteristics (such as socioeconomic status) and school characteristics (such as participation in HPSGP). For the purpose of this evaluation, our main interest was the marginal contribution of the HPSGP to student outcomes.

### Statewide Student-Level Analyses by Student Subgroups

As requested by the evaluation questions, additional analyses of student-level outcomes were conducted using disaggregated data for several sub-populations: English learners (ELs), students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, Hispanic, African-American, Asian, and special education students. Similar to the statewide student-level analyses described previously, we assessed differences in performance between HP Only plus planning and comparison schools for a given student subgroup.

### Longitudinally Linked Student Level Analysis of Data from a Large Urban School District

Lastly, we complemented these statewide analyses by estimating the impact of HPSGP using a longitudinally linked student level dataset provided by a large urban school district in the state. As we were able to follow students over time, we could study the individual performance trajectories of students in HP Only plus planning and comparison schools to estimate whether differences between those trajectories were a result of their school's participation in HPSGP.

## *Other Data Analysis*

To further inform the research questions, we drew upon school staffing data from the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) for all schools in the state, as well as the HPSGP Annual Report data and Expenditure Files. Using CBEDS Professional Assignment Information Form files, we examined the personnel resources in HP Only schools in 2001-02 (i.e., the planning grant year) and 2005-06 (i.e., the fourth year of implementation), in relation to comparison schools and all other schools statewide. Districts with HPSGP schools are required by the program to submit annual data on various elements relating to the program. We used these Annual Report data on principal experience in HP Only schools to provide additional context on principal turnover in participating schools. While the research team reviewed other data elements in these reports, they were not found particularly helpful for evaluation purposes. The HPSGP Expenditure Files were used to examine the distribution of spending across several expenditure categories as well as the amount of unused program funds that were carried over on a year to year basis.

## *Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis*

To inform evaluation questions 1, 2 and 4 regarding the overall impact, implementation and unintended consequences of HPSGP, we needed to gather first-hand data from key stakeholders. Our approach consisted of visits to 16 HP Only schools and their districts during the 2005-06 school year, followed by a large scale survey effort during the 2006-07 school year. The following sections describe each data collection in detail, including the sampling, recruiting participants, and collecting and analyzing data.

### Year 1 Case Studies

By visiting schools in person, our primary goal was to better understand the context in which HPSGP schools and districts operate. We also wanted to explore the implementation and impact of the program in schools that experienced some degree of improvement compared to those showing little or no improvement over the course of the HPSGP implementation period. 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 provider in providing technical support and assistance in schoolwide reform and improvement, as well as district strategies and supports for HPSGP schools.

### Selection of the Case Study Sample

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 first three implementation years (2002-03 through 2004-05) and a relatively high or low cumulative API growth over the last two of those years (2003-04 and 2004-05). 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 comparable 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.

In addition, our sample was selected to ensure that it represented key features of the broader population of HP Only schools. For practical reasons, we attempted to cluster schools within districts. In total, we selected 16 schools: 6 elementary schools, 4 middle schools and 6 high schools. Of these, half were consistent growth schools and the other half were recent low growth or no growth schools.

### Case study 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 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. At the district, we conducted interviews 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 visited in Year 1, on average, we interviewed the principal, four teachers, and two paraprofessionals. In addition, we conducted separate 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 given assurances that neither individual nor school names would be identified in the report. Additionally, the HPSGP applications submitted by schools 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), findings from the II/USP continuation study and instruments previously developed for other studies (for example, the II/USP and Proposition 227), the HPSGP case study 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.

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 are as follows:

- **Interviews with District Administrators, School Board Members, External Assistance Providers, Principals, and Teaching Staff:** A major focus of these interviews was 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 focus group 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 focus groups 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 rate the effectiveness of their school's improvement strategies, their confidence in sustaining improvement beyond the program's end, the helpfulness of the planning year and the HPSGP overall, as well as the support of the district.

## Year 2 School and District Surveys

While the case studies can be characterized as exploratory in nature, the surveys were designed to key in on the important themes that emerged from the case study findings.

### Selection of the Survey Sample

The survey sample, in contrast to the purposive case study sample, was designed so that results could be generalized to the broader population of HP Only schools. In selecting this sample, we had two objectives – 1) to stratify by school type to ensure a large enough number of elementary, middle, and high schools to conduct meaningful statistical analyses by school type, and 2) over-sample to account for inevitable district and school declines to participate in the survey effort. As a result, we first set a desired target (based on statistical considerations) of obtaining 90 completed school surveys (30 from each school type - elementary, middle and high) and conducting 45 district surveys. With this target in mind, we over-sampled for a total of 162 schools from 65 different districts. This random sample represented 46 percent of the 351 HP Only schools.

We randomly selected 162 schools from the larger population of 325 HP Only schools.[19] We did not include schools that had previously participated in our case studies so as to not overburden them with a second round of data collection requests. In addition, alternative, special education and continuation schools were not considered for the sample.

We decided jointly with the CDE and the HPSGP Advisory Panel to distribute one survey per school. Although the survey was targeted to principals, we recognized that with high levels of staff turnover, we would need to be flexible in our approach. As a result, our survey instructions noted that principals could seek the support of staff with more knowledge or experience related to the HPSGP. To make completing the survey as convenient as possible, we offered respondents two alternatives: complete a hard copy of the survey and return it to AIR with a pre-paid envelope or complete and submit an electronic version of the survey online.

At the district level, we identified administrators knowledgeable about the implementation of HPSGP and conducted an hour-long survey with them over the phone. To encourage both district and school participation, we designed a multi-step strategy which is described in more detail below.

### District survey recruitment

First, using contact information provided by the CDE, we sent a package on November 30, 2006 via FedEx to the superintendents of all 65 sampled districts. The package contained a letter from State Superintendent Jack O'Connell endorsing the evaluation and a letter from AIR. The documents described the goals and main features of the study and encouraged their participation. The AIR data collection team proceeded by following up with district superintendents or their

[19] The total count of 325 excludes the 16 case studies and 10 alternative, special education, and continuation schools.

designees through phone calls, fax messages, and emails. Nine districts required a formal application for conducting research with schools. For these districts (which tended to be larger, urban districts), we prepared and submitted applications that followed their guidelines.

After a number of weeks of seeking approvals, 7 districts refused to participate and 4 districts were not responsive to our contact efforts. With support from the CDE, we were able to obtain the approval from two of the districts that had originally declined. Among the districts that did not grant us permission to contact their schools, the reasons cited included new school administration, major changes at the school or district (such as restructuring under Program Improvement) and reluctance to overburden school or district staff. In total, 21 of the sampled schools (5 elementary, 8 middle and 6 high schools) were dropped from the study due to district-level refusals or non-response.

Of the 99 districts with HP Only schools, 65 were sampled and of these a total of 56 gave AIR permission to administer the school surveys.

### School survey recruitment

The 56 districts that agreed to support AIR's survey effort represented 141 of the sampled schools. Between January 29 and February 22, 2007, we mailed these schools a letter from State Superintendent Jack O'Connell, a description of the study, instructions to complete the survey, and a copy of the survey instrument. Following this mailing, the AIR data collection team made a strategic and concerted effort to contact (by phone, fax, and e-mail) the principals of the sampled schools to confirm the receipt of the survey, encourage their participation, and address any of their concerns or questions.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of the school level data collection was simply getting in direct contact with the principal. Another challenge was turnover; some of the principals were new to the school and were thus unfamiliar with the program and its implementation. As a result, our strategy shifted by attempting to communicate not only with the principal but with other administrators (such as the assistant principal), coordinators (such as the Title I coordinator), and, in some cases, teachers. We also attempted, to the extent possible, to leverage already developed district-school relationships. In some cases, our district contact offered to serve as a liaison between the AIR data collection team and the schools. In other cases, where possible, we recommended that our district contact the selected schools to remind them about the survey and encourage its completion. District support was an invaluable resource during our data collection effort.

Concerned with the limited number of high school responses, towards the end of our data collection period, we asked the CDE to provide additional support by contacting the remaining sampled high schools that had not returned the survey. With their support, we were able to secure participation from two other high schools. In total, 37 of the sample schools (20 elementary, 26 middle and 12 high schools) did not return the survey.

### School survey response rates

Exhibit 2.4 displays the overall school response rates to the survey along with the response rates by school type and urbanicity. The exhibit displays two response rates, response rate A is based on column A (the total number of HP Only schools sampled) and response rate B is based on

column B (the total number of surveys sent to schools). While response rate A reflects school attrition due to school non-response and district refusals, response rate B reflects school attrition due only to school non-response. Of the 141 schools that received a survey, we obtained an overall response rate of 75 percent. The response rate by school type is somewhat varied. In absolute terms, we received the least number of completed surveys from high schools (n = 28) compared with elementary (n = 44) and middle schools (n = 34). However, high schools had the highest response rate relative to the other two school types (85 vs. 76 and 68 percent for elementary and middle schools, respectively), due to the relatively smaller total number of HP Only high schools.

**Exhibit 2.4. School Survey Sample, Response Rate by School Type and Urbanicity**

| | Total Number of Eligible HP Only Schools <1> | Total Number of HP Only Schools in Sample | Total Number of HP Only Schools with District Approval | Total Number of HP Only Schools that Responded | Response Rate A | Response Rate B |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | A | B | C | C/A | C/B |
| **Overall** | **325** | **162** | **141** | **106** | **65%** | **75%** |
| **By School Type** | | | | | | |
| Elementary | 223 | 63 | 58 | 44 | 70% | 76% |
| Middle | 62 | 60 | 50 | 34 | 57% | 68% |
| High | 40 | 39 | 33 | 28 | 72% | 85% |
| **By Urbanicity** | | | | | | |
| Urban | 199 | 88 | 82 | 63 | 72% | 77% |
| Suburban | 134 | 67 | 52 | 36 | 54% | 69% |
| Small Town or Rural | 16 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 100% | 100% |

<1> These counts do not include 16 case study schools and 10 schools that had an alternative, special education, or continuation school type.

As shown in Exhibit 2.5, the majority of the respondents to the school survey were principals.[20] Other respondents included assistant principals or other administrators (9.4 percent), coordinators or teachers on special assignment (7.5 percent), and former principals that currently serve as district administrators (1.9 percent).

**Exhibit 2.5. School Survey Respondents by Type**

| **Staff Position** | Count (N) | Percent (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Principal | 79 | 74.5% |
| Assistant Principal/ Administrator | 10 | 9.4% |
| Coordinator or Teacher on special assignment (e.g. Title I Coordinator) | 8 | 7.5% |
| District Administrator (Ex - Principal) | 2 | 1.9% |
| Other* | 5 | 4.7% |
| Missing | 2 | 1.9% |

*Other Includes: Executive Director/ Project Director/ Principal Designee/ Language Arts Coach

[20] Principal respondents reported, on average, 6.7 years at the surveyed school (in any capacity), and 4.5 years as being the principal of the surveyed school. On average, the principal respondents have been a principal for 11.1 years in total (at current and any other school).

While we obtained a high response rate (75 percent), we were concerned about selection bias stemming from possible systematic differences between schools that agreed to participate and those that declined (or districts declined on their behalf) that would affect the representativeness of the returned data. For example, it is possible that participating sites may be better organized, more successful, and positive about the program that non-study participants.

While we obtained a high response rate (75 percent), we were concerned about selection bias stemming from possible systematic differences between schools that agreed to participate and those that declined (or districts declined on their behalf) that would affect the representativeness of the returned data. For example, it is possible that participating sites may be better organized, more successful, and positive about the program that non-study participants.

To assess possible bias, we conducted two analyses. First, we compared schools returning the survey with the overall population from which they were sampled, across a variety of key characteristics. This allows us to test whether the returned survey data appear to be representative of the overall population of HP Only schools. To supplement this analysis, we also examined schools in our sample that submitted and did not submit the surveys. Please refer to Technical Appendix B for results of both analyses.

When comparing the participating schools to the overall population (analysis 1), we found no statistically significant differences within each school level in student demographic characteristics, such as percentage of English learners and students eligible for free and reduced price lunch. With respect to academic performance, elementary schools participating in the survey had a statistically significantly higher average 2006 API Base (653 points) in relation to that for the overall population of HP Only elementary schools (640).[21] On all other measured performance dimensions, including the percentage of schools in Program Improvement, there were no statistically significant differences.[22]

Among the original sample (analysis 2), there were no statistically significant differences between schools that submitted the survey and those that did not, in terms of student demographics and academic performance (2006 API Growth, 2005 API Base, 2005-06 API Growth, state rank, and similar school state rank). A statistically significantly greater percentage of participating middle schools were in Program Improvement (97 percent), in relation to non-participating middle schools (83 percent).[23] However, this difference did not appear to affect comparability between participating schools and the overall population of HP Only schools (as there were no statistical differences in the percentage of PI schools between participating schools and the overall population).

To supplement analysis 2, we obtained the number of years of principal experience at the school site for 31 of the 35 schools that received the survey but did not respond, as well as from the 98 schools that answered the survey question on principal experience. [24] Principals in schools that

[21] At the 5 percent confidence level.
[22] These dimensions included the 2006 API Growth, 2005 API Base, 2005-06 API Growth, state rank, and similar school state rank
[23] At the 10 percent confidence level.
[24] CBEDS does not collect this information. The latest HPSGP Annual Report (2005-06) was missing over a third of the HP Only schools and therefore was not analyzed for this purpose.

returned the survey had been at the site, on average, more than a year longer than principals at the non-responsive sites.[25] In addition, principals at the responding schools had a median of four years at the school sites as compared to two years for the non-respondents. Greater longevity of leadership at participating schools may have influenced some of the survey responses. As noted previously, 21 schools were dropped from the sample due to district-level refusals or non-response; stated reasons for declining included a new school administration and restructuring. However, without being able to analyze principal longevity for the population of all HP Only schools, we do not know if this would introduce bias.

In summary, there may be potential sources of bias in terms of a) participating elementary schools having higher performance than the overall population, b) longer principal tenure at schools returning the survey in relation to the non-responsive sites, and c) district declines on behalf of the schools to participate due to new staff or school restructuring. However, in each case, the likely direction of bias is unclear.

Exhibit 2.6 displays the total number of districts represented by the school survey sample, the number that agreed to allow schools to participate in the study and the number that participated in the district phone survey. It is important to note that we pursued district phone surveys even if we did not ultimately obtain surveys from the sampled schools in the district. Of the 65 districts that were sampled, we surveyed administrators from 45 of them (69 percent.) Realizing the need for additional context in one large urban district, we decided to pursue additional interviews with administrators in its local districts. Including these local district surveys, in total we conducted 49 district-level surveys. Across district types response rates were similar; however, with regards to total district enrollment we obtained a relatively higher response rate from larger districts – those with enrollments between 10,000 and 30,000 and those with more than 30,000 students had response rates of 70 and 83 percent, respectively. Moderately sized districts – districts whose enrollment range from 1,000 to 10,000 and small districts with less than 1,000 students, had response rates of 61 and 50 percent, respectively.

**Exhibit 2.6. District Survey Sample, Response Rate by District Type and District Enrollment**

| | N of Districts with HP Only Schools (Pool of Eligible Districts) | N of Districts in Sample | N of Districts approving participation | N of Districts that participated in phone survey | Response Rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | A | B | C | C/A |
| **Overall** | **99** | **65** | **56** | **45*** | **69%** |
| **By District Type:** | | | | | |
| Elementary | 31 | 18 | 16 | 11 | 61% |
| High | 9 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 67% |
| Unified | 59 | 41 | 35 | 30 | 73% |
| **By District Enrollment:** | | | | | |
| greater than 30,000 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 15 | 83% |
| between 10,000 and 30,000 | 30 | 23 | 18 | 16 | 70% |
| between 1,000 and 10,000 | 41 | 18 | 15 | 11 | 61% |
| less than 1,000 | 10 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 50% |

*This number does not include 4 local districts interviewed in a large district.

[25] An average 4.5 years at participating sites in comparison to 3.2 years at the non-participating sites. This difference was statistically significant at the 10 percent confidence level.

Relative to school survey respondents, district respondents were more diverse in terms of their roles and responsibilities. As Exhibit 2.7 shows, 14 percent of the district respondents were superintendents; 22 percent were either assistant, associate, or deputy superintendents; 37 percent were department directors, and 27 were coordinators.

**Exhibit 2.7. District Survey Respondents by Type**

| Staff Position | Count (N) | Percent (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Superintendent | 7 | 14% |
| Assistant, Associate or Deputy Superintendent | 11 | 22% |
| Department Director* | 18 | 37% |
| Coordinator/ Administrator** | 13 | 27% |

*Examples Include: Directors of Curriculum and Instruction, State and Federal Programs
**Examples Include: Coordinators of Accountability, Grants, Compliance, Categorical Programs

### School and District Survey Protocols

The development of the school survey protocol was informed primarily by the findings of the Year 1 case studies and was designed to measure perceptions of district support, school capacity and the implementation and impact of HPSGP and its primary components. The survey was organized around several themes: the overall context of the district, school capacity, staffing and administration, level of understanding of the HPSGP, HPSGP funding and use of resources, HPSGP external provider, district support under the HPSGP, observations of change, sustainability of reform and program assessment. Individual questions under each theme were refined pursuant to feedback from the CDE and a series of pilots that were conducted with principals from HP Only schools not in our sample. All of the survey questions were closed-ended with the exception of five open-ended questions in the survey's narrative section. The purpose of these open-ended questions was to create an opportunity to obtain responses that would help contextualize respondents' answers as well as capture themes that may not have been specifically asked about in the closed ended questions. The final school survey protocol is in Technical Appendix E.

The district survey, while similar in length and scope to the school survey, was administered differently, and included a set of topics aligned with the roles and responsibilities of the district. The survey was organized around several categories: administrator background, district context, impact of the HPSGP, HPSGP external provider, district challenges, sustainability and conclusions. Some of the topics exclusively explored in the district survey, were the roles played by the school board and county office of education, policies to allocate staff and quality of staff in HP Only schools. Where possible, we tried to use the same items as in the school survey, in order to triangulate responses between school and district respondents. Given that we spoke directly with district respondents, the survey built in opportunities for interviewers to ask follow up questions.

### Survey Analysis

School survey data submitted electronically through the survey website were automatically stored in a downloadable database. Data from school surveys that were returned to us by mail were manually entered into the database. Once all of the survey information was compiled, we

examined the percentage of respondents by response option for each question (see Technical Appendix F). Given that our sample design stratified by school type, where appropriate, we tested for significant differences among elementary, middle, and high schools. As opposed to our case study sample which was selected with school performance in mind, our survey sample did not consider student outcomes as a primary stratifier. Nevertheless, we were still interested in exploring associations between the survey data and indicators of progress. To do so, we developed two metrics based on an estimate of average school performance using student-level CST scores in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math (controlling for student- and school-level characteristics; see Appendix C-3 for detail) and the API similar schools rank. Our first metric, defined high and low performers only using the CST measure. Our second metric was more restrictive and used both the CST performance measure and the similar schools rank. Although we tested for differences in survey results among high and low performers using both metrics, we did not find any revealing or consistent patterns.

For each of the five open-ended survey questions, we developed an analysis framework by first creating a set of discrete categories which captured the most prevalent themes from the data. We then coded the incidence of these categories in each response. Synthesizing the data in this way allowed us to identify patterns and quantify those patterns across the surveyed schools. A similar framework was used for the open-ended district questions. We used the student achievement analysis results and prior research in the field of school accountability to inform our analyses.

The following chapters present the results of the quantitative and qualitative data analyses.

# Chapter 3: Impact of Program Participation on Student Achievement

## Introduction

A major research question for this study and of significant policy interest is whether the HPSGP had an impact on student performance in participating schools. In this chapter, we examine statewide and school-level achievement trends associated with the implementation of the HPSGP. Given the program differences among HPSGP schools in addition to the fact that the program targeted the lowest performing schools, we first describe the selection of HPSGP and relevant comparison schools used for these analyses.[26] We provide descriptive school-level performance trends of these schools according to state and federal accountability measures of performance. Using statewide student-level data and statistically controlling for key differences among the HPSGP and comparison schools, we explore the impact of the program on student achievement. These statewide results are complemented by analyses of a longitudinal dataset of a large school district in the state which, unlike state data, allows us to link the performance of individual students over time.

**Key Finding**

- **On average, HP Only plus planning schools showed gains in student performance during the period of program implementation.**
- **However - when statistically controlling for student and school characteristics - the differences in student performance between HP Only plus planning and comparison schools across a variety of comparative analyses were negligible.**

## Steps Preliminary to the Analysis

There were three important activities undertaken prior to analyzing the effect of participating in the HPSGP on student achievement are described below. First, given dual participation in other state programs, we identified a sub-group of HPSGP schools. Second, an appropriate comparison group of schools were selected against which HPSGP school student performance can be compared and contrasted. As described below, this activity was not as straightforward as might be expected. Last, we generated descriptive profiles of these two groups of schools to show how they appear in regard to student composition and student performance.

[26] 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.

## *Selecting the Subgroup of HPSGP Schools*

Given the variation in the timing of the funding and participation in other programs, the achievement analyses are limited to schools that did not participate in the II/USP or CSR and received planning grant and the first round of implementation funds in the first year.

As described in Chapter 1, HPSGP includes a number of schools that also participated in II/USP and/or CSR. Even among the HPSGP schools that did not participate in II/USP or CSR, there are differences in the timing of the first year implementation funds, with some schools receiving a second round of funding later. In addition, because the planning year was optional and due to the different selection criteria for implementation funds,[27] not all of these schools received *both* planning and implementation funds. These achievement analyses focus on the effects of HPSGP in schools that were fully funded through the program (i.e., received a planning grant and first round of implementation funds[28]) and did not participate in II/USP and/or CSR. We refer to this subset as the "HP Only plus planning" schools.[29]

Restricting the achievement analysis to HPSGP schools that received planning and first round implementation funds, and did not participate in II/USP and/or CSR, was an evaluation decision based on input from the CDE and the study's Advisory Committee. The II/USP and CSR are no longer funded, and as future HPSGP funding will no longer be split between these three programs, the CDE and committee members believed that evaluation should focus on schools that did not also participate in II/USP and/or CSR. This group was further restricted to those that received a planning grant and first round of implementation funding.

Essentially, the desire was to estimate an HPSGP effect that was not distorted by any previous similar interventions that targeted low performing schools in California. Even though it would have been possible to account for the influence of these other programs in a regression framework, the approach of limiting the HPSGP group as described above simplifies this. The trade-off is that the conclusions of this evaluation regarding the effects of the HPSGP on student achievement can only be generalized to schools that received *both* planning and one-time first year implementation funds, and that did not participate in II/USP and/or CSR. In other words, the results do not answer the question of the impact of this program on HPSGP schools that had previously participated in II/USP and/or CSR.[30]

[27] HPSGP planning funds were allocated based on 2000 API Growth, and HPSGP implementation funds were allocated based on 2001 API Growth.

[28] By "first round of implementation funds," we refer to the schools that received the first round of implementation funds during the course of the first year of the program (2002-03). As described in Chapter 1, 98 schools were selected later and received the first year of implementation funds at the end of the 2002-03 school year and beginning of the 2003-04 school year.

[29] The Year 1 report for this evaluation referred to these schools as "Pure-Pure" schools. To make the label more intuitive, we call them "HP Only plus planning" in this report.

[30] Earlier in the evaluation, we conducted achievement analyses that included schools that were jointly funded by the HPSGP and II/USP or CSR. Although the analysis approach was refined over time, these earlier analyses including all HPSGP schools showed similar results to those in the current chapter.

### What are HP Only plus planning schools?

**For the purposes of this report, we grouped schools that received HPSGP implementation funds into three broad categories:**

- **Mixed Program Schools:** Schools that were jointly funded by HPSGP and II/USP or CSR. Among the 658 schools receiving HPSGP implementation funds, 307 (46.7%) were mixed program schools.
- **HP Only:** HPSGP schools that received implementation funds and did not participate in II/USP or CSR. Of the total schools receiving HPSGP implementation funds, 351 (53.3%) were HP Only.
- **HP Only plus planning:** These schools are a subset of the HP Only group. These HPSGP schools a) did not participate in II/USP or CSR, b) received a planning grant, and c) received the first round of implementation funds. All three of these criteria must be met. In addition, this group was limited to schools with elementary, middle/junior high, and high school type in CBEDS. Of the total HPSGP schools, 229 (34.8%) were HP Only plus planning.

**Please note that the above schools may be participating in other non-specified programs, such as the federal Program Improvement and Reading First.**

## *Selecting the Comparison Schools*

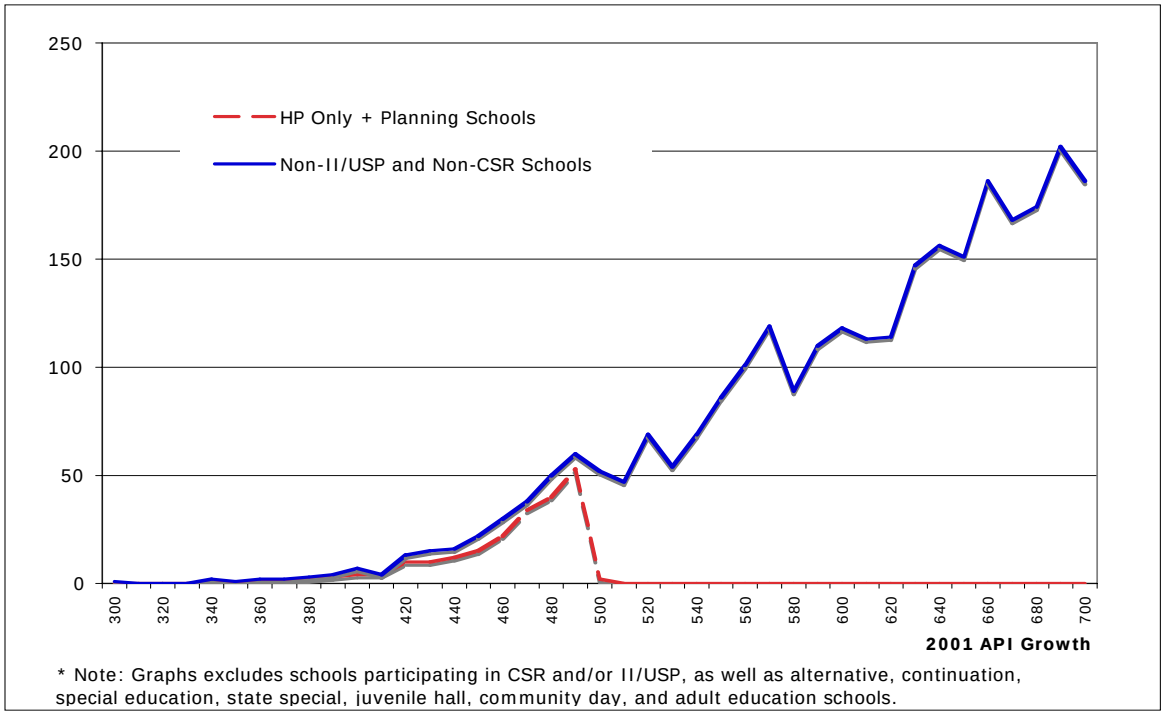
As HPSGP schools were purposely selected as the lowest performing in the state, a perfect comparison group of schools for these analyses does not exist. Consequent trade-offs were necessary regarding sample size and the need to keep comparison schools as similar to HPSGP schools as possible.

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 schools participating in the HPSGP 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 the HP Only plus planning schools had they not been in the program.

The ideal comparison group would exhibit the same characteristics as the HP Only plus planning schools with the only major difference being participation in the HPSGP. However, as the lowest performing schools in the state were targeted for this program, completely similar comparison schools do not exist. Exhibit 3.1 shows the overall 2001 API Growth[31] distribution of HP Only plus planning schools (the dotted line). It also shows the 2001 API Growth distribution of all schools in California that did not participate in any other similar state program, such as II/USP or CSR (the continuous line). As observed, HPSGP almost exclusively targeted the very lowest performing schools in the state, leaving only a small number of schools with similar 2001 academic performance for the comparison group.

[31] See Chapter 1 for definition of API Growth and API Base.

**Exhibit 3.1. 2001 API Growth Distribution of HP Only + Planning Schools and All Non-II/USP and Non-CSR California Schools**




* Note: Graphs excludes schools participating in CSR and/or II/USP, as well as alternative, continuation, special education, state special, juvenile hall, community day, and adult education schools.

Understanding the selection process used to assign schools to the program is crucial for determining appropriate comparison schools and to tease out possible effects of the HPSGP on student achievement. In the case of the HPSGP, the CDE invited all eligible schools to apply to the program as the first step of the selection process. In 2001, a total of 713 schools were invited to apply, out of which 646 submitted applications (see Exhibit 3.2). Implementation funds were then distributed to schools ranked from low to high according to their 2001 API Growth, until the funds were exhausted. Later in October 2003, as additional funds became available, a new round of schools (n = 113) was invited to apply to the program. All of these schools applied, and all but 19 received HPSGP implementation funds.

**Exhibit 3.2. The HPSGP Selection Process**
Note: Shows all schools that were invited, applied, and received HPSGP implementation funds

| | Originally Invited (2001) | | | Late Invited (2003) | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Invited to Apply | Applied | Invited But Did Not Apply | Invited to Apply | Applied | Invited But Did Not Apply | |
| Schools that received only HPSGP planning funds | 53 | 53 | | 0 | 0 | | |
| Schools that received only HPSGP implementation funds | 297 | 297 | | 30 | 30 | | |
| Schools that received planning & implementation funds | 243 | 243 | | 64 | 64 | | |
| **Sub-Total: Schools that received HPSGP implementation funds** | **540** | **540** | | **94** | **94** | | **634*** |
| Schools that were not selected to participate in the HPSGP | 120 | 53 | 67 | 19 | 19 | 0 | |
| **Total** | **713** | **646** | **67** | **113** | **113** | **0** | |

Source: Data provided by the California Department of Education.
* This total is lower than the 658 that appears in the earlier textbox as it excludes 24 schools funded through the CSR program.

As mentioned above, for those schools that were originally invited in 2001 and applied to the program, HPSGP implementation funds were allocated using the 2001 API Growth. 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-performing schools (according to their 2001 API Growth) 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.

In order to evaluate the impact of the HPSGP by school type, we require a large enough sample size of elementary, middle, and high schools. Ideally, this would include at least 30 schools in each of these school-level categories to provide enough statistical power to evaluate policy effects. 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 included 30 schools at each school level.

## *Descriptive Differences of HP Only plus Planning and Comparison Schools*

Because a perfect comparison group for these analyses does not exist, comparison schools differ from HP Only plus planning schools in regard to student demographics and a number of student performance measures.

### Differences in API Growth

Exhibit 3.3 presents the average 2001 API Growth of HP Only plus planning and comparison schools by school type. As can be observed, the HP Only plus planning schools are at the lower

end of the 2001 performance distribution. Their 2001 API Growth average is below those of the comparison groups for all three school types. This is especially noticeable for middle schools. 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 30 observations and which affects achievement comparability.

**Exhibit 3.3. Average 2001 API Growth of HP Only + Planning and Comparison Schools**

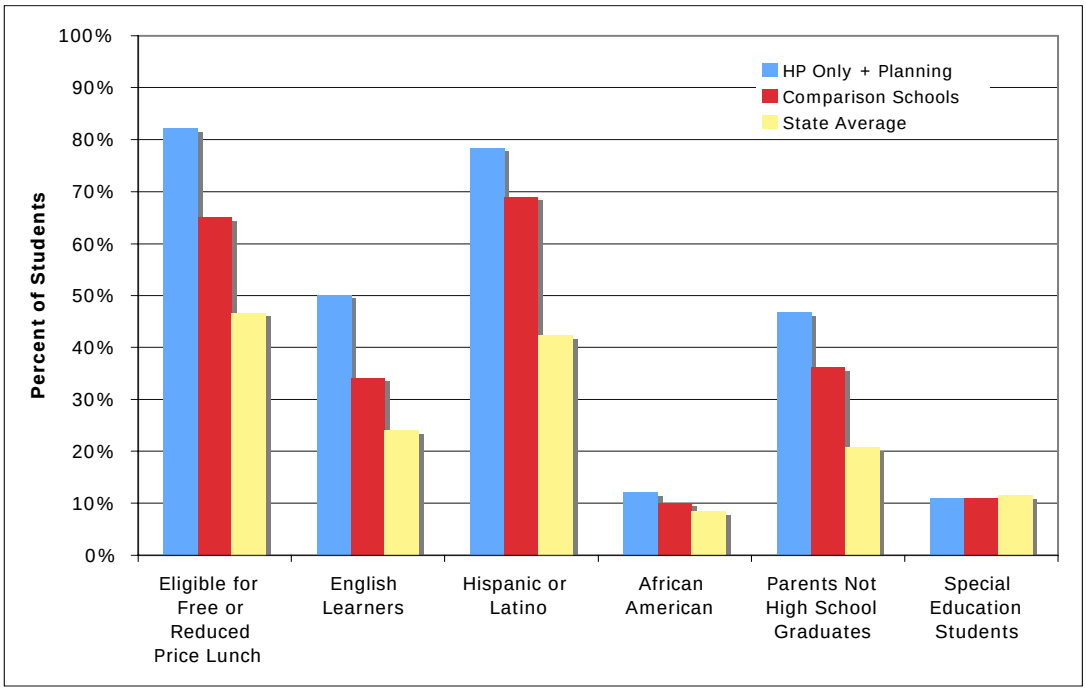
| CBEDS School Type | HP Only + Planning Schools | | Comparison Schools | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number of Schools | Average 2001 API Growth | Number of Schools | Average 2001 API Growth | Number of Schools | Average 2001 API Growth |
| Elementary Schools | 142 | 472.3 | 30 | 486.5 | **172** | **475.0** |
| Middle Schools | 48 | 460.0 | 30 | 526.4 | **78** | **485.5** |
| High Schools | 39 | 469.6 | 30 | 499.2 | **69** | **482.9** |
| **Total** | **229** | **469.0** | **90** | **504.1** | **319** | **479.5** |

NOTE: This table includes the subset of HPSGP schools that did not participate in any other state reform program, and received planning grants and first round of implementation funds. We refer to this subset as "HP Only + Planning" schools.

## Differences in Student Characteristics

Including higher-performing schools for the purpose of increasing the sample size of the comparison group has the unintended consequence of using schools with different demographic characteristics in relation to the HP Only plus planning schools. This is due to the fact that academic performance is highly correlated with socio-economic status (SES), ethnicity, and other demographic characteristics. Exhibit 3.4 shows that in 2001, HP Only plus planning schools had, on average, a higher percentage of students who are English learners, Hispanic, African-American, eligible for free or reduced price lunch, and with lower parental education. In 2006, these differences remained almost identical (see Technical Appendix C-2).

**Exhibit 3.4. Student Demographic Characteristics of HP Only + Planning, Comparison, and All Regular Public Schools in California, 2000-01**



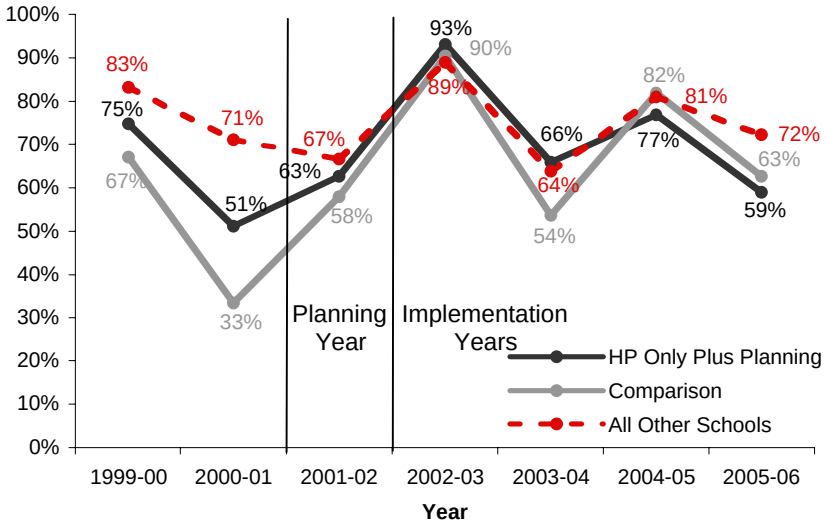

Source: 2001 API Growth database, enrollment weighted estimates. Enrollment weighted estimated indicate average student characteristics (as opposed to average school characteristics provided by unweighted estimates).

## Differences in Meeting API Growth Targets

Before looking for relationships between HPSGP participation and student academic achievement, this section provides purely descriptive data showing the school-level performance trends of HP Only plus planning, comparison, and all schools statewide.

In California's accountability system, the main school-level performance indicator is the API. Schools with a schoolwide API lower than 800 are given an annual growth target that is five percent of the difference between 800 and the school's current score. There are separate growth targets for numerically significant subgroups such as ethnic subgroups and socio-economically disadvantaged students. Exhibit 3.5 shows the percentage of HP Only plus planning and comparison schools that met their schoolwide growth targets from 1999-2000 through 2005-06.

**Exhibit 3.5 Percentage of HP Only + Planning and Comparison Schools Meeting Schoolwide API Growth Targets, 1999-2000 to 2005-06**




The exhibit shows that a higher proportion of HP Only plus planning 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, 63 percent of the HPSGP schools reached their schoolwide growth targets compared to 58 percent of the comparison schools. Only during the last two school years analyzed did a higher proportion of comparison schools meet the schoolwide API growth target.[32]

However, these results cannot be interpreted as evidence of the HPSGP's success for several reasons. First, greater percentages of HP Only plus planning 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.[33] For these reasons, this type of analysis should only be considered descriptive.

[32] It is interesting to note that the school year 2002-03 was particularly successful in terms of schools meeting their schoolwide API targets. That year, the Norm Reference Test (NRT) was changed from the SAT-9 to the CAT/6.
[33] 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.

## Differences in Statewide Decile Ranks

Another analysis using school-level API measures is the movement of HPSGP and comparison schools across state ranks over the years.[34] As shown in Exhibit 3.6, 95 percent of HP Only plus planning schools were in the lowest decile in the 2000-01 school year. On the other hand, only about half of the comparison schools were in the lowest decile that year. Neither group had any schools above decile 2 in the school year 2000-01. Over time, some schools in both groups have moved out of the lowest state rank deciles. In fact, one HPSGP school reached the state decile rank 9 in 2005-06.[35]

**Exhibit 3.6. API Statewide Decile Ranks for HP Only + Planning and Comparison Schools, 1999-2000 to 2005-06**

| YEAR | Decile 1 | Decile 2 | Decile 3 | Decile 4 | Decile 5 | Decile 6 | Decile 7 | Decile 8 | Decile 9 | Decile 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **HP Only + Planning (N = 229)** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1999-00 | 74% | 11% | 0.4% | | | | | | | |
| 2000-01 | 95% | 3% | | | | | | | | |
| 2001-02 | 78% | 18% | 0.4% | | | | | | | |
| 2002-03 | 67% | 24% | 6% | 0.4% | | | | | | |
| 2003-04 | 56% | 32% | 9% | 1% | 0.4% | | | | | |
| 2004-05 | 53% | 31% | 10% | 3% | 1% | 0.4% | 0.4% | | | |
| 2005-06 | 49% | 31% | 11% | 5% | 2% | | 0.4% | | 0.4% | |
| **Comparison Schools (N = 90)** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1999-00 | 12% | 47% | 19% | 1% | | | | | | |
| 2000-01 | 41% | 58% | | | | | | | | |
| 2001-02 | 32% | 43% | 18% | 3% | | | | | | |
| 2002-03 | 29% | 38% | 17% | 4% | 2% | | | | | |
| 2003-04 | 32% | 33% | 18% | 8% | 1% | 1% | | | | |
| 2004-05 | 31% | 32% | 20% | 8% | 1% | 1% | 1% | | | |
| 2005-06 | 28% | 29% | 19% | 14% | 1% | 1% | | | | |

Note: Schools participating in the Alternative School Accountability Model (ASAM) or with missing state rank are not included.

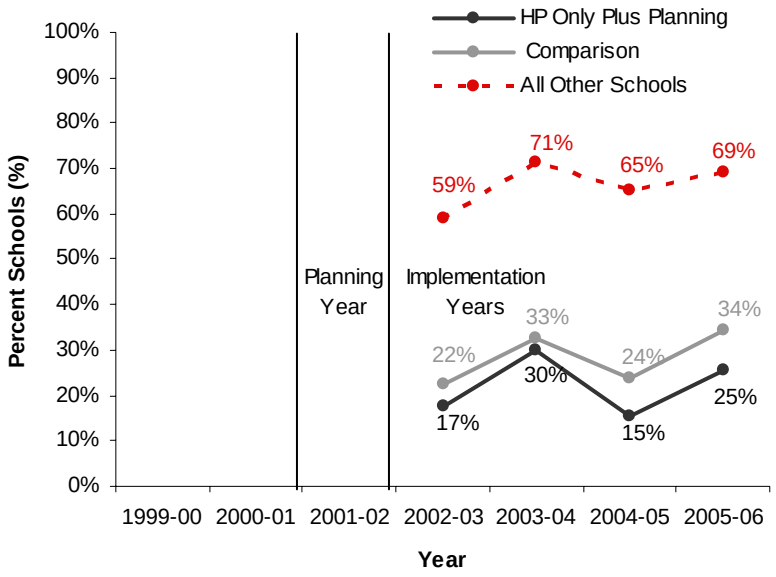
## Differences in Meeting Annual AYP Targets

In addition to the state accountability system, schools in California also have to comply with the federal NCLB requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Exhibit 3.7 shows the percent of HP Only plus planning and comparison schools that have been able to meet AYP. As observed, a consistently lower percentage of HP Only plus planning schools met the AYP targets across all years in relation to the comparison group. This is somewhat contrary to the API results, in which HP Only plus planning schools outperformed the comparison schools before 2004-05 (see Exibit 3.5). It is relatively easier for lower performing schools (in this case, the HP Only plus planning schools) to show progress on the API, given that it is based on growth, as opposed to the AYP, which is based on performance levels. Furthermore, the percentage of schools meeting all AYP targets has increased more in the comparison than the HP Only plus planning schools. Between 2002-03 and 2005-06, this figure has increased by nearly 12 percent in the comparison group, notably larger than the 7 percent of HP Only plus planning schools.

[34] 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.

[35] Even though these schools have made considerable progress over these years in terms of academic performance, only one school reached the 800 points threshold on its API Base between 2001 and 2006. This was an HPSGP school that reached decile 9 in 2006, with an API Base of 856.

**Exhibit 3.7. Percentage of HP Only + Planning and Comparison Schools Meeting All AYP Targets, 2002-03 to 2005-06**




## Differences in Percentage of Students Proficient or Above in ELA and Math

To supplement these school-level analyses, we also examined trends in the percentage of students ranked as proficient or advanced in the CST English language arts (ELA) and math tests (see Exhibits 3.8 and 3.9, respectively).[36] HP Only plus planning schools, on average, showed gains in the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the CST. The percentage increased from 9 percent to 24 percent in English language arts and from 12 percent to 29 percent in math from 2001-02 to 2005-06. The averages for comparison schools and all other schools showed similar trajectories.

With respect to differences between the school groups, HP Only plus planning schools had a consistently lower percentage of students performing at proficient or advanced in relation to comparison schools. On the other hand, although the percentages for math are remarkably similar over time, during the last year HP Only plus planning schools have been able to improve in terms of this performance measure more than comparison schools.

[36] Please see Technical Appendix C-5 for these results for student subgroups.

**Exhibit 3.8. Percentage of Students in HP Only + Planning and Comparison Schools Classified as Proficient or Advanced in CST ELA, 2001-02 to 2005-06**

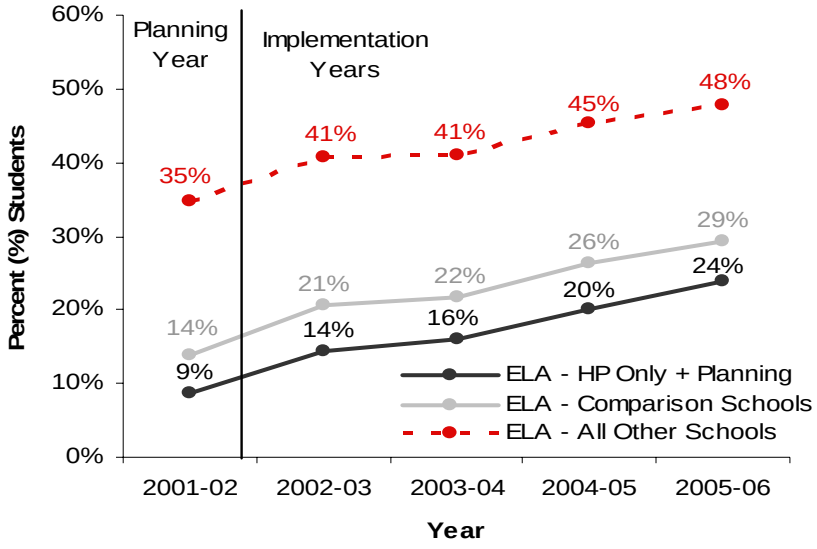
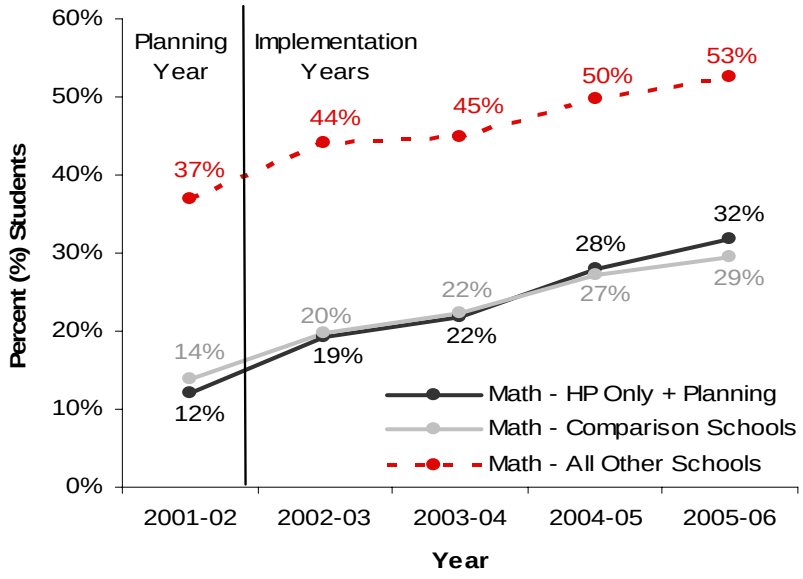



**Exhibit 3.9. Percentage of Students in HP Only + Planning and Comparison Schools Classified as Proficient or Advanced in CST Math, 2001-02 to 2005-06**




Even though these descriptive figures provide important school-level information about the progress of the HP Only plus planning and comparison schools on state and federal accountability measures, they cannot be used to deduce the impact of the HPSGP on student

achievement, as they do not control for differences in student- and school-level characteristics that may also influence academic achievement.[37]

# Analysis of the Impact of Program Participation

No substantial differences in student performance between HP Only plus planning and comparison schools were found.

Improving student achievement is central to the purpose of the HPSGP and to this evaluation. In attempting to measure 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 HP Only plus planning and the comparison schools.

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 1997-98 through 2005-06. 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 state data allow us to statistically control for student-level demographic characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, and eligibility for free or reduced price lunch, but do not contain the information needed to link individual student performance over time.

We used regression analyses to statistically control for differences in student- and school-level background characteristics across the HP Only plus planning 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 C-3 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 1997-98 through 2005-06, we used multiple measures to evaluate progress in academic achievement over this time period. The two types of statewide tests included in STAR during this 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 1997-98 through 2001-02, and the CAT/6 from 2002-03 through 2003-04 for all grades 2 through 11. However, starting in 2004-05, this test was only implemented in grades 3 and 7. Therefore, we were not

[37] 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.

able to include CAT/6 data beyond 2003-04 given that the grades do not align. The standards-based CST is available for grades 2 through 11 from 2001-02 through 2005-06.

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 standardized, the resulting scores indicate how far away (in standard deviations)[38] 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 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.

### *Results from the Statewide Analysis*

The analysis presented in this section is designed to capture the effect of participation in a fully implemented HPSGP[39] by comparing average test scores of HP Only plus planning and comparison schools when student- and school-level characteristics are held statistically constant. This statewide analysis section first presents findings across all students, and then findings by individual sub-groups of students. Because the purpose is to focus on achievement trajectories,[40] the model incorporates a time dimension. For a detailed discussion of the equations used, please refer to Technical Appendix C-4.

In these regressions, we analyze whether students in HP Only plus planning schools were able to improve their academic achievement over time at higher rates than those in comparison schools. Our variables of interest are the interaction terms of time and HPSGP. These interactions pick up differences in the growth rates of student academic achievement between HP Only plus planning and comparison schools.

The numbers presented in the following tables represent the HLM regression coefficients of these interaction terms of time and participation in HPSGP. Given that the outcome variable is in standard deviations, they indicate the difference in the academic growth rate of students in the HP Only plus planning versus comparison schools in terms of standard deviations in the NRT and CST.

[38] 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.

[39] By "fully implemented," we mean schools that received HPSGP planning grants and the first round of implementation funds.

[40] As mentioned above, these trajectories indicate how far students in HP Only plus planning and comparison schools are from the state average in a specific subject.

### Is "statistically significant" the same as "educationally significant"?

To help assist readers in interpreting the results in the following sections, we refer to educational literature that considers effect sizes smaller than 0.25 standard deviations as "educationally non-significant."

Cohen (1969) 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." This gives us an important reference point in distinguishing between "statistical significance" and "educational significance." In other words, while two results may be considered different in a statistical sense, the magnitude of the difference may be so small that it is considered as largely irrelevant from a policy perspective.

The following exhibits refer to the 2005-06 school year as the fourth year of implementation, which was based on the schools' performance during the first three years of the program. While most of the HP Only plus planning schools were provided a fourth year of funding, 33 of these schools were subject to SAIT in 2005-06 and therefore were no longer part of the program. However, given the long HPSGP involvement of these schools we kept them in the HP Only plus planning group in 2005-06.

## Overall Statewide Results

Exhibit 3.10 presents the estimated effect of program participation on annual growth rates of academic achievement in HP Only plus planning elementary schools.[41] All three NRT subjects (reading, math, and language arts) show higher achievement improvement in elementary HPSGP schools in the year before the implementation of the program (i.e., in 2000-01). While we only observe a statistically significant (but negative) HPSGP effect during the planning year in language, the NRT scores indicate a very small positive HPSGP implementation effect across all three subjects during the first implementation year. During the second implementation year, HP Only plus planning schools again outperformed comparison schools in reading and math. Unfortunately, there are no NRT scores available for all grades after 2004, so we supplemented this analysis with an evaluation of the CST performance trends.

[41] Technical Appendix C-5 presents the complete statewide HLM regression results.

**Exhibit 3.10. HLM Regression Results for HP Only + Planning and Comparison Elementary Schools**

| Year | NRT Reading | NRT Math | NRT Language | CST ELA | CST Math |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year 1998-99 | *-0.005* | 0.01 | *-0.02* | | |
| Year 1999-00 | 0.02 | *-0.02* | **0.03**** | | |
| Year 2000-01 | **0.07***** | **0.04***** | **0.07***** | | |
| Year 2001-02 (Planning) | 0.004 | *-0.003* | ***-0.03**** | | |
| Year 2002-03 (Implementation 1) | **0.05***** | **0.03***** | **0.06***** | **0.04***** | **0.06***** |
| Year 2003-04 (Implementation 2) | **0.03**** | **0.04***** | 0.02 | **0.02*** | **0.04***** |
| Year 2004-05 (Implementation 3) | | | | ***-0.05***** | ***-0.06***** |
| Year 2005-06 (Implementation 4) | | | | ***-0.03**** | ***-0.03**** |

Note: These coefficients indicate the effect of the HPSGP on student achievement in standard deviations. Shaded cells indicate that tests were not administered in all grades those years.
* indicates statistical significance at 10%, ** at 5%, and *** at 1%.

The results of the CST regressions point in the same direction as those of the NRT in the first two implementation years. However, HP Only plus planning elementary schools experience a slower growth rate of academic performance in relation to comparison schools in the third and fourth years of implementation, which raises questions about the sustainability of the previously observed positive program effect.

Perhaps the most important observation to take away from this exhibit is that while many of these results are statistically significant, they are so small that we must be careful not to associate too much meaning to the distinctions between the positive and negative relationships observed above.

Exhibit 3.11 presents the HLM results for middle schools, which indicate that HP Only plus planning schools fared less well than comparison schools in improving student academic performance during the planning year, followed by a generally positive program effect during the first two implementation years. Middle school CST scores are consistent with NRT scores during the two years they overlap, but then fall off to more mixed results during the third and fourth implementation years. As with the elementary school findings, however, the effect sizes are so small that it is not clear that any of the differences seen above (negative or positive) are very important from the perspective of meaningful educational growth.

### Exhibit 3.11. HLM Regression Results for HP Only + Planning and Comparison Middle Schools

| Year | NRT Reading | NRT Math | NRT Language | CST ELA | CST Math |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year 1998-99 | *-0.04*** | *-0.06*** | *-0.05*** | | |
| Year 1999-00 | *-0.005* | *-0.008* | 0.004 | | |
| Year 2000-01 | 0.009 | *-0.003* | 0.008 | | |
| Year 2001-02 (Planning) | *-0.04*** | *-0.02*** | *-0.02*** | | |
| Year 2002-03 (Implementation 1) | **0.05*** ** | **0.01*** | **0.02*** ** | **0.04*** ** | **0.01*** |
| Year 2003-04 (Implementation 2) | **0.06*** ** | 0.006 | **0.05*** ** | **0.01*** | 0.00007 |
| Year 2004-05 (Implementation 3) | | | | 0.0006 | **0.01*** |
| Year 2005-06 (Implementation 4) | | | | *-0.02*** | *-0.01* |

Note: These coefficients indicate the effect of the HPSGP on student achievement in standard deviations. Shaded cells indicate that tests were not administered in all grades those years.
* indicates statistical significance at 10%, ** at 5%, and *** at 1%.

The HLM results for high schools, as shown in Exhibit 3.12, show similarities with the prior two sets of results. What sets high schools apart, however, is that comparison schools outperformed HP Only plus planning schools during the second implementation year. There is no consistent positive trend over time in HPSGP high schools, and the data show an alternating pattern of positive and negative effects from year to year. Again, the effect sizes are very small, and one should not place too much importance on yearly swings. Given the size of the effects and the observed alternating pattern, the soundest interpretation may be an overall pattern of no effect, with some slight variations.

### Exhibit 3.12. HLM Regression Results for HP Only + Planning and Comparison High Schools

| Year | NRT Reading | NRT Math | NRT Language | CST ELA | CST Math |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year 1998-99 | **0.02*** ** | *-0.01** | *-0.004* | | |
| Year 1999-00 | **0.01*** | **0.02** ** | **0.02*** ** | | |
| Year 2000-01 | 0.007 | 0.008 | **0.02*** ** | | |
| Year 2001-02 (Planning) | *-0.03*** | *-0.02*** | *-0.04*** | | |
| Year 2002-03 (Implementation 1) | **0.07*** ** | 0.01 | **0.08*** ** | **0.03*** ** | **0.02*** ** |
| Year 2003-04 (Implementation 2) | *-0.04*** | *-0.02*** | *-0.05*** | *-0.02*** | *-0.01** |
| Year 2004-05 (Implementation 3 | | | | **0.02** ** | **0.02*** ** |
| Year 2005-06 (Implementation 4) | | | | *-0.04*** | *-0.04*** |

Note: These coefficients indicate the effect of the HPSGP on student achievement in standard deviations. Shaded cells indicate that tests were not administered in all grades those years.
* indicates statistical significance at 10%, ** at 5%, and *** at 1%.

As shown in Exhibit 3.13, with these annual differences between HP Only plus planning and comparison schools, we can estimate the cumulative impact of the HPSGP by summing the statistically significant differences across all implementation years by CST subject test. For example, for elementary schools, this reveals an overall HPSGP effect of -0.02 and 0.01 standard deviations annually in ELA and math, respectively. In other words, HPSGP elementary schools

have improved less in English language arts over time than comparison schools after the introduction of the HPSGP¸ and in math the reverse is the case. In the case of middle schools, the estimated total effects are equal to 0.03 and 0.02 standard deviations in ELA and math, respectively. Finally, HPSGP high schools were outperformed in both subjects by comparison schools after the implementation of the program (by 0.01 standard deviations).[42]

**Exhibit 3.13. Cumulative Impact of the HPSGP in HP Only + Planning Schools**

| | CST ELA | CST Math |
|---|---|---|
| Statewide Elementary HP Only + Planning | -0.02 | 0.01 |
| Statewide Middle HP Only + Planning | 0.03 | 0.02 |
| Statewide High HP Only + Planning | -0.01 | -0.01 |

Note: These figures are estimated summing all the statistically significant coefficients of Exhibits 3.10, 3.11, and 3.12.

As noted above, these effect sizes are arguably too small to translate into meaningful differences in terms of educational benefit between HP Only plus planning and comparison schools. Given the very small size of these differences, these data seem to show that HP Only plus planning and comparison schools performed virtually the same over the period of HPGSP implementation when controlling for student demographic characteristics. It is important not to over-emphasize statistical significance whenever effect sizes are close to zero. This is especially relevant given the large sample size at our disposal for this evaluation. The larger the sample, the higher the power to reject any null hypothesis, and therefore it is easier to find statistically significant differences.

## Statewide Student Sub-Group Results

Despite the general conclusion of no meaningful difference between HP Only plus planning and comparison schools above, it is possible that the program had more substantial effects for certain subpopulation of students. Analyzing test score trajectories for all students in HP Only plus planning and comparison schools may mask differences across important sub-populations of students. Therefore, in this section we analyze the impact of the HPSGP on students who are English learners, Hispanic, African-American, Asian, in special education, or eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The analyses by subpopulations focus only on the CST results in order to cover the whole implementation period of the HPSGP.

Exhibit 3.14 presents these results. Some general patterns are observed in the elementary and middle schools, where statistically significant differences tend to be positive in the first two years of the program (2002-03 and 2003-04), and negative thereafter. In other words, certain types of students in HP Only plus planning schools tend to outperform comparison schools during the first two years of the program and then fall behind the comparison group in the later years.

[42] The following is an example of what an annual difference of 0.01 standard deviations means in more concrete terms. Second graders in elementary HP Only plus planning and comparison schools had an average scale score of 334.5 with a standard deviation of 82.6 points on the CST in 2006 (CST math scale scores). A difference of a 0.01 standard deviation means, on average, that second grade students in HP Only plus planning elementary schools had scale scores that were about 0.8 points (82.6 * 0.01) higher than those enrolled at comparison sites.

Note that this general pattern is not a rule. An exception to this are English learners in HP Only plus planning elementary schools, who demonstrated higher rates of achievement than those in the comparison group by 0.07 and 0.10 standard deviations in ELA and math, respectively, in the fourth year of the program (2005-06). Similarly, African-American students in HPSGP elementary schools and special education students in HPSGP middle schools demonstrated larger achievement gains than their peers in comparison schools in the last year of the program.

**Exhibit 3.14. HLM Regression Results of the HPSGP Effect on Certain Student Groups in HP Only + Planning Schools**

| Student Group | Year | Elementary | | Middle | | High | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | CST ELA | CST Math | CST ELA | CST Math | CST ELA | CST Math |
| English Learners | Year 2002-03 | 0.02 | **0.04*** ** | **0.06*** ** | **0.04*** ** | **0.08*** ** | **0.02*** |
| | Year 2003-04 | *-0.002* | 0.01 | **0.03*** ** | 0.003 | ***-0.04*** ** | ***-0.03*** * |
| | Year 2004-05 | ***-0.06*** ** | ***-0.06*** ** | ***-0.05*** ** | ***-0.02*** * | 0.0001 | *-0.0009* |
| | Year 2005-06 | **0.07** ** | **0.10*** ** | *-0.01* | ***-0.02*** * | ***-0.06*** ** | ***-0.04*** ** |
| Low Socio-Economic Status Students[1] | Year 2002-03 | **0.03*** ** | **0.06*** ** | **0.03*** ** | 0.01 | **0.04*** ** | **0.03*** ** |
| | Year 2003-04 | 0.02 | **0.04*** ** | 0.01 | 0.0003 | ***-0.04*** ** | ***-0.04*** ** |
| | Year 2004-05 | ***-0.06*** ** | ***-0.07*** ** | *-0.007* | 0.006 | **0.02** * | **0.02*** ** |
| | Year 2005-06 | ***-0.03*** * | *-0.02* | ***-0.02*** * | *-0.01* | ***-0.03*** ** | ***-0.02*** * |
| Hispanic Students | Year 2002-03 | **0.04*** ** | **0.07*** ** | **0.04*** ** | **0.01*** | **0.03*** ** | **0.02*** * |
| | Year 2003-04 | 0.009 | **0.03*** | 0.01 | *-0.001* | ***-0.02*** ** | ***-0.02*** ** |
| | Year 2004-05 | ***-0.05*** ** | ***-0.05*** ** | *-0.01* | 0.008 | **0.02** * | **0.02*** ** |
| | Year 2005-06 | ***-0.04*** ** | ***-0.05*** ** | ***-0.01*** * | *-0.004* | ***-0.04*** ** | ***-0.03*** ** |
| African-American Students | Year 2002-03 | 0.05 | 0.002 | 0.006 | *-0.02* | 0.0008 | 0.04 |
| | Year 2003-04 | 0.04 | 0.06 | 0.03 | **0.05*** ** | ***-0.06*** ** | *-0.002* |
| | Year 2004-05 | ***-0.09*** * | ***-0.16*** ** | 0.04 | *-0.004* | 0.03 | 0.03 |
| | Year 2005-06 | **0.12*** ** | **0.19*** ** | *-0.02* | *-0.01* | ***-0.05*** * | ***-0.08*** ** |
| Asian Students | Year 2002-03 | *-0.09* | *-0.05* | 0.03 | *-0.01* | 0.02 | *-0.04* |
| | Year 2003-04 | **0.25** * | **0.28** * | *-0.006* | *-0.01* | **0.08** * | 0.02 |
| | Year 2004-05 | 0.12 | *-0.02* | *-0.002* | *-0.003* | 0.03 | *-0.03* |
| | Year 2005-06 | -0.05 | 0.05 | ***-0.20*** ** | ***-0.13*** ** | ***-0.16*** ** | *-0.03* |
| Special Education Students | Year 2002-03 | 0.003 | *-0.002* | *-0.02* | *-0.03* | 0.007 | 0.01 |
| | Year 2003-04 | 0.01 | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.0006 | *-0.02* | 0.02 |
| | Year 2004-05 | ***-0.10*** * | ***-0.11*** ** | ***-0.07*** ** | ***-0.04*** * | **0.11*** ** | **0.11*** ** |
| | Year 2005-06 | 0.01 | 0.03 | **0.07*** ** | **0.06*** ** | ***-0.08*** ** | ***-0.09*** ** |

Note: These coefficients indicate the effect of the HPSGP on student achievement in standard deviations.
[1] As measured by student's eligibility for free or reduced price lunch.
* indicates statistical significance at 10%, ** at 5%, and *** at 1%.

Exhibit 3.15 shows the cumulative program effect, summing all statistically significant differences in performance gains for student sub-groups between HP Only plus planning and comparison schools over the implementation years as was done for the earlier schoolwide analyses. Some of the sub-groups present the same program effects as the overall school-level

analyses with very small effect sizes (both positive and negative). Asian students show the largest effect sizes, but this tends to be for only one out the four years of implementation and positive for elementary students and negative for Asian students in middle and high school.

**Exhibit 3.15. Cumulative Impact of the HPSGP on Certain Student Groups in HP Only + Planning Schools**

| | Elementary | | Middle | | High | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | CST ELA | CST Math | CST ELA | CST Math | CST ELA | CST Math |
| English Learners | 0.01 | 0.08 | 0.04 | 0.00 | -0.02 | -0.05 |
| Low Socio-Economic Status Students* | -0.06 | 0.03 | 0.01 | 0.00 | -0.01 | -0.01 |
| Hispanic Students | -0.05 | 0.00 | 0.03 | 0.01 | -0.01 | -0.01 |
| African-American Students | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.00 | 0.05 | -0.11 | -0.08 |
| Asian Students | 0.25 | 0.28 | -0.20 | -0.13 | -0.08 | 0.00 |
| Special Education Students | -0.10 | -0.11 | 0.00 | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.02 |

* As measured by student's eligibility for free and reduced price lunch.
Note: These figures are estimated summing all the statistically significant coefficients of Exhibit 3.14.

In summary, while it is possible that the overall finding of no meaningful program effect found in the aggregate statewide analyses masks possible effects on important subpopulations of students, the results above show this not to be the case. Similar to the general pattern observed for all students, the sub-group analyses largely show fluctuations across grade levels and subjects between a slightly positive and a slightly negative HPSGP effect. The most defensible conclusion across these state-level sub-population analyses is no meaningful program effect, either positive or negative.

### *Results of Student-Level Longitudinal Analysis of Data from a Large Urban School District*

The statewide achievement analyses presented in the previous sections of this chapter analyzed academic performance of HP Only plus planning and comparison schools over time, based on their student population in a given year. Given that no unique student identifiers are available in the student-level STAR datasets, it is not possible to match individual students across years and track their achievement over time. Therefore, statewide analyses rely on longitudinal trends at the school-level to make inferences about the effects of the HPSGP.

While the results of statewide analyses must clearly dominate this evaluation of the HPSGP, the fact that these statewide data do not feature student data with identifying information to allow the performance of individual students to be tracked over time poses some important data limitations. For example, student mobility can be important and is likely to occur more in low performing schools than in others. When tracking the performance of individual schools over time, as we are doing in the statewide analysis above, there is no way to know the extent to which we are tracking the impact of the HPSGP on students who have been present during the full four years of program implementation at the school as opposed to a constantly changing student population who would have much less opportunity to be affected by the HPSGP. To the extent that student mobility is greater at HPSGP than at comparison schools, we are comparing the results of relative mobility as opposed to relative stability combined with possible HPSGP impact.

Thus, through the analyses presented in this section, we attempt to further investigate the question of HPSGP impact through the use of a longitudinally-linked student-level dataset from a large urban school district.[43] These data include all students in the district across seven years (1999-2000 through 2005-06) with unique identifiers that allow us to follow the performance of individual students over time on the NRT reading, math, and language and CST ELA and math. The dataset contains a wealth of information on each student, including gender, primary ethnicity, English proficiency, parental education, eligibility for free or reduced price lunch, special education status, and current grade.

While a relatively high number of HPSGP schools are located in this district, it is important to highlight that this district analysis does not replace, but rather complements, the statewide analyses in the previous sections, as the results cannot be generalized beyond the district. While it does not provide answers to our evaluation questions that can be extrapolated to the state as a whole, it may provide some insight into the question of the potential impact of not having individual linked student data at the state level on the statewide findings presented in this report.

Given that students often move among schools over the years, we limited this analysis to those students who either have always or who never attended an HP Only plus planning school. This eliminates the complications raised by students who transfer between HPSGP and comparison

[43] AIR was requested not to identify the district.

schools during our period of analysis. In addition, we hold the sample of students constant over time from 1999-2000 through 2005-06.[44]

Students who always attended an HP Only plus planning school in the district for this time period constituted the HPSGP group for this analysis. Even though this may reduce the sample size somewhat, it is important to keep the sample of students constant over time, in order to compare academic performance trajectories before and after the program was put in place, and make sure that changes in academic performance are not due to changes in the student population attending these schools, as described above.

In order to select a comparison group for these students, we no longer need to select entire schools, but rather individual students in the same school district. We matched each student in the HPSGP group with another student with similar initial academic achievement level (i.e., NRT reading in 1999-2000), primary ethnicity, eligibility for free or reduced price lunch, special education status, and grade from a non-HPSGP school. To supplement this matching, we selected these comparison students in schools with a similar percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch as the school attended by the matched HPSGP student in 1999-2000. In other words, for each student in the HPSGP group, we found his/her most similar counterpart in the district at a non-HPSGP school based on these characteristics. The only difference between the matched pair is that one attended an HP Only plus planning school from 1999-2000 through 2005-06, and the other did not (neither did the matched student attend II/USP or CSR schools).[45]

### Overall District Data Results

Exhibit 3.16 presents the results of the student-level longitudinal HLM regressions using district data.[46] The NRT scores in reading show a positive HPSGP effect of 0.07 standard deviations in reading during the first year of program implementation in 2002-03. However, the results following this first year of implementation suggest that students in comparison schools slightly outperformed students in the HPSGP schools. More specifically, there was a negative program effect of -0.05 standard deviations on NRT language in 2003-04; -0.04 standard deviations on CST ELA in 2004-05 and 2005-06; and -0.08 standard deviations on CST math in 2005-06.

[44] Following a consistent group of students over time is referred to as a balanced panel.
[45] Students in HPSGP and comparison schools did not have to attend the same school from 1999-2000 through 2005-06. The only restriction is that students in the HPSGP group needed to always attend an HP Only plus planning school throughout the period, but they may have transferred from one to another. The same is true for students in the comparison group; they could move between schools, but always from a non-HP, non-II/USP and non-CSR school to another.
[46] Technical Appendix C-6 presents the complete HLM regression results.

**Exhibit 3.16. HLM Regression Results for Students in HP Only + Planning and Comparison Schools in a Large Urban District**

| Year | NRT Reading | NRT Math | NRT Language | CST ELA | CST Math |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year 2000-01 | ***-0.07****** | -0.03 | ***-0.10****** | | |
| Year 2001-02 (Planning) | -0.02 | 0.02 | **0.09***** | | |
| Year 2002-03 (Implementation 1) | **0.07***** | -0.03 | 0.01 | ***-0.04**** | ***-0.05**** |
| Year 2003-04 (Implementation 2) | -0.01 | 0.03 | ***-0.05**** | 0.004 | 0.02 |
| Year 2004-05 (Implementation 3) | | | | ***-0.04**** | -0.002 |
| Year 2005-06 (Implementation 4) | | | | ***-0.04**** | ***-0.08***** |

Note 1: These coefficients indicate the effect of the HPSGP on student achievement in standard deviations. Shaded cells indicate that tests were not administered in all grades those years.
Note 2: An average of 23,540 observations per subject test were included in this analysis.
* indicates statistical significance at 10%, ** at 5%, and *** at 1%.

## District Student Sub-Group Results

We also analyzed performance trends by student sub-groups in this distrct, namely Hispanic and African-American students, students with low socio-economic status, and English learners.[47] Exhibits 3.17 and 3.18 present the HLM results for students eligible for free or reduced price lunch and Hispanic students, respectively. Given that 93 percent of the students in both the HPSGP and comparison schools are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, and 88 percent of them are of Hispanic origin, this extremely high overlap generates very consistent results with the overall findings for the district above.

**Exhibit 3.17. HLM Regression Results for Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch in HP Only + Planning and Comparison Schools in a Large Urban District**

| Year | NRT Reading | NRT Math | NRT Language | CST ELA | CST Math |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year 2000-01 | ***-0.07****** | ***-0.04**** | ***-0.11****** | | |
| Year 2001-02 (Planning) | -0.01 | 0.02 | **0.10***** | | |
| Year 2002-03 (Implementation 1) | **0.06**** | -0.03 | 0.004 | ***-0.04**** | ***-0.06**** |
| Year 2003-04 (Implementation 2) | -0.004 | 0.03 | ***-0.05**** | 0.01 | 0.04 |
| Year 2004-05 (Implementation 3) | | | | ***-0.04**** | 0.004 |
| Year 2005-06 (Implementation 4) | | | | ***-0.04***** | ***-0.09***** |

Note 1: These coefficients indicate the effect of the HPSGP on student achievement in standard deviations. Shaded cells indicate that tests were not administered in all grades those years.
* indicates statistical significance at 10%, ** at 5%, and *** at 1%.

[47] Asian and special education students were not included in these analyses due to small sample size.

**Exhibit 3.18. HLM Regression Results for Hispanic Students in HP Only + Planning and Comparison Schools in a Large Urban District**

| Year | NRT Reading | NRT Math | NRT Language | CST ELA | CST Math |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year 2000-01 | ***-0.08****** | ***-0.04**** | ***-0.10****** | | |
| Year 2001-02 (Planning) | -0.01 | 0.03 | **0.10***** | | |
| Year 2002-03 (Implementation 1) | **0.06**** | -0.02 | -0.002 | ***-0.04**** | ***-0.06**** |
| Year 2003-04 (Implementation 2) | -0.01 | 0.02 | ***-0.07***** | 0.004 | 0.03 |
| Year 2004-05 (Implementation 3) | | | | -0.03 | 0.02 |
| Year 2005-06 (Implementation 4) | | | | ***-0.04**** | ***-0.09***** |

Note 1: These coefficients indicate the effect of the HPSGP on student achievement in standard deviations. Shaded cells indicate that tests were not administered in all grades those years.
* indicates statistical significance at 10%, ** at 5%, and *** at 1%.

Exhibit 3.19 shows the HLM regression results for English learners. Even though the vast majority of students in these schools are of Hispanic origin, less than half are classified as English learners. Therefore, this is a relatively smaller group of students for analysis purposes.

**Exhibit 3.19. HLM Regression Results for English Learners in HP Only + Planning and Comparison Schools in a Large Urban District**

| Year | NRT Reading | NRT Math | NRT Language | CST ELA | CST Math |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year 2000-01 | ***-0.11****** | ***-0.05**** | ***-0.12****** | | |
| Year 2001-02 (Planning) | -0.01 | **0.05*** | **0.07**** | | |
| Year 2002-03 (Implementation 1) | 0.03 | -0.05 | 0.01 | -0.004 | ***-0.06**** |
| Year 2003-04 (Implementation 2) | 0.02 | 0.01 | ***-0.12***** | -0.02 | 0.03 |
| Year 2004-05 (Implementation 3) | | | | -0.03 | -0.02 |
| Year 2005-06 (Implementation 4) | | | | -0.02 | ***-0.08**** |

Note 1: These coefficients indicate the effect of the HPSGP on student achievement in standard deviations. Shaded cells indicate that tests were not administered in all grades those years.
* indicates statistical significance at 10%, ** at 5%, and *** at 1%.

Contrary to the prior district results, we do not observe a positive effect on the NRT reading during the first year of the program. In line with the other analyses, however, CST math test scores show a statistically significant but small negative HPSGP effect during that year. Furthermore, English learners in HP Only plus planning schools performed lower in relation to their counterparts in non-HP schools in NRT language in 2003-04 and in CST math in 2005-06. In the case of NRT language, the negative impact is more than twice that observed for all students in HP Only plus planning schools, still below the "small effect" threshold of 0.25 standard deviations (Cohen, 1969).

Finally, Exhibit 3.20 presents the HLM results for African-American students in this district. These students represent about 10 percent of the student population of interest. Given the much smaller number of observations, it is also more unlikely to observe statistically significant

differences.[48] Only the NRT math scores show differences between and HPSGP comparison groups.

**Exhibit 3.20. HLM Regression Results for African-American Students in HP Only + Planning and Comparison Schools in a Large Urban District**

| Year | NRT Reading | NRT Math | NRT Language | CST ELA | CST Math |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year 2000-01 | -0.07 | 0.06 | -0.13 | | |
| Year 2001-02 (Planning) | -0.11 | -0.05 | 0.04 | | |
| Year 2002-03 (Implementation 1) | 0.11 | ***-0.15*****| -0.02 | -0.09 | 0.03 |
| Year 2003-04 (Implementation 2) | -0.06 | **0.13*** | 0.07 | -0.01 | -0.004 |
| Year 2004-05 (Implementation 3) | | | | -0.09 | -0.14 |
| Year 2005-06 (Implementation 4) | | | | 0.05 | 0.05 |

Note 1: These coefficients indicate the effect of the HPSGP on student achievement in standard deviations. Shaded cells indicate that tests were not administered in all grades those years.
* indicates statistical significance at 10%, ** at 5%, and *** at 1%.

## Summary Findings Using Data from a Large Urban District

Exhibit 3.21 presents the cumulative effect of the HPSGP using student-level longitudinally linked data from this district (i.e., summing all statistically significant differences of the overall results of Exhibit 3.16), alongside the statewide results. As observed, the comparison students outperformed students in HP Only plus planning schools in the district by 0.12 and 0.13 standard deviations in CST ELA and math, respectively, since the program was implemented. Given that the standard deviation of these tests was in 2006 equal to 63.2 and 81.2 scale scores in ELA and math, respectively, students in comparison schools outperformed their counterparts in HP Only plus planning schools by about 7.6 points in ELA and 10.6 points in math.

**Exhibit 3.21. Cumulative Impact of the HPSGP in HP Only + Planning Schools, Statewide and for a Large Urban District**

| | CST ELA | CST Math |
|---|---|---|
| Statewide Elementary HP Only + Planning | -0.02 | 0.01 |
| Statewide Middle HP Only + Planning | 0.03 | 0.02 |
| Statewide High HP Only + Planning | -0.01 | -0.01 |
| Large Urban District HP Only + Planning | -0.12 | -0.13 |

Note: These figures are estimated summing all the statistically significant coefficients of Exhibits 3.10, 3.11, 3.12, and 3.16.

However, consistent with the statewide analyses, it is very important to note that these effect sizes – whether positive or negative - are too small to be considered "educationally significant" in either direction. In summary, the district-level results support the statewide analyses, in that the differences in student achievement between HP Only plus planning and comparison schools are negligible.

[48] Whenever sample size decreases, the power to reject null hypotheses, and therefore find statistically significant differences, also decreases.

# Summary

Across a wide array of alternative analyses, there is no educationally significant effect of participating in the HPSGP on student achievement.

During the period of program implementation, HP Only plus planning schools, on average, showed gains in student performance, with more than twice as many students scoring proficient and above on the CST in 2006 than in 2001. At the same time, the best comparison group that we could construct for the purpose of this evaluation also exhibited similar growth. 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 HP Only plus planning and comparison schools, even though it is not possible to fully determine it.

In terms of other descriptive measures, a greater percentage of HP Only plus planning schools met their schoolwide API targets in two of the four implementation years in relation to the comparison schools. However, this trend was also present prior to program implementation. Contrary to this, a greater percentage of comparison schools met AYP in relation to HP Only plus planning. As these analyses do not control for student- and school-level characteristics, they 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 across years and grade levels. Overall, the results suggest that HP Only and comparison schools performed virtually the same over the period of the program. These very small differences are supported also by analyses of student subgroups and longitudinally student-linked data from a large urban school district.

Considering the empirical evidence presented in this chapter, questions arise as to why we observe no discernable impact on student outcomes given the fairly substantial amount of additional funding that the HPSGP provides (i.e., $400 per student per implementation year). The lack of impact seems fairly striking, even though prior literature has traditionally been quite mixed in terms of finding a strong link between educational inputs and outputs.[49] This evaluation provides an opportunity to better understand some of the possible reasons for this weak link.

These achievement analyses are based on a simple dichotomy – schools that did and did not participate in the HPSGP. However, within the group that participated in the program, our qualitative data collection shows considerable variation in implementation in key components, such as the external provider, and the extent to which funds were fully expended each year. The achievement analyses do not account for these differences – HP Only plus planning schools that may have implemented the program with fidelity are treated the same as schools that may have experienced breakdowns in implementation. In subsequent chapters, we turn to the findings from

[49] One recent example is the study "Successful California Schools in the Context of Educational Adequacy" carried out by Perez et al. (http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/17-AIR-Successful-Schools/17-Successful-California-Schools(3-07).pdf). The authors find no statistical evidence that beating-the-odds schools are radically different in terms of inputs than other schools in the state.

our qualitative research techniques to enrich our understanding of state, district and school practices that are likely to influence the degree to which HPSGP had an impact on student achievement.

# Chapter 4: School and District Context for HPSGP Reform

## Introduction

Before evaluating specific components of the HPSGP and the perception of its impact, this chapter assesses the broader environment in which students learn and in which the program was implemented. As HPSGP does not exist in isolation, understanding the interaction between contextual factors (such as school capacity and the role of the district) with school improvement may help us identify conditions that lead to its successful implementation as well as reasons for its negligible overall impact.

A primary goal of the Year 1 site visits to 16 HP Only schools was to gain an understanding of the district and school factors that both hindered and facilitated the implementation of the HPSGP and the realization of its desired outcomes. The themes that emerged from the case studies were explored further across a broader sample of 106 schools and 49 districts in the Year 2 survey data collection. Please see Chapter 2 for a review of these methods.

### Key Findings

- **Staff levels do not appear to differ appreciably between HP Only and other schools statewide.**
- **Survey evidence suggests that principal turnover negatively impacts the perception of school reform coherence.** Respondents in schools with two or more principals over the last five years were more than twice as likely to believe that the school improvement program lacked coherence in comparison to respondents in schools with one principal.
- **Seventy percent of school respondents believed that the district was reasonably or very supportive. However, the majority of respondents did not believe their schools received differential district support in terms of administrative, instructional and support staff and non-personnel resources.**
- **While a majority of surveyed school and district respondents reported that their district fostered a stable school administration, a considerable percentage (about 25 percent) disagreed.**

In addition to building on case study findings, this chapter draws heavily from the results of school and district surveys, as well as supplemental data sources, such as statewide personnel resource data from CBEDS and the HPSGP Annual Reports. All school-level analyses for HPSGP schools pertain only to schools

that did not also participate in the II/USP or CSR – what we call in this report HP Only schools.[50]

We begin by assessing survey findings on school-level factors supporting school reform efforts, paying particular attention to personnel characteristics, such as quantity, attrition, and quality. We then explore the perceptions of district support – both current levels as well as support provided over the course of the grant period.[51] The chapter concludes with a brief look at the district perspectives of their local school boards. Please note that the survey results reflect individuals' perceptions (see Chapter 2 for types of respondents), which may not accurately represent the views of the school or district overall.

## School Contextual Factors

This section reviews key school-level factors such as professional development and personnel quality that can directly shape schools' improvement efforts. When interpreting these findings, it is important to keep in mind that HP Only schools, on average, serve greater proportions of students with special needs. As depicted in Exhibit 3.4 in Chapter 3, more than 80 percent of students in HP Only plus planning schools were of low socio-economic status, in relation to less the 50 percent of students statewide. HP Only plus planning schools also had more than twice as many English learners and students whose parents did not have a high school degree.[52] These student demographics clearly pose an important, overarching factor that influence schools' improvement efforts.

Another predominant characteristic that sets these schools apart is their Program Improvement (PI) status under the NCLB. As described in Chapter 1, failure to meet the federal AYP measures for two consecutive years results in schools being placed in PI, which features a broad range of sanctions and interventions that increase in severity each year that a school does not make AYP. Nearly 80 percent of HP Only schools are in Program Improvement, with nearly half of the PI schools in Year PI 4 or 5. By contrast, only 37 percent of all schools statewide are in PI, and of those, 30 percent are in Year 4 or 5.

[50] The Year 1 report for this evaluation referred to these schools as "Pure" schools. To make the label more intuitive, we call them "HP Only " in this report.

[51] The responses for charter schools (n = 6) were set to missing for district support questions, due to their unique governance structure. This decision was supported by the fact that one charter left the district questions blank, explaining they were administered differently, and another charter noted in the survey narrative that its district responses pertained exclusively to their charter school which acts as its own district.

[52] Although Chapter 3 examined student demographics for HP Only plus planning schools, these patterns hold for all HP Only schools.

## *General School-Level Capacity*

While the survey respondents generally had positive perceptions of key school capacity characteristics, a considerable percentage indicated concerns with curriculum coordination and planning time.

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. The Year 1 case study results identified several of these school-level factors as contributing to school improvement efforts. Some of the more predominant factors reported to facilitate academic success across the case study 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.

While not intending to be a comprehensive review of all school-level factors, the school survey in Year 2 of this study built on these initial findings and posed a series of questions relating to vertical and horizontal instructional coherence through common curricula; staff motivation, collaboration, and professional development; staff content knowledge; coherence and consistency of school reform with clear goals. Exhibit 4.1 presents the results for these survey items. Although one might expect to observe differences by higher and lower performers (see Chapter 2 for these categories), no consistent statistically significant patterns emerged.

## Exhibit 4.1. School Respondents' Perceptions on School Level Contextual Factors

Source: HPSGP School and District Surveys (AIR)

| Over the past five years… | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **a) There has been consistency in curriculum and instruction among teachers in the same grade level/subject area at this school.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 1.9 | 20.8 | 55.7 | 21.7 | -- |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 0.0 | 11.4 | 61.4 | 27.3 | -- |
| Middle (n = 34) | 5.9 | 29.4 | 50.0 | 14.7 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 25.0 | 53.6 | 21.4 | -- |
| **b) Curriculum and instruction have been well coordinated across grade levels/subject areas.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 1.9 | 23.6 | 58.5 | 15.1 | 0.9 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 0.0 | 22.7 | 54.6 | 20.5 | 2.3 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 5.9 | 23.5 | 61.8 | 8.8 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 25.0 | 60.7 | 14.3 | -- |
| **c) Staff at the school have been motivated and committed to making changes to improve student achievement.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 0.9 | 7.6 | 54.7 | 36.8 | -- |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 2.3 | 6.8 | 56.8 | 34.1 | -- |
| Middle (n = 34) | 0.0 | 11.8 | 44.1 | 44.1 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 3.6 | 64.3 | 32.1 | -- |
| **d) My school has had adequate teacher planning time to improve student achievement.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 2.8 | 28.3 | 45.3 | 23.6 | -- |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 4.6 | 18.2 | 45.5 | 31.8 | -- |
| Middle (n = 34) | 0.0 | 38.2 | 38.2 | 23.5 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 3.6 | 32.1 | 53.6 | 10.7 | -- |
| **e) My school has had adequate high-quality professional development to improve classroom instruction.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 0.0 | 17.0 | 55.7 | 27.4 | -- |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 0.0 | 11.4 | 56.8 | 31.8 | -- |
| Middle (n = 34) | 0.0 | 26.5 | 41.2 | 32.4 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 14.3 | 71.4 | 14.3 | -- |
| **f) Most teachers in this school have had the knowledge and skills needed to teach the state standards.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 0.0 | 13.2 | 59.4 | 25.5 | 1.9 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 0.0 | 9.1 | 65.9 | 20.5 | 4.6 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 0.0 | 23.5 | 47.1 | 29.4 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 7.1 | 64.3 | 28.6 | -- |
| **g) We have had so many different initiatives in this school that our school improvement program lacks coherence.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 16.0 | 56.6 | 23.6 | 3.8 | -- |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 18.2 | 59.1 | 18.2 | 4.6 | -- |
| Middle (n = 34) | 20.6 | 47.1 | 29.4 | 2.9 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 7.1 | 64.3 | 25 | 3.6 | -- |
| **h) Student learning goals and strategies have been clearly defined in our school.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 0.0 | 8.5 | 66 | 24.5 | 0.9 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 0.0 | 6.8 | 61.4 | 31.8 | -- |
| Middle (n = 34) | 0.0 | 17.7 | 55.9 | 23.5 | 2.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 0.0 | 85.7 | 14.3 | -- |
| **i) The school's strategies for improvement have been consistent (e.g., focus, use of strategies).** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 1.9 | 15.1 | 54.7 | 28.3 | -- |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 0.0 | 11.4 | 54.6 | 34.1 | -- |
| Middle (n = 34) | 5.9 | 23.5 | 44.1 | 26.5 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 10.7 | 67.9 | 21.4 | -- |

### Coordinated curriculum

Curriculum is featured in rows a) and b) of Exhibit 4.1. While more than three-quarters of the school-level respondents agreed that there had been consistency in curriculum and instruction within the same grade (row a), respondents from elementary schools were much more likely than middle school respondents to confirm this (88.6 percent to 64.7 percent).[53] Lack of grade-level coherence appears especially problematic at the middle school level, where over a third of respondents indicated that their schools lacked within-grade consistency. Nearly three-quarters of all school respondents shared the perception of curriculum and instruction coordination across grades and subject areas (row b).

While these findings seem positive, it is worthy of note that about a quarter of the respondents indicated that such coordination is not occurring. This seems somewhat disconcerting for schools undergoing the kinds of intensive school reform efforts that HPSGP is designed to produce.

### Staff motivation, staff planning and professional development

The vast majority (91.5 percent) of all HP Only school respondents believed that staff were motivated and committed to improving student learning (row c in Exhibit 4.1). Despite the noted importance of joint planning time at the case study schools, more than 30 percent of all surveyed school respondents did not believe that their schools had adequate planning time (row d). About 84 percent overall believed that the school had adequate, high quality professional development (row e), with middle school respondents statistically significantly less likely than elementary school respondents to agree with item e (74 percent to 89 percent).[54] In terms of content knowledge (row f), middle school respondents again were statistically significantly less likely than high school respondents to believe that most teachers had the knowledge and skills need to teach to the state standards (77 percent to 93 percent).[55]

### Consistency and coherence of school reform initiatives

Given that some of the case study schools experienced chronic disruptions in their school reform efforts, often attributed to changes in school leadership, the survey assessed the extent to which HP Only school respondents believed that the school reform program was coherent and consistent, and had clear goals. While a majority of surveyed schools disagreed, a quarter of the school respondents believed that the school had so many initiatives that the improvement program lacked coherence (row g).

However, this perceived lack of coherence did not seem to influence the respondents' views on whether student learning goals and strategies were clearly defined. Overall, more than percent believed the goals and strategies were clear, although middle school respondents were less likely than those from high schools to agree with this (79.5 percent versus 100 percent).[56] Respondents from both high schools and elementary schools were more likely than middle school respondents to believe that that the school's improvement strategies are consistent.[57] The relationship

[53] Significant at the 1 percent confidence level.
[54] Significant at the 10 percent confidence level.
[55] Significant at the 10 percent confidence level.
[56] Significant at the 5 percent confidence level.
[57] Significant at the 5 percent confidence level for elementary/middle school comparisons, and 10 percent for high/middle school comparisons.

between principal turnover and school reform coherence, as measured by these items, will be discussed in the subsequent section on personnel.

In summary, while the survey results generally pointed to positive perceptions of key school capacity characteristics, a sizeable percentage of the school respondents expressed concerns with coordination of the curriculum, and sufficient planning time. While most respondents seemed to agree that the professional development was adequate, the overall knowledge and skill level of their staff was sufficient to teach to state standards, and the reform strategies were consistent, middle school respondents were less confident with about one-quarter indicating that this was not the case.

## *Personnel Resource Capacity*

While professional development, planning time, and instructional coherence are important strategies, the potential of these strategies for building capacity and raising student achievement will be directly impacted by personnel resources, such as staffing levels, quality, and turnover. To inform our understanding of these factors, we drew upon statewide CBEDS data, HPSGP Annual Reports, and survey results.

### Staffing Levels

> Staff levels do not appear to differ appreciably between HP Only and other schools statewide.

An important preface to this section is that increasing staffing levels was not a specified program goal of the HPSGP. At the same time, as will be shown in Exhibit 5.13 in Chapter 5, nearly half of the school survey respondents reported "supplemental personnel" (e.g., teachers, literacy coaches) as the largest and as the most effective use of HPSGP funds at their schools. Given this, it might be reasonable to expect staffing levels at HPSGP schools to exceed what is found on average across all schools statewide.

In addition, as shown in Chapter 3, HP Only plus planning schools face some of the most academically 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 needs (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.[58] That is, equal funding generally has not been considered "equitable" across sites with measurably different student needs. Consequently, 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 HPSGP grant.

[58] This was also found in all three of the separate adequacy studies conducted for California this past year as a part of the *Getting Down to Facts* studies described in greater detail in Chapter 7 of this report.

From a statewide perspective, however, HP Only schools do not appear to differ considerably in terms of overall full-time equivalent (FTE) personnel levels in relation to the comparison schools used for the achievement analyses and all other schools in the state.[59] As shown in Exhibit 4.2, HP Only schools, on average, had only slightly more overall, teacher, and administrator FTEs in 2005-06. 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 HP Only and non-HP schools, to the extent that they receive support from the district or other personnel not directly associated with the schools in CBEDS.

While we observe an increase in overall FTE levels among HP Only schools from 2001-02 to 2005-06, teacher FTEs declined across all school groups during this period. Even with this decline, however, HP Only schools had a total of 4.68 FTE teachers per 100 students, above the average of 4.41 for comparison schools and 4.64 for all other schools. For a school with 800 students – the average school size of HP Only schools in 2005 – this translates to a difference of approximately 2.2 more FTE teachers in HP Only schools, in relation to comparison schools (and an additional 0.7 FTE in relation to all other schools).[60]

### Exhibit 4.2. Average FTE Personnel per 100 Students by School Grouping, 2001-02 and 2005-06

Source: CBEDS PAIF (Personnel Assignment Information File) and SIF (Student Information File), 2001-02 through 2005-06.

| | | 2001-02 | 2005-06 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Personnel Type | N of Schools | Total FTEs Per 100 Students | Total FTEs Per 100 Students |
| **Total FTE (all staff)** | | | |
| HP Only | 341 | 5.16 | 5.24 |
| Comparison | 90 | 5.03 | 4.97 |
| All Other | 10,022 | 5.19 | 5.15 |
| **Teachers** | | | |
| HP Only | 341 | 4.70 | 4.68 |
| Comparison | 90 | 4.52 | 4.41 |
| All Other | 10,022 | 4.74 | 4.64 |
| **Administrators** | | | |
| HP Only | 341 | 0.24 | 0.35 |
| Comparison | 90 | 0.26 | 0.31 |
| All Other | 10,022 | 0.25 | 0.30 |
| **Pupil Support Staff** | | | |
| HP Only | 341 | 0.22 | 0.21 |
| Comparison | 90 | 0.25 | 0.25 |
| All Other | 10,022 | 0.20 | 0.22 |

[59] The Year 1 report found that HP Only schools had, on average, lower levels of personnel. However, the results were based on a different comparison group and used unweighted averages which were more susceptible to enrollment variations. 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 D for a more detailed description of the specific personnel assignments that are included within each category.

[60] The average school size of HP Only schools was 796 students, using the 2005 API Growth database.

Note 1: These figures exclude alternative, continuation, special education, state special, juvenile hall, community day or adult education schools.
Note 2: In deriving the FTE per 100 students, we summed all FTEs (by type) for each school grouping and divided by the total enrollment in that group.

While these results suggest that HP Only schools may have a slight advantage in teacher levels, they do not take into account differing student demographics. Showing the number of students per teacher and pupil support staff, Exhibit 4.3 presents striking differences between HP Only and other schools. While the number of overall students per teacher is fairly similar between the school groups, HP Only schools have considerably higher numbers of low socio-economic status students and English learners per teacher in relation to all other schools. Specifically, teachers in HP Only schools serve 2.5 more low socio-economic status students than teachers in comparison schools, and nearly 8 more than teachers in all other schools. A similar pattern holds true for English learners, with teachers in HP Only schools serving twice as many English learners than teachers in all other schools. The differences for pupil support staff are even more pronounced, with HP Only schools serving in excess of 125 more students with low-socioeconomic status in relation to comparison and all other schools. Any personnel advantage observed above in Exhibit 4.2 is likely to be offset by differences in the number of students with special learning needs served.

### Exhibit 4.3. Average Number of Students per FTE Teacher and Pupil Support Staff, 2005-06

Source: Figures based on CBEDS PAIF (Personnel Assignment Information File) and SIF (Student Information File), 2005-06. English learner enrollment estimates derived from the API Growth Database.

| Number of Students per FTE Staff 2005-06 Averages | HP Only Schools (N = 338)* | Comparison Schools (N = 90) | All Other Schools (N = 9,869)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Overall Students per Teacher | 21.4 | 22.7 | 21.5 |
| Free/Reduced Price Lunch Students per Teacher | 17.7 | 15.5 | 10.1 |
| English Learners per Teacher | 9.8 | 8.1 | 4.7 |
| Overall Students per Pupil Support Staff | 480.4 | 396.7 | 462.0 |
| Free/Reduced Price Lunch Students per Pupil Support Staff | 397.3 | 270.9 | 216.0 |
| English Learners per Pupil Support Staff | 220.4 | 141.5 | 100.0 |

* The numbers of observations are lower than Exhibit 4.2 due to missing data.

In summary, while overall and teacher staffing levels did not appear to differ appreciably between HP Only and other schools statewide, it raises questions as to how these schools can be expected to make academic progress with similar levels of staff resources as schools serving less challenging populations. One might suggest that this is compensated through higher teacher quality, which is very difficult to measure. As one approximation, however, additional findings presented later show that HP Only schools also have lower proportions of fully credentialed teachers.

## Staff Turnover

Survey evidence suggests that principal turnover negatively impacts the perception of school reform coherence. Respondents in schools with two or more principals over the last five years were more than twice as likely to believe that the school improvement program lacked coherence in comparison to respondents in schools with one principal.

Staff turnover – both in terms of leadership and instructional staff – was frequently cited by the case study schools as problematic to school reform efforts. Using information from the survey and the HPSGP Annual Reports, this section examines district and school staff attrition, as well as the perceived impact of attrition on school improvement efforts. However, since statewide turnover data are not available from CBEDS, we are unable to make comparisons between HP Only schools with other groups of schools.

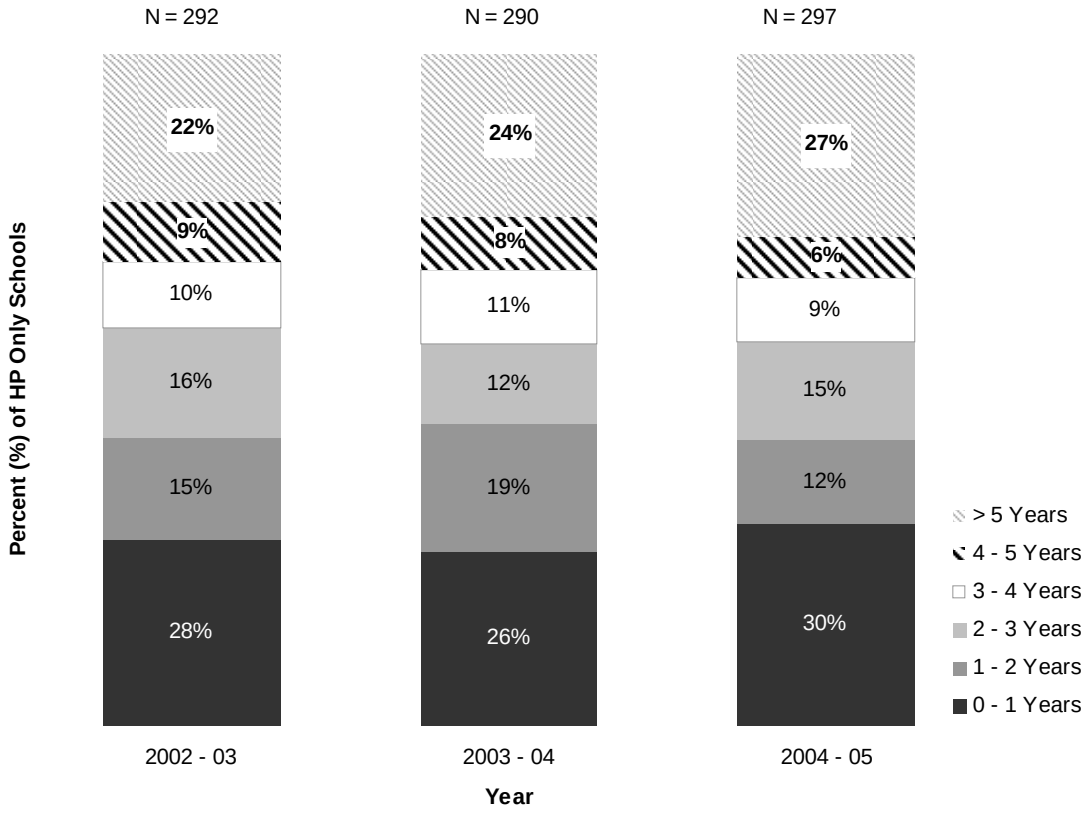
### School Leadership Turnover

A 2003 RAND study examining the 1999-2000 School and Staffing Survey (SASS) found that although national and state data 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.

Using information in the HPSGP Annual Reports, Exhibit 4.4 displays the percentage of HP Only principals by number of years that they have been at the current school from 2002-03 to 2004-05. These data suggest that a substantial percentage of HP Only schools have relatively new principals. Across all years, nearly 30 percent of principals were at their current HP Only school for less than a year, indicating a high degree of turnover. The percentage of principals with three years or less at their current school hovered around 60 percent. A more encouraging sign is the increase in the percentage of principals at their school for more than five years, from 22 to 27 percent. Among the 14 principals at the surveyed schools that were new to the school (e.g., one year or less), 21 percent were first-time principals – similar to the proportion of first year principals observed in the case study schools.

**Exhibit 4.4. Percentage of Principals by Years at Current HP Only School, 2002-03 through 2004-05**

Source: HPSGP Annual Reports, 2002-03 through 2004-05.




The finding that a considerable percentage of HP Only schools appeared to have more than one principal over the first three years of the program was consistent with the level of turnover observed in the case study schools. While 8 of the 16 case study schools had reasonably well-established and continuous leadership, 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. 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 (as reported by the 2004-05 HPSGP Annual Report) the degree of new leadership at the case study schools seemed 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.

The HP Only schools that were surveyed reported turnover rates that ranged from 1 to 4 principals over the five years of the implementation period of the grant. More than a third of the schools had a single principal over five years; another 38 percent had two principals; 21 percent reported three principals; and the remaining 4 percent had four principals during that time period.

However, these changes in school leadership were not consistently reported as an obstacle for school improvement efforts. For example, as shown in Exhibit 4.5, half of the schools with two principals and more than quarter of schools with three or more principals described this degree of change as facilitating improvement efforts. However, these data may be difficult to interpret, as respondents may have been considering the skills of the last principal as opposed to the impact of multiple leadership changes.

On the other hand, a considerable percentage of respondents (43 percent, or 28 of the 66 schools with two or more principals) reported that the change in leadership was somewhat disruptive or a major impediment. Additionally, in response to a separate narrative question regarding factors that limited the school's ability to use the HPSGP funds, six school respondents identified principal turnover as a factor. As one school respondent described, "Turnover in leadership disrupted the coherence of the reforms as each new principal had to get up to speed on the plan, the tenets of the HPSGP in addition to becoming familiar with his/her new school and staff."

We acknowledge that other leadership positions may have experienced significant attrition and although these changes were not captured by the survey they were still important. As described by one school respondent, "We have been through 3 principals and 8 assistant principals, due to movement in the district, not by choice or promotion."

**Exhibit 4.5. School Respondents' Perception of the Impact of Change in Principals Over the Past Five Years on School Improvement Efforts**

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

| Impact of change on improvement efforts… | Number of principals over the past five years… | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 (n = 39) | 2 (n = 40) | 3 + (n = 26) <1> |
| Facilitated our school improvement efforts | 67% | 50% | 27% |
| No impact on school improvement efforts | 28% | 28% | 0% |
| Somewhat disruptive | 0% | 18% | 42% |
| A major impediment to our school improvement efforts | 3% | 5% | 31% |

<1> The responses for schools with 3 and 4 principals over the past five years were grouped together due to small number of observations.
Note: Percentages will not add to 100 percent due to rounding and missing responses.

Linking the level of principal turnover to perceptions of reform consistency and clear goals (see Exhibit 4.1), we found additional evidence that changes in school leadership has negative implications for improvement efforts. Respondents in schools with two or more principals over the last five years were more than twice as likely to believe that the school had so many initiatives that the improvement program lacked coherence (35 percent), in comparison to schools that had one principal (15 percent).[61] In addition, a statistically significantly greater percentage of respondents in schools with one principal (97 percent) believed that student learning goals and strategies were clearly defined, in relation to other schools (88 percent).[62] Although a greater percentage of respondents from schools with one principal believed that the school's improvement strategies have been consistent – 90 percent in relation to 79 percent of schools with two or more principals over time – this difference was not statistically significant.

### Instructional Staff Turnover

Teacher turnover was generally cited as a concern by principals and teachers across the majority of the case study schools. In the most recent year, nearly a third of the surveyed schools reported minimal turnover (e.g., less than 10 percent of current staff is new). However, nearly as many reported between 10 and 19 percent of their teaching staff as new, and between 20 and 39 percent of the staff were new in a quarter of the surveyed schools. On the extreme end, five schools reported 40 percent or more new staff.

[61] Significant at the 5 percent confidence level.
[62] Significant at the 10 percent confidence level.

**Exhibit 4.6. Percentage of Teaching Staff New to the School in 2006-07, as Reported by Surveyed School Respondents**

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

| | | | % of schools that reported that the % of new staff in 2006-07 was… | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **% New Teaching Staff** | **N** | **% of Surveyed Schools** | **Lower than the last five years** | **Typical** | **Higher than the last five years** |
| 0-9 | 37 | 35% | 57% | 41% | 3% |
| 10-19 | 36 | 34% | 33% | 61% | 6% |
| 20-29 | 15 | 14% | 40% | 47% | 13% |
| 30-39 | 12 | 11% | 17% | 42% | 42% |
| 40-69 | 5 | 5% | 0% | 60% | 40% |
| Missing | 1 | 1% | -- | -- | -- |
| **Total** | **106** | **100%** | | | |

The majority of schools that reported turnover between 0 and 9 percent indicated that this was lower than what the school experienced over the past five years, while the majority of schools with 10 to 19 percent new staff reported this level of turnover was typical. Of concern are three schools with turnover in the range of 40 to 69 percent, for which this appears to be a chronic issue.

School respondents were asked to characterize the impact of teacher turnover between 2002-03 and 2006-07 (i.e., the HPSGP grant period) on their school improvement efforts. Given that teacher attrition varied over this time, Exhibit 4.7 presents these results for schools that indicated the percentage of new teaching staff in 2006-07 was representative of the last five years. As the percentage of new teachers increases, so does the percentage of schools reporting turnover to be a major impediment. However, a third of respondents in schools with 10 to 19 percent new staff described this change as facilitating school improvement efforts, suggesting that there may be an optimal level of turnover that provides a balance between new, and likely inexperienced, staff and veteran staff who may be less inclined to embrace reforms.

**Exhibit 4.7. School Respondents' Perception of the Impact of Change in Teachers Over the Past Five Years on School Improvement Efforts (in schools for which the 2006-07 teacher turnover was "typical" of the last five years)**

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

| **Impact of change on improvement efforts over last five years…** | **% of new teachers in most recent year…** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **0 - 9% (n = 15)** | **10 -19% (n = 22)** | **20 - 69% (n = 15) <1>** |
| Facilitated our school improvement efforts | 20% | 36% | 13% |
| No impact on school improvement efforts | 73% | 23% | 13% |
| Somewhat disruptive | 7% | 32% | 40% |
| A major impediment to our school improvement efforts | 0% | 5% | 25% |

<1> The responses for schools reporting between 20 and 69 percent teacher turnover were grouped together due to small number of observations.
Note: Percentages will not add to 100 percent due to rounding and missing responses.

### District Superintendent Turnover

In addition to site level staff, turnover in district leadership may influence the perception of district support and coherence between school and district efforts. Principal and teacher respondents in four of the nine districts visited as a part of the case studies mentioned that administrative turnover at the district level posed a major challenge in their efforts to improve student performance. The survey results showed that a third of the districts in our school sample had one superintendent over a five year period, while nearly half had two superintendents, and another 17 percent had three or more.[63] As expected, fewer school respondents perceived the change as facilitating improvements as the number of new superintendents increased (see Exhibit 4.8). The most striking difference is the jump in the percentage of schools that view the change as a major impediment – 5 percent of schools with 2 superintendents and 62 percent of schools with 3 or more.

**Exhibit 4.8. School Respondents' Perception of the Impact of Change in District Superintendents**

Source: HPSGP School and District Surveys (AIR)

| Impact of change on improvement efforts… | Number of superintendents over the past five years… | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 (n = 20) | 2 (n = 71) | 3 + (n = 13) <1> |
| Facilitated our school improvement efforts | 85% | 33% | 8% |
| No impact on school improvement efforts | 15% | 38% | 8% |
| Somewhat disruptive | 0% | 24% | 23% |
| A major impediment to our school improvement efforts | 0% | 5% | 62% |

<1> The responses for schools that reported with 3-5 district superintendents over the past five years were grouped together due to small number of observations.
Note: Percentages will not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Although we cannot compare these patterns of turnover to those in other schools in the state, as CBEDS does not track this information, the school survey results nonetheless indicate that district- and school-level staff attrition appears to have an impact on improvement efforts in HP Only schools.

## Staff Quality

While HP Only schools are slightly below other schools statewide in terms of teacher credentials and education levels, the vast majority of surveyed district respondents believed that teacher quality in HPSGP schools was as good as the district average.

The issue of personnel stability is also closely associated with the quality of existing and new staff in terms of credentials, education, and experience. Again turning to CBEDS for a statewide picture, the percentage of FTE teachers with full credentials increased considerably across all school groups from 2001-02 to 2005-06 (Exhibit 4.9). With the lowest percentage of credentialed

[63] Based on 106 school surveys, representing 46 districts. One district had five superintendents in five years.

teachers in 2001-02, HP Only schools made the greatest gains over time, surpassing the comparison schools by a slim margin in 2005-06, but remaining below the average of all other schools.

In terms of education levels, we again observe increases in the percentage of teachers with a masters or doctorate for all school groups. While the gap between HP Only and the other groups declined over this period, HP Only schools continued to have lower percentages of teachers with this level of education by 2005-06. With respect to experience levels, HP Only schools showed marginally lower number of years of experience among teachers.

### Exhibit 4.9. Average Percentage of Teachers with Full Credentials, Education Level, and Years of Experience by School Grouping, 2001-02 and 2005-06

Source: CBEDS PAIF (Personnel Assignment Information File) and SIF (Student Information File), 2001-02 through 2005-06

| | N of schools | 2001-02 | 2005-06 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **FTE Teachers with Credentials** | | **%** | **%** |
| HP Only | 341 | 72.7% | 90.3% |
| Comparison | 90 | 78.7% | 89.0% |
| All Other | 10,022 | 87.3% | 94.2% |
| **FTE Teachers with Masters or Doctorate** | | **%** | **%** |
| HP Only | 341 | 25.4% | 29.0% |
| Comparison | 90 | 31.2% | 32.1% |
| All Other | 10,022 | 30.4% | 32.9% |
| **FTE Years of Experience** | | Mean | Mean |
| HP Only | 341 | 10.9 | 11.1 |
| Comparison | 90 | 12.1 | 11.8 |
| All Other | 10,022 | 12.6 | 12.5 |

Note: These figures exclude alternative, continuation, special education, state special, juvenile hall, community day or adult education schools.

Given that the HPSGP schools were generally the lowest performing schools statewide, we might expect that the quality of their staff might have received particular attention from the district during the grant period in relation to other schools in the district. While the personnel analysis based on CBEDS above provides a picture of how HP Only schools compare to other schools statewide, it does not account for intra-district variations.[64] Recent research by Education Trust-West (2005) has shown substantial funding gaps in California between high and low poverty schools in the same district. The report shows these gaps, which disadvantage high poverty schools, result from concentrations of more experienced and more highly credentialed teachers in lower poverty schools.

As HPSGP schools (as shown in Chapter 3, for HP Only plus planning schools) on average serve higher poverty and higher minority students in relation to the statewide average, these intra-district variations are of concern.[65] In our survey, we asked district respondents to describe the

[64] Limited resources prevented us from analyzing personnel distributions within districts. While we raised intra-district analyses as a possible option, the CDE and Advisory Committee members decided to pursue longitudinally-linked student level achievement analyses instead.

[65] Furthermore, nearly half of the largest school districts that Education Trust – West identified as spending more on average teacher salaries in schools in the bottom poverty quartiles participated in our survey.

overall quality of school administrators and teachers, as well as specifically their experience, education, and content knowledge, in relation to the district average. As shown in Exhibit 4.10, the vast majority of the respondents believed the overall quality of these staff was as good as the district average.

**Exhibit 4.10. District Respondents' Perceptions of the Quality of School Administrators and Teachers in HPSGP Schools, in Relation to the District Average (n = 49)**

Source: HPSGP District Surveys (AIR)

| | As Good As | Better Than | Worse Than | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall School Administrator Quality** | **75.5** | **12.2** | **0.0** | **12.2** |
| In terms of experience | 65.3 | 14.3 | 12.2 | 8.2 |
| In terms of education | 77.6 | 14.3 | 0.0 | 8.2 |
| In terms of content knowledge | 73.5 | 14.3 | 4.1 | 8.2 |
| **Overall Teacher Quality** | **87.8** | **2.0** | **2.0** | **8.2** |
| In terms of experience | 71.4 | 6.1 | 12.2 | 10.2 |
| In terms of education | 83.7 | 2.0 | 4.1 | 10.2 |
| In terms of content knowledge | 75.5 | 12.2 | 4.1 | 8.2 |

To summarize this section on the school context, while HP Only schools were generally positive about some key capacity characteristics (e.g., teacher planning and professional development), we have concerns regarding their most critical resource – personnel. Although personnel levels at HP Only schools do not appear to substantially differ from other schools, the fact that these schools serve populations with greater needs (as depicted in Exhibit 3.4 in Chapter 3 and Exhibit 4.3) suggests that the same allocations of staff as all schools may be insufficient to address the substantially greater challenges these schools face. To meet these challenges, districts may need to actively provide differential levels of support in HPSGP schools, a topic explored further in the following section.

# Role of the District in School Reform

A growing body of research has put increasing emphasis on the role of the district in school-level reform efforts. Marsh (2000) found that districts can play a "potentially critical role in improving teaching and learning." Districts acting as change agents tend to mobilize critical resources, increasing the likelihood "of enacting and sustaining state and local reform goals and policies." The coherence of school programs and district goals has also been identified as an important quality of effective schools and districts. A recent study of high poverty elementary schools in California found that "performance is higher in schools in which the actions of teachers, principals, and school district officials are all closely aligned and tightly focused on student achievement" (EdSource, 2006).

### *General District Support*

Surveyed school respondents had generally positive views of the district, with 70 percent believing the district was reasonably or very supportive. However, despite their participation in a program targeting the lowest performing schools in the state, the majority of respondents did not believe their schools received differential district support in terms of administrative, instructional and support staff and non-personnel resources.

In Year 1, one of the predominant themes surfacing from the case studies was the critical and substantially varying role of the district. Varying degrees of district support clearly influenced the visited schools' ability to address challenges in implementing the HPSGP and to improve student performance. Given that schools were selected into the program due to low performance and that a substantial financial commitment with important sanctions were associated with their participation, 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 situation in our case study schools, 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 from the district. Findings from the case studies raised additional concerns about the long-term sustainability of realized gains in the absence of substantial district buy-in and involvement.

Among the nine districts visited during the case studies, based on extensive interviews with district respondents and at the visited schools, the study team assessed that a third were engaged and helpful in assisting schools to address their academic challenges, specifically in regard to HPSGP implementation. Four of the nine districts visited, however, were generally characterized as not helpful during the time of program implementation, 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 schools faced in improving student achievement, which respondents at the district office as well as at the schools tended to acknowledge. Based on what we saw and heard during these visits, the remaining districts were assessed as neither a major help nor detriment to school improvement efforts. The perception of school respondents in these districts was that areas of assistance were fairly evenly offset by areas in which the district was seen to be holding them back. In relation to the level of support that might be expected for some of the state's most academically challenged schools, overall perceptions of district support in the case studies suggested room for improvement.

School and district surveys administered in Year 2 explored perspectives on current and prior levels of district support across a larger sample. District respondents were asked to select one of the three options provided in Exhibit 4.11 that best described the district's goals and support of school improvement activities in low performing schools. The results were split between districts reporting that they had clear goals with a focus on supporting school reform (51 percent) and those that were in the process of developing, or revisiting, their goals and support (49 percent).

### Exhibit 4.11. Current District Context as Perceived by District Respondents

Source: HPSGP District Surveys (AIR)

| In your opinion, which of the following three situations best describes the current context in your district with regard to low performing schools? | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| The district has clear, cohesive goals and is focused on supporting school improvement. | 25 | 51.0 |
| The district is developing or reforming school improvement goals and support. | 24 | 49.0 |
| The district does not have clear school improvement goals and support. | 0 | 0.0 |

School responses to a similar question on current district support were generally more positive than what was observed at the case study sites, as described above. Seventy percent of all school respondents indicated that the district was reasonably or greatly supportive of their improvement efforts (Exhibit 4.12). At the same time, however, only about a quarter of the respondents described the district as greatly helping. Moreover, 13 percent reported that the district neither helped nor hurt; 6 percent said the district failed to provide any support; and 4 percent described their districts as seriously hurting their efforts. This suggests that districts could be doing more to actively assist their most academically challenged schools, where it might be expected that district support efforts would be the greatest. These views were relatively consistent across school types, while elementary school respondents were slightly more likely to hold a negative view of district support and middle schools were more likely to be neutral.

### Exhibit 4.12. Current Level of District Support as Perceived by School Respondents

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

| How would you describe the central district's current level of support on your school improvement efforts? | Seriously hurts our efforts | Fails to provide any support | Neither helps nor hurts our efforts | Provides a reasonable level of support | Provides support that greatly helps our efforts | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 3.8 | 5.7 | 13.2 | 42.5 | 27.4 | 7.6 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 4.6 | 6.8 | 9.1 | 40.9 | 29.6 | 9.1 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 2.9 | 5.9 | 17.7 | 44.1 | 23.5 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 3.6 | 3.6 | 14.3 | 42.9 | 28.6 | 7.1 |

We further probed school respondents' perceptions on whether district's goals, policies, and procedures facilitated school reform. Approximately 80 percent of the surveyed school respondents believed that the district had set clear, consistent goals and provided critical expertise in supporting improvement efforts (Exhibit 4.13). Respondents from HP Only high schools were most likely to perceive the importance of the district staff's expertise in relation to other school types, with nearly 93 of the respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing on this item. While about two-thirds overall did not believe the district hindered important decisions and the school's ability to address student needs, about a quarter of the school respondents indicated that

the district interfered (with 15 percent of middle school respondents *strongly* agreeing that district policies and procedures made it difficult to address the needs of their students).

### Exhibit 4.13. Current District Goals, Expertise, and Policies as Perceived by School Respondents

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

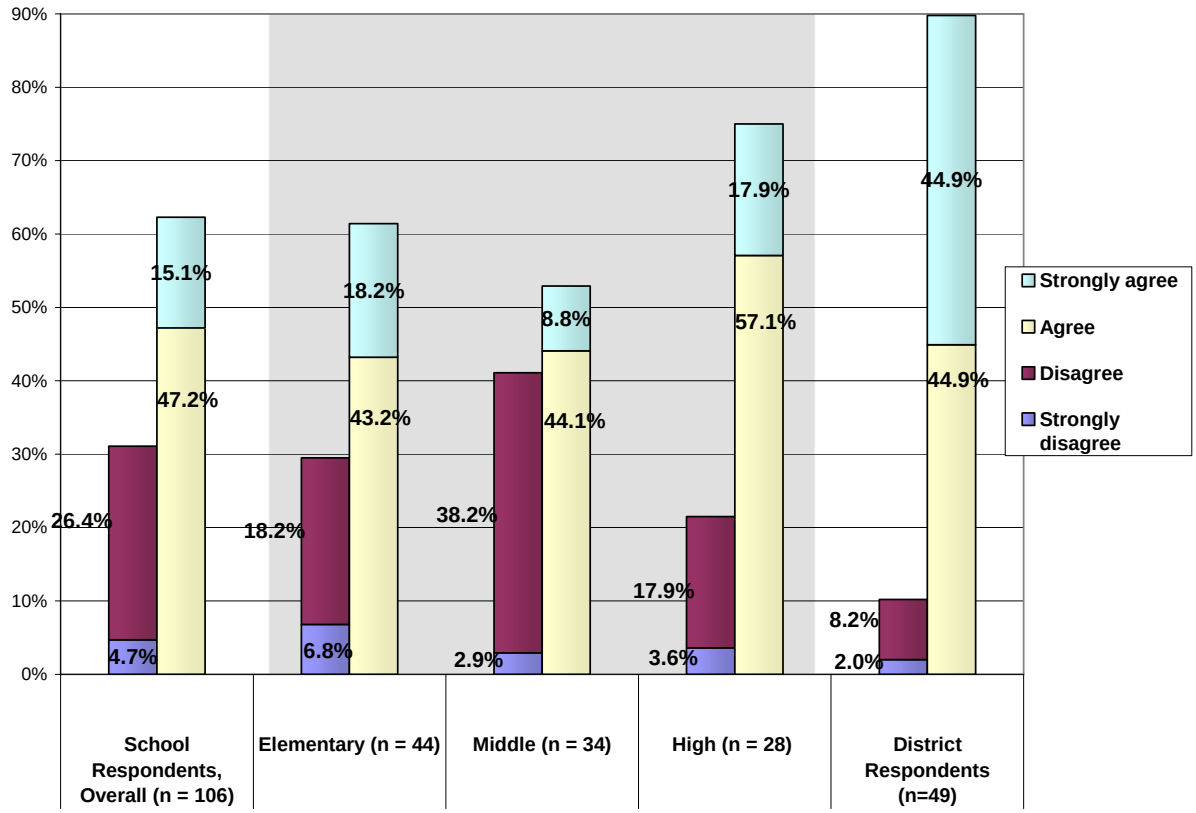
| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **The district sets clear, consistent goals for schools.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 1.9 | 12.3 | 47.2 | 33.0 | 5.7 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 2.3 | 11.4 | 43.2 | 36.4 | 6.8 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 0.0 | 11.8 | 55.9 | 26.5 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 3.6 | 14.3 | 42.9 | 35.7 | 3.6 |
| **District staff provide important information and expertise that supports our school improvement efforts.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 1.9 | 12.3 | 50.0 | 29.3 | 6.6 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 2.3 | 13.6 | 47.7 | 29.6 | 6.8 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 2.9 | 17.7 | 41.2 | 29.4 | 8.8 |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 3.6 | 64.3 | 28.6 | 3.6 |
| **The district's policies and procedures make it difficult for us to address the specific needs of students at our school.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 22.6 | 44.3 | 18.9 | 8.5 | 5.7 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 22.7 | 43.2 | 20.5 | 6.8 | 6.8 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 17.7 | 41.2 | 20.6 | 14.7 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 28.6 | 50.0 | 14.3 | 3.6 | 3.6 |
| **The district interferes with our ability to make important decisions at this school.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 21.7 | 47.2 | 16.0 | 8.5 | 6.6 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 20.5 | 47.7 | 13.6 | 9.1 | 9.1 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 14.7 | 52.9 | 17.7 | 8.8 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 32.1 | 39.3 | 17.9 | 7.1 | 3.6 |

In addition to the current district context, respondents were asked to consider district support over the duration of the grant period (i.e. between 2002-03 and 2006-07). About 62 percent of the school respondents believed that the district was a critical factor in improving student achievement over the past five years. While this seems a favorable reflection of district assistance, it is noteworthy that 30 percent of school respondents disagreed that the district had been a critical factor.

As depicted in Exhibit 4.14, twice as many middle school respondents disagreed that the district was a critical factor, in relation to high school respondents. While the discrepancy between district and school respondents appears substantial, the reader is reminded that these groups are not entirely comparable (e.g., there are schools for which we did not obtain a district survey, and vice versa). However, when limiting the analysis to respondents for which we obtained both school and district surveys, 65 percent of the school respondents believed the district was a critical factor, in relation to 88 percent of the district respondents, suggesting a considerable disconnect between these perceptions.

**Exhibit 4.14. School and district responses to "Over the past five years, the district was a critical factor in improving student achievement"**

Source: HPSGP School and District Surveys (AIR)




Aside from district expertise and guidance, districts provide other important support in the form of school-level personnel and non-personnel resources. Shown in Exhibit 4.15, while nearly 90 percent of the district respondents agreed that the district had provided adequate resources over this time period, this was true for only 64 percent of the school respondents. When limiting the analysis to schools for which we obtained both school and district surveys, the differences remain pronounced (89 percent versus 67 percent). Again, the largest school-level difference was between middle and high schools, where a quarter of the high schools and over 38 percent of the middle schools did not believe the district provided adequate resources.

**Exhibit 4.15. School and District Respondent Perceptions on District Provision of Adequate Resources over the Past Five Years**

Source: HPSGP School and District Surveys (AIR)

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Over the past five years, the district actively provided adequate resources** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 7.6 | 22.6 | 44.3 | 19.8 | 5.7 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 9.1 | 18.2 | 43.2 | 22.7 | 6.8 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 5.9 | 32.4 | 35.3 | 20.6 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 7.1 | 17.9 | 57.1 | 14.3 | 3.6 |
| District Respondents (n = 49) | 2.0 | 8.2 | 59.2 | 30.6 | -- |

It is important to clarify, however, some of the responses of the five districts that disagreed with the statement in Exhibit 4.15. One respondent indicated that the response was conditional on time, and that he would strongly agree that the district provided adequate resources in the last year and a half. Two respondents suggested that it was not necessarily that the resources were inadequate, but rather that HPSGP schools were not treated differently than other schools in the district – as one remarked, "They were not proactive with these schools. They didn't focus on these schools any more than any other schools."

However, case study respondents in Year 1 valued targeted services and supports provided by their district, such as the assignment of strong and proven leadership and instructional staff. Yet, such targeted actions were cited for schools in only two case study districts. At about a third of the other sites, principals, teachers, and sometimes students felt as if they were at a resource disadvantage relative 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.

Given that the HPSGP, like II/USP before it, focused on the lowest performing schools we wanted to explore whether districts prioritized these struggling schools in their allocation of resources. While we recognize that perceptions are not the best objective measure, respondent perceptions are shown in Exhibit 4.16 to complement some of actual personnel counts shown above and to more broadly measure differential resource level perceptions.

### Exhibit 4.16. School and District Perceptions of the Degree of Support in Personnel and Non-Personnel Resources over the Past Five Years

Source: HPSGP School and District Surveys (AIR)

| Over the past five years, do you believe that the central district has provided more, equal, or less support to your school in relation to other schools in each of the following areas? | Less Support | Equal Support | More Support | Don't Know | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Administrative or leadership staff** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 10.4 | 60.4 | 20.8 | 2.8 | 5.7 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 11.4 | 63.6 | 13.6 | 4.6 | 6.8 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 5.9 | 67.7 | 17.7 | 2.9 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 14.3 | 46.4 | 35.7 | 0.0 | 3.6 |
| District Respondents (n = 49) | 2.0 | 67.4 | 26.5 | 0.0 | 4.1 |
| **Instructional staff** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 14.2 | 64.2 | 12.3 | 2.8 | 6.6 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 15.9 | 63.6 | 6.8 | 4.6 | 9.1 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 11.8 | 70.6 | 8.8 | 2.9 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 14.3 | 57.1 | 25.0 | 0.0 | 3.6 |
| District Respondents (n = 49) | 0.0 | 63.3 | 32.7 | 0.0 | 4.1 |
| **Other support staff (e.g., teacher aides, custodians)** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 17.9 | 66.0 | 7.6 | 1.9 | 6.6 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 15.9 | 65.9 | 6.8 | 2.3 | 9.1 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 20.6 | 61.8 | 8.8 | 2.9 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 17.9 | 71.4 | 7.1 | 0.0 | 3.6 |
| District Respondents (n = 49) | 0.0 | 83.7 | 12.2 | 0.0 | 4.1 |
| **Equipment, supplies, and materials** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 11.3 | 62.3 | 17.0 | 2.8 | 6.6 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 15.9 | 61.4 | 11.4 | 2.3 | 9.1 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 5.9 | 61.8 | 20.6 | 5.9 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 10.7 | 64.3 | 21.4 | 0.0 | 3.6 |
| District Respondents (n = 49) | 0.0 | 77.6 | 18.4 | 0.0 | 4.1 |

Exhibit 4.13 shows that between 60 and 66 percent of the respondents from HP Only schools believed that the school received *equal* district support in terms of administrative, instructional, and other support staff and equipment, supplies, and materials. While 21 percent of the school respondents believed the district provided more support in terms of administrative or leadership staff, just 12 percent believed they had more instructional staff support. High school respondents were statistically significantly more likely than elementary school respondents to report more support for administrative and instructional staff.[66] About 18 percent of the HP Only school respondents perceived *less* district resources in the area of other support staff in relation to other schools in the district. With respect to non-personnel resources, an overall 17 percent believed their school received more equipment, supplies, and materials. With one exception, all district respondents felt that the district provided equal or more support across all four resource categories.

[66] Significant at the 5 percent confidence level. High school respondents also statistically significantly more likely than middle school respondents to report more instructional staff support (10 percent confidence level).

In summary, these perceptions suggests that – despite their participation in a program targeting the lowest performing schools in the state – the majority of HP Only schools did not receive differential district support in terms of administrative, instructional and support staff and non-personnel resources. In addition, about 10 to 15 percent of school respondents believed they were receiving less in these areas. It is also interesting to note the differences between school and district respondent perspectives on some of these measures. For example, while 14 to 18 percent of school respondents felt they had fewer instructional and support staff than other schools, no surveyed district administrator believed this. While perceptions can vary and are often inaccurate, even when wrong they can affect such factors as school morale and the degree to which schools feel supported in what can be difficult task to improve academic performance.

## *Role of the District in Personnel Issues*

As salaries and benefits make up 81 percent of total K-12 education expenditures, personnel are by far the most prominent school resource. This section explores the ways in which districts maintained and distributed staff, including fully credentialed teachers, to HP Only schools, and concludes with a brief review of district challenges in addressing personnel issues in lower performing schools

### District Support in Personnel Stability

> While a majority of surveyed school and district respondents reported that their district fostered a stable school administration, about a quarter disagreed.

The role of the district in leading efforts to place highly quality staff in HPSGP schools was explored in the Year 1 case studies. In response to the question of whether there were any specific efforts to allocate some of their strongest administrators and/or teachers to sites struggling the most academically, respondents from seven of the nine district offices involved in the case studies said they did not have such a program in place. An assistant superintendent conceded that while the district did not make a concerted effort to re-distribute teaching staff, which 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, the respondent asserted, "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 (including both case study and survey districts).

As we did not find much evidence of district practices to alleviate the turnover in the case study schools, we posed a survey question to assess whether districts helped maintain personnel stability across the larger sample of schools. There was an interesting degree of alignment between district and school survey respondents regarding district support in maintaining stable administration and instructional staff at HP Only schools. Across both school and district respondents, about a quarter did not believe that the district had assisted in fostering a stable school administration (Exhibit 4.17). Respondents from schools with two or more principals over the past five years were statistically significantly less likely to believe their district fostered a

stable administration, than those from schools with one principal.[67] In terms of instructional staff, about 28 percent of both respondent groups disagreed that the district supported stability. In explaining why they disagreed, district respondents generally noted that personnel attrition was a problem district-wide and not just for HPSGP schools.

### Exhibit 4.17 School and District Respondents' Perceptions of District Support in Maintaining Stable School Personnel

Source: HPSGP School and District Surveys (AIR)

| Over the past five years… | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **The district helped maintain a stable school administration in my school.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 3.8 | 19.8 | 49.1 | 20.8 | 6.6 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 0.0 | 22.7 | 43.2 | 27.3 | 6.8 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 5.9 | 17.7 | 47.1 | 20.6 | 8.8 |
| High (n = 28) | 7.1 | 17.9 | 60.7 | 10.7 | 3.6 |
| District Respondents (n = 49) | 4.1 | 22.5 | 30.6 | 36.7 | 6.1 |
| **The district helped maintain a stable teaching staff in my school.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 6.6 | 21.7 | 52.8 | 13.2 | 6.6 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 5.7 | 15.9 | 50.0 | 15.9 | 9.1 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 9.1 | 29.4 | 50.0 | 11.8 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 3.6 | 21.4 | 60.7 | 10.7 | 3.6 |
| District Respondents (n = 49) | 0.0 | 28.6 | 42.9 | 22.5 | 6.1 |

## Differential Policies for HPSGP and Lower Performing Schools

The vast majority of surveyed districts did not report policies for preferential treatment in staffing lower performing schools.

To further our understanding of the ways in which districts support staffing, the district survey asked respondents about district policies related to recruiting, retaining, and redistributing school administrators with demonstrated effectiveness and high quality teachers in lower performing schools. Similar to the case study findings, the majority of districts reported no preferential policies to foster retention or redistribution of high quality administrators or teachers in lower performing schools. However, about 20 percent of respondents said they did have such policies, and nearly a third of respondents said they had preferential recruiting policies for high quality teachers.

[67] About 68 percent of respondents from schools with two or more principals believed that the district fostered a stable administration, versus 89 percent of respondents from schools with one principal. This difference is statistically significant at the 5 percent confidence level.

**Exhibit 4.18 Incidence of District Policies on Recruiting, Retaining, and Redistributing Effective School Administrators and High Quality Teachers in Lower Performing Schools (n = 49)**

Source: HPSGP District Surveys (AIR)

| | Yes % | No % | Missing % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Recruiting school administrators with demonstrated effectiveness | 20.4 | 73.5 | 6.1 |
| Retaining school administrators with demonstrated effectiveness | 18.4 | 77.6 | 4.1 |
| Redistributing school administrators with demonstrated effectiveness | 22.5 | 71.4 | 6.1 |
| Recruiting high quality teachers | 32.7 | 59.2 | 8.2 |
| Retaining high quality teachers | 18.4 | 71.4 | 10.2 |
| Redistributing high quality teachers | 12.2 | 79.6 | 8.2 |

Five of the 49 surveyed districts without specific policies regarding effective school administrators contended that such strategies were not applicable, as all schools in the district were low performing, hence rendering preferential treatment moot. Others without policies noted that while there were no formal procedures, ad hoc processes were in place, or that district support through intensive training and competitive salaries made formal strategies unnecessary.

Districts with teacher policies commonly cited financial incentives for attracting teachers, particularly for hard-to-staff subjects such as math and science. Only two districts, representing nine HP Only schools, reported that HPSGP schools received priority in staffing assignments. Two others described strong professional development activities as a means to recruit and retain. While the survey question asked about differential policies that target lower performing schools specifically, four of the district respondents acknowledged that the existing policies applied to all schools, while two others noted that they pertained to all schools, with a focus on lower performing schools. Similarly, respondents from 14 districts without differential polices for staffing teachers asserted that such steps were not applicable, due to reasons such as the district's small size, all schools in the district were low performing, or all teachers were, by their definition, highly qualified.

In a subsequent section, we present some of the confounding factors perceived by districts in establishing preferential policies for staffing.

## Raising the Percentage of Fully Credentialed Teachers in HPSGP Schools

> Although more than half of districts with HP Only schools fell short of the program assurance that these schools would be at least at the district average percentage of fully credentialed teacher, the degree to which they missed this objective on average was very small.

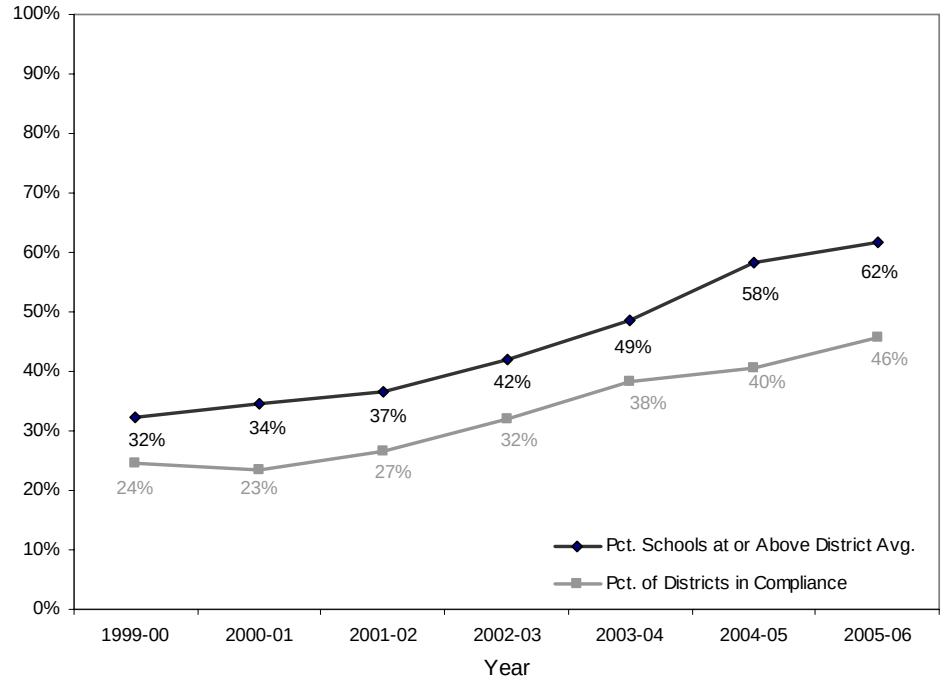
Included in the HPSGP application for the first cohort were a series of six assurances detailing specific actions with which districts must comply as participants in the program. One of the assurances charges districts to ensure that by the second year of HPSGP implementation, the percentage of fully credentialed teachers in participating schools will increase at least to the district average.[68] About 73 percent (n = 36) of the surveyed districts respondents were aware of

[68] 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

this HPSGP district assurance. Of those 36 respondents, 75 percent believed that they had met the target.

Using CBEDS data, Exhibit 4.19 displays the percentage of districts in which all HP Only schools[69] were at or above the average for their district regarding the percentage[70] of fully credentialed staff between 1999-2000 and 2005-06. While we observe a steady increase in this percentage, less than half of the districts were in full compliance with this assurance by 2005-06. The exhibit also shows the percentage of HP Only schools that were at least at the district average percentage of fully credential teachers; more than 60 percent of HP Only schools were at or above the district average in the last year shown. It is important to note that the gap between the HP Only schools and the district average in districts that did not meet this assurance is fairly small. As depicted in Exhibit 4.20, in the aggregate, HP Only schools in these districts were under the district average by just 1.2 percent in 2004-05, which shrunk to less than one-half percent in 2005-06.[71]

**Exhibit 4.19 Percentage of HP Only Schools and HPSGP Districts in which all HP Only Schools were At or Above the District Average Percent of Fully Credentialed Teachers, 1999-2000 to 2006-05**



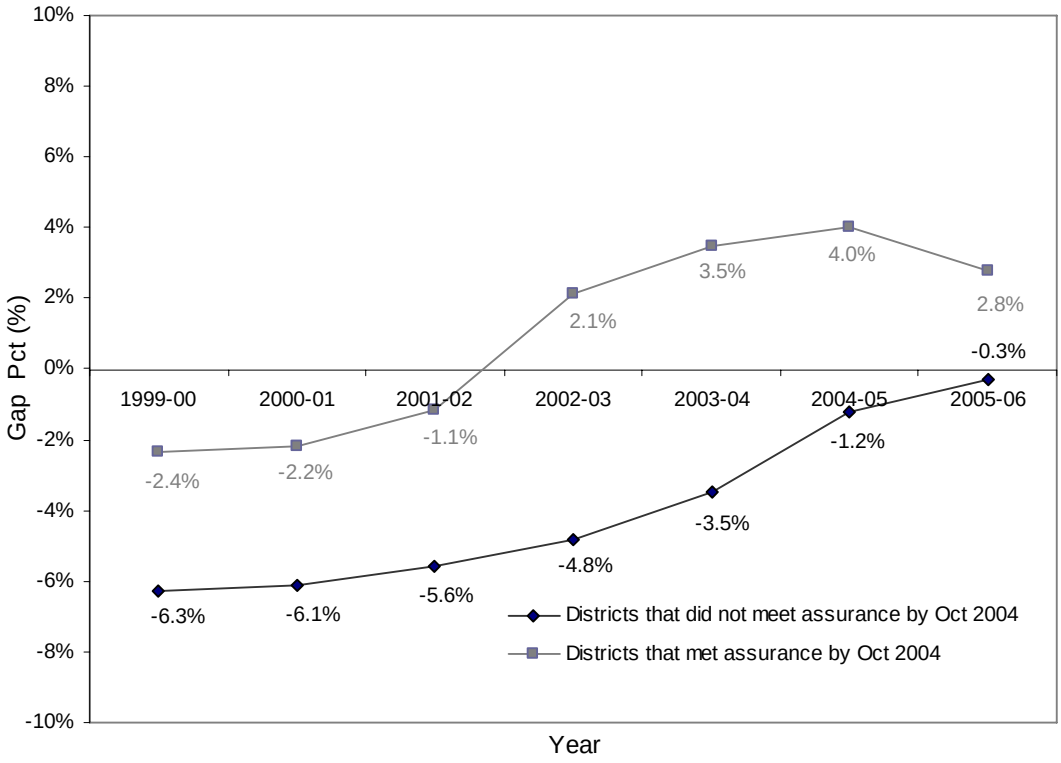

implementation, the percentage of fully credentialed and experienced teachers will increase at least to the district average. The increase after the first year of implementation will be at least one half of the total increase needed."

[69] The district percentage reflects 94 districts which had at least one HP Only school and for which there were CBEDS data for all seven years.

[70] 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.

[71] Exhibit 4.20 groups districts by whether they were in compliance with this assurance by October 2004, two years after the implementation of the HPSGP.

**Exhibit 4.20 Difference between the Percentage of Fully Credentialed Teachers in HP Only Schools and the District Average, in Districts Meeting and Not Meeting Compliance, 1999-2000 to 2005-06**




## District Challenges in Supporting Personnel in Lower Performing Schools

In describing reasons why there was a lack of targeted policies or limited district success in maintaining stable school-site personnel or increasing credentialed teachers, district respondents identified several challenges in recruiting and retaining personnel. Twenty percent of the surveyed districts with a general lack of preferential policies for lower performing schools reported that they had limited flexibility due to contractual and union issues. While 12 district respondents specifically reported no challenges in meeting the HPSGP district assurance relating to the percentage of fully credentialed teachers, 16 percent (n = 8) described the high level of teacher turnover as a confounding factor in reaching this goal. Conversely, five district respondents believed that turnover assisted the process, as it allowed the district to replace ineffective teachers. Contextual factors such as rural or remote location, challenging student population, or high cost of living made working in schools in ten districts unappealing, therefore hampering recruiting and retaining efforts. With a high percentage of highly qualified teachers in elementary schools, seven districts cited difficulties almost exclusively at the secondary level, particularly for math, science, and special education teaching positions.

## *Other Types of District Support*

Through the Year 1 case studies, we identified three key district practices that supported school improvement efforts: ongoing provision of student assessment data; professional development; and efforts to assign and maintain strong staff. However, because the prevalence of these practices were somewhat mixed in our limited case study sample, the school and district surveys attempted to gather information on these topics from a broader sample. As staff quality and stability were discussed above, this section reviews the results of survey items regarding district support in the areas of professional development and data systems on student achievement.

### Professional Development

Professional development was cited as an important and sometimes effective role for the district by approximately half the teachers on average across all district sites participating in the Year 1 case studies. While teachers 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.

The school and district surveys included questions about the role of the district in the provision of professional development; results are shown in Exhibit 4.21. On average, about 72 percent of all school types believed that their districts provided quality professional development opportunities for principals and teachers. High school respondents held a more favorable view of professional development for principals, with 82 percent believing that the district provided quality opportunities in relation to about 68 percent of the other school types. While perceptions on opportunities for teachers was fairly consistent across schools types, district respondents were more likely to believe that the district provided quality professional development for teaching staff.

**Exhibit 4.21. School and District Respondent Perceptions on District Provision of Professional Development**

Source: HPSGP School and District Surveys (AIR)

| Over the past five years… | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **The district provided quality professional development opportunities for principals.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 2.8 | 19.8 | 45.3 | 26.4 | 5.7 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 4.6 | 20.5 | 43.2 | 25.0 | 6.8 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 0.0 | 26.5 | 41.2 | 26.5 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 3.6 | 10.7 | 53.6 | 28.6 | 3.6 |
| District Respondents (n = 49) | 0.0 | 16.3 | 40.8 | 38.8 | 4.1 |
| **The district provided quality professional development opportunities for teachers.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 0.9 | 20.8 | 47.2 | 25.5 | 5.7 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 2.3 | 18.2 | 45.5 | 27.3 | 6.8 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 0.0 | 20.6 | 50.0 | 23.5 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 25.0 | 46.4 | 25.0 | 3.6 |
| District Respondents (n = 49) | 0.0 | 6.1 | 42.9 | 51.0 | -- |

### Data Systems

Ongoing assessments and use of data were cited as important elements in improving school academic performance in about half of the 16 case study schools in Year 1, and was specifically referenced in four of the nine districts. Case study school respondents in four districts described the ongoing assessments 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.

While all districts surveyed in Year 2 said that they currently had an on-going system in place to assess student performance, the extent to which the district provided useful support to schools in this domain over the past five years varied (Exhibit 4.22). About 71 percent of the surveyed school respondents and 86 of the districts believed that the district provided helpful on-going student achievement data and supported schools in data interpretation. Four of the five district respondents that disagreed noted that effective support from their district was only a recent trend. An overwhelming 84 percent of the surveyed district respondents were confident that the teachers were regularly using data to inform classroom instruction.

**Exhibit 4.22. School and District Respondent Perceptions on Student Achievement Data Systems**

Source: HPSGP School and District Surveys (AIR)

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Over the past five years, the district provided useful, on-going data on student achievement and assisted my school in interpreting the data.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 2.8 | 20.8 | 38.7 | 32.1 | 5.7 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 4.6 | 18.2 | 36.4 | 34.1 | 6.8 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 2.9 | 23.5 | 38.2 | 29.4 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 21.4 | 42.9 | 32.1 | 3.6 |
| District Respondents (n = 49) | 2.0 | 10.2 | 30.6 | 55.1 | 2.0 |
| **Teachers in my district regularly use data to inform classroom instruction.** | | | | | |
| District Respondents (n = 49) | 0.0 | 14.3 | 61.2 | 22.5 | 2.0 |

# Local School Boards

Just as schools and districts can work together to raise student achievement, districts can also forge supportive relationships with local school boards. Local school boards can play an important role in education governance and in effecting change in schools. Conversely, as was observed in two of the 16 case study schools, these relationships may also be dysfunctional and disruptive to school reform. The following section provides a brief overview of district

respondents' perceptions of the impact of their local school boards on school improvement efforts.

Exhibit 4.23 presents the perceived impact of the school board on the improvement efforts of the schools in the sampled districts. Over two-thirds of the 49 district administrators surveyed indicated that their boards facilitate school improvement efforts, while a smaller percentage (20 percent) reported they had no impact on school improvement efforts. While none characterized their boards as being a major impediment, 6 percent described the board as somewhat disruptive.

**Exhibit 4.23. District Respondents' Perceptions of Impact of the Local School Board (n = 49)**

Source: HPSGP District Surveys (AIR)

| | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Facilitated school improvement efforts | 33 | 67.3 |
| No impact on school improvement efforts | 10 | 20.4 |
| Somewhat disruptive | 3 | 6.1 |
| A major impediment to school improvement efforts | 0 | 0.0 |
| No response | 3 | 6.1 |

An interesting pattern is evident when comparing districts that described themselves has having clear cohesive goals and focused on school improvement and districts that reported they were in the process of developing school improvement goals. Suggestive of how school boards can contribute to an overall supportive environment, the vast majority of districts in the former group (88 percent) reported their board to have facilitated improvement efforts while less than half of the latter group (46 percent) described the board in the same manner.[72]

School boards identified as having a positive influence were often directly involved in decision-making, supported the hiring of qualified personnel, were informed of issues and progress, and/or committed fiscal resources to schools to support reform efforts. Thirty percent of the districts that described the boards as facilitating improvement highlighted their focus on and expectations for student achievement. One district administrator recalled, "They set a district goal of improving test scores and put the pressure on us.It was good; we need that." A few other districts cited the board's willingness to head to a new direction, their attentiveness to recommendations and staff needs, and their resolve to hold schools and the district accountable as some examples of ways the board assist with improvement efforts. In one particular case, the board gave the superintendent wide discretion in appropriately filling positions in the district. Some respondents indicated that the board's support was not always consistent. Five districts pointed out that their board assisted school improvement efforts for only part of the duration of the grant, primarily during the latter years.

Among the ten district administrators that reported no impact, two stated that the board was generally supportive but their efforts had no bearing on improvement efforts while another two described the board's involvement as fairly minimal. One district mentioned, "They don't interact with us at all. We are so large that unless there is a major decision to start or stop something, they just approve the money from grants when it comes in." While noting a high

[72] Significant at the 1 percent confidence level.

alignment between the board and the superintendent, another respondent said, “The local school board is not an entity that asks the tough questions.”

## Summary

This chapter provided information on the school and district context in which the HPSGP was implemented, with a particular focus on personnel capacity and the degree of district support. Although personnel levels and quality in HP Only schools do not appear to substantially differ from other schools, the fact that these schools serve more academically challenging student populations suggests that equal resources may not be sufficient for these schools. To meaningfully assist HP Only schools, districts may need to actively provide differential levels of support.

However, district support did not appear to be universal across the sample of HP Only schools, nor consistent across different types of support. The majority of HP Only school respondents did not report differential district support in terms of administrative, instructional, and support staff and non-personnel resources. In addition, the vast majority of surveyed districts reported no policies for preferential treatment in staffing lower performing schools. About a quarter of surveyed school and district respondents did not believe the district fostered a stable school administration or instructional staff. Survey evidence suggests that continuity of staff, particularly school leadership, is important for school reform coherence. For example, respondents in schools with two or more principals over the last five years were more than twice as likely to believe that the school improvement program lacked coherence in comparison to respondents in schools with one principal.

These contextual factors may have influenced the degree to which schools implemented the HPSGP, as well as enhance our understanding as to why we observed negligible program effect on student achievement. When interpreting the findings of the following chapter, which examines the implementation of specific HPSGP components, the reader should be mindful of this broader context.

# Chapter 5: Implementation of the HPSGP

## Introduction

Fidelity of program implementation – or conversely, breakdowns in the process – can affect the potential of the HPSGP to impact student outcomes. The groundbreaking work of Berman and McLaughlin (1978) dealing with change in educational organizations describes the difficulties associated with introducing and implementing change programs in schools. Berman and McLaughlin studied 293 American school change programs during the 1960s and 70s, and found that most of these programs, which had been developed by external bodies and "passed down" to the schools, were not well implemented at the local level.

### Key Findings

- **Sixty percent of survey respondents reported that a plan for school improvement figured prominently in their reform efforts. However, this impression does not correlate with measured academic gains.**
- **While nearly half of the school respondents described their external provider support as appropriate and effective, nearly 45 percent reported that the school did not use or did not know if the school used an external provider even though it was a program requirement.**
- **Although the HPSGP attempted to more clearly define the district role, over 40 percent of school respondents indicated that the district had not actively assisted them in the implementation of the program.**
- **The vast majority of HPSGP school respondents indicated an effective use of funds. However, half expressed concern about the number of years of the program, and nearly a third reported that the untimely arrival of funds did not allow appropriate planning and spending.**

Despite the design efforts underlying HPSGP and the considerable resources associated with this program, there is a lack of educationally significant impact of the program on student achievement. This chapter attempts to explore the extent to which breakdowns in program implementation may be contributing to these findings.

This chapter examines four fundamental elements of the implementation of the HPSGP: the development of the *Action Plan* with the assistance of an *External Provider*, *district participation* in the development, monitoring and implementation of the Action Plan, and the allocation and use of *supplemental state funds*. The findings presented in this chapter primarily draw upon the school survey results from HP Only schools, but are also informed by the district telephone surveys, the case study analyses conducted in Year 1 of this study, as well as other data sources such as the HPSGP expenditure files.

Before presenting the survey results pertaining to the HPSGP's components, consideration should be given to the respondents' level of understanding of the HPSGP. While the survey was targeted to the most knowledgeable person at the school site,[73] it was possible that respondents would have limited program awareness, given the level of turnover we had observed in the case study schools. Despite concerns (given high turnover levels) that few or no personnel with program-specific experience or knowledge remained in our surveyed schools, the survey results indicate a high degree of familiarity with the HPSGP. Just one survey respondent at each school level (i.e., elementary, middle, high) indicated that they were only "somewhat" familiar with the program. Although respondents, on average, professed knowledge of the program, the reader should be mindful that the survey results reflect individuals' perceptions, which may not accurately represent the views of the school overall.

The following sections explore in greater detail respondents' perspectives on the prominence of the Action Plan in school reform efforts, the appropriateness of the external provider, and the level of district HPSGP-related support. The chapter concludes with an in-depth examination of the HPSGP funding and expenditures, and discusses factors that limited schools' ability to leverage their funds to improve student achievement.

## Action Plan

Although more than 60 percent of all survey respondents reported that a plan for school improvement figured prominently in their reform efforts, this reported impression does not correlate with measured academic gains.

Each school's Action Plan lays out the framework for implementing change under the HPSGP. As described in the application, "The action plan will serve as a blueprint for the school and community to focus on raising student achievement to meet the school's academic growth targets." The *Education Code* (52055.620) provides specific guidelines for the development of this plan, which is to be research-based, include ongoing data gathering, and be grounded in the results from the initial needs assessment. With technical assistance from an outside expert knowledgeable about the challenges specific to low-performing schools (described further in the next section), HPSGP schools were required to address 14 dimensions of school improvement in the Action Plan. These dimensions included 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. (Please see Technical Appendix G for the full list of overarching guidelines and specific plan requirements.)

A general observation across the 16 case study schools visited during Year 1 of this evaluation was the lack of a current, distinct HPSGP Action Plan beyond the narrative that the school and/or district had submitted as part of the application process. While some respondents at nearly all of the case study site remembered some involvement in creating an HPSGP Action Plan, continuity of the plan was complicated by turnover – both among teachers and principals – at a majority of

[73] Principals were encouraged to seek the assistance of another staff person who is knowledgeable about the HPSGP.

the visited schools. As a result, relatively few of the respondents at these sites reported that they considered the Action Plan as still meaningful in guiding current practice at the school. However, the Action Plan reportedly actively guided reform efforts in a third of the case study schools. Even in these schools, however, it was sometimes noted that while the plan was still adhered to, it was not evolving.

At the same time, most of the case study schools did have some type of plan in place, particularly the Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). Given this, and as the HPSGP schools were expected to integrate the HPSGP Action Plan with their SPSA, the school survey for this evaluation posed a broader question to assess the degree to which the school was guided by any plan for improvement, which could include the SPSA or the HPSGP Action Plan.

Relative to the observations noted during the case studies, the survey results (shown in Exhibit 5.1) suggest that the plan for school improvement had greater relevance across this much broader array of HPSGP schools. Nearly 70 percent of the school respondents asserted a high degree of knowledge of the school's Action Plan (not shown in exhibit), and more than 60 percent described the plan as the "centerpiece for my school's improvement efforts." As described by one surveyed school respondent, "The Action Plan was the clout required to bring along all staff. The habits formed are invaluable to sustaining change at the school." Less than one-third indicated that the plan only partially guided their efforts. Four schools did not have an active plan, while two schools reported that they did not have a clear plan.

### Exhibit 5.1 Percentages of School Respondents by the Degree to which the School is Guided by a Plan for Improvement

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

| Which of the following best describes the extent to which your school has been guided by a plan for improvement over the past five years?* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | This plan has been the centerpiece for my school's improvement efforts and has actively guided all instructional decisions. | This plan has only partially guided my school's improvement efforts. | This plan has not played an active role in guiding my school's improvement efforts. | My school has not had a clear plan for improvement. |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 62.3 | 32.1 | 3.8 | 1.9 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 59.1 | 31.8 | 6.8 | 2.3 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 64.7 | 32.4 | 2.9 | 0.0 |
| High (n = 28) | 64.3 | 32.1 | 0.0 | 3.6 |

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)
* This plan could be the school's Single Plan for Student Achievement and/or the HPSGP Action Plan.

Despite the perceived importance of the plan as shown above, this impression does not correlate with academic gains by the respondent schools. That is, schools whose respondents described the plan as a centerpiece of their improvement efforts performed no differently on average than those schools indicating much less (or no) reliance on such a plan.[74] Furthermore, the performance

[74] For this exercise, we examined the proportion of schools that met their 2006 API schoolwide and comparable targets, as well as their average performance on the CST over the past five years (see Chapter 2 for further explanation of this grouping of higher and lower performers). No statistical differences were found between schools that described the plan as a centerpiece and other schools that did not describe the plan as a centerpiece.

levels of the group that perceived their plans as actively guiding their efforts were split fairly equally; roughly half of this group did not meet their 2006 API schoolwide and comparative growth targets, and the schools fell into nearly equal camps of higher and lower performers. This could suggest, among other things, that their perceptions of the plan may be overly confident, or that the plan does guide improvement efforts, but is not well-designed or sufficient for supporting gains in student achievement.

In addition, the open-ended survey responses[75] for four schools indicate the need for additional guidance in devising a strategic plan for reform. While some school respondents valued the flexibility of the grant and the ability to individualize it to their schools' needs, others expressed a desire to learn about and better understand effective practices. Two schools, in particular, noted that they were left to their own devices to identify areas for improvement and strategies:

> We were unable to 'copy' or use anyone else as a guide. The first few years we were left to 'flounder' on our own … I think many of the schools in this first round of schools fumbled for a while trying to figure out what to do, how to do it, etc. My district did the best they could with the few people it has to provide assistance.

> I don't feel we got the results we would have liked to have received. Once the grant was in operation, we learned from other schools some very innovative strategies that we would have liked to have known about before writing the grant. It might be a good idea if central office provides the schools with more suggestions or resources that are available. We do not want them to tell us what our school needs but we would like them to offer suggestions.

The desire for clearer guidance and greater access to learning opportunities was similarly expressed by district respondents. These respondents indicated that they did not always have answers for the schools and pointed to the need for more technical assistance to come from the state. About 20 percent of the 49 surveyed districts identified the limited knowledge available and guidance on effective school reforms as a weakness of the HPSGP. A generally reported sentiment was that while the intention of the program was clear, the way to reach the goals was not. For example, one district respondent noted, "There is always the need to clarify strategies. I know there is no silver bullet, but I wish there was more information available; a small clearinghouse to know where to go to see what is good. We've had a leg-up, but someone coming in cold might be lost at where to start and what to do."

[75] In response to the question, "What is the single most important improvement to the HPSGP that you would recommend to state policymakers?"

# External Provider

While nearly half of the school respondents described their external provider support as appropriate and effective, 44 percent of the surveyed respondents reported that the school did not use or did not know if the school used an external provider in the development of the Action Plan, even though it was a program requirement.

Under the overall HPSGP design, the research expertise and guidance in regard to best practice comes from an external provider, who at a minimum was expected to guide the school in the formulation of its Action Plan. Questions addressed in this section include the various types of entities serving in an external provider capacity, over what period of time, and with what degree of follow-up, as well as the extent to which schools perceived this assistance to be appropriate and effective.

In a significant departure from its precursor, the II/USP, the HPSGP allows entities other than state-approved External Evaluators to provide technical assistance in the development of the Action Plan. These other permitted entities for the first cohort of HPSGP schools included school district personnel, county offices of education, universities, or any other person or entity that has proven successful expertise specific to the challenges inherent in low-performing schools.[76]

Our case studies in Year 1 found considerable confusion regarding the external provider, 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 providers was either non-existent or negative across the vast majority of the 16 schools visited through this study. While a somewhat positive experience with the external provider was described at two sites, 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.

Under the HPSGP, the external provider 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 differential support appeared less clear cut. For one site, we interviewed the person listed on the application as the district external provider, who had no knowledge of this designation. Along with the considerable turnover in administrative and teaching staff, this may contribute to the general lack of knowledge observed across some of the visited schools.

The survey built on these case study findings to determine the level of provider support and perceptions of their effectiveness across a wider sample of HPSGP schools and districts. Relative to other program components, school respondents generally had a lower comprehension of the role and responsibilities of the external provider, with less than half of the surveyed schools describing their knowledge as thorough (see Technical Appendix F). Perhaps the more striking finding from the survey regarding external providers is that only 54 percent of the school respondents reported that their school had used an external provider to develop an Action Plan for the HPSGP application. This leaves 44 percent of responding schools that either did not use

[76] In the second cohort of HPSGP schools, the district was no longer permitted to serve as the external provider.

(34.0 percent) or did not know if the school used an external provider (10.4 percent), which is quite surprising given that this was a program requirement. One explanation may be that the district served in the role of the provider, but – as found in our case studies – that the schools were unaware that the district was performing this function.[77] Alternatively, it could relate to the lack of familiarity the respondent had regarding this program component. Respondents who reported that the schools used an external provider in the development of the plan were significantly more likely that have a thorough understanding of the roles and responsibility of the provider than those who reported no use or did not know.[78] While the degree of administrative turnover may influence some principal respondents' familiarity, principals were encouraged to draw upon other staff who were familiar with the program in completing the survey.[79]

Among those schools reporting use of a provider, the majority used either a private company or individual, as observed in Exhibit 5.2. There was more variation in the use of district and county offices of education (COE) as providers. Middle schools appear most likely to utilize the COE, while only elementary schools reported using the district office. It is important to note that four schools identified a provider type, even though they reported that the provider was not involved in the development of the Action Plan. This suggests that some schools tapped into external sources to assist with the implementation of the plan after its development.

### Exhibit 5.2. Types of External Provider Among School Respondents Reporting Use of a Provider

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

| | District Office | County Office of Education | Private Company | Private Individual |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 61)* | 6.6 | 21.3 | 55.7 | 16.4 |
| Elementary (n = 26) | 15.4 | 15.4 | 57.7 | 11.5 |
| Middle (n = 20) | 0.0 | 30.0 | 50.0 | 20.0 |
| High (n = 15) | 0.0 | 20.0 | 60.0 | 20.0 |

NOTE: "University" and "Other" were provided as options in the survey, but these were not reported.
* One high school did not provide a response. The total number of respondents for this survey item (n = 61) is slightly larger than the total number of schools that responded "Yes" to having an external provider help develop the action plan (n = 57). Four schools that responded "No" in the earlier table later identified an external provider type. One school that answered "Yes" did not provide a response.

Although the HPSGP does not require ongoing support from the external provider beyond the development of the plan, we were interested to what extent a longer term relationship was established. While schools working with an external provider reported an average of three years of involvement, the nature of that support appears to vary as shown in Exhibit 5.3. Elementary schools appear relatively less likely to have regular, ongoing support from their providers,

[77] As CDE does not maintain electronic records of entities serving as external providers, we were unable to test whether districts were the external provider in schools that reported no use of a provider, or did not know of this.
[78] About a quarter of the respondents who indicated that the school did not use a provider in the development of the Action Plan or did not know reported a thorough understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the external provider under the program, in relation to 63 percent of the respondents who indicated that the schools did use a provider. This difference is significant at the 1 percent confidence level.
[79] There were no statistically significant differences in how principals who had been at the school site for less than five years answered whether the school used an external provider, in comparison to those who had been at the site for five or more years.

whereas more than half of the middle schools reported a sustained relationship with regular interaction.

### Exhibit 5.3. Percentages of School Respondents Reporting the Use of a Provider by Level of Support beyond the Development of the Action Plan

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

| Which statement best describes the support your school received from the external provider after the development of an Action Plan (e.g., through an additional contract or arrangement)? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | After the Action Plan was approved, our involvement with the external provider ended. | The external provider provided limited follow-up assistance after the development of the Action Plan. | The external provider visited our school regularly to help us implement the Action Plan. |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 61)* | 13.1 | 42.6 | 44.3 |
| Elementary (n = 26) | 19.2 | 42.3 | 38.5 |
| Middle (n = 19) | 5.3 | 42.1 | 52.6 |
| High (n = 16) | 12.5 | 43.8 | 43.8 |

* This is based on school respondents who identified a provider type (n = 61). One middle school did not provide a response. The total number of respondents for this survey item (n = 61) is slightly larger than the total number of schools that responded "Yes" to having an external provider help develop the action plan (n = 57). Four schools that responded "No" in the earlier table later identified an external provider type.

The survey also prompted respondents (who reported using a provider) to indicate their level of agreement on a series of statements pertaining to the appropriateness of the external provider support; these results are presented in Exhibit 5.4. On average, school respondents held favorable views of them, with three-fourths or more of the 61 school respondents that identified a provider type (as shown Exhibit 5.2) agreeing or strongly agreeing that provider was critical to the development of the Action Plan; provided effective, appropriate support; understood the school context; and established rapport with school staff. However, school-level analyses reveal striking differences, with elementary school respondents more than twice (and in one case, five times) as likely to disagree on these points. The differences between school types are smaller on the issue of whether the provider spent adequate time in the school, with 70 percent overall agreeing. Nearly two-thirds of all respondents believed that the provider was a critical factor in improving student achievement, and 80 percent overall would recommend their provider to other schools. Again, however, the overall average masks substantial variation at the school level, as elementary school respondents were more than three times as likely *not* to recommend their provider.

### Exhibit 5.4. Percentages of Survey Respondents by their Perceptions of the Appropriateness of External Provider Support

Source: HPSGP School and District Surveys (AIR)

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | No answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **The external provider….** | | | | | |
| **a) Was critical to the development of the school's Action Plan.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 61) | 1.6 | 24.6 | 49.2 | 23.0 | 1.6 |
| Elementary (n = 26) | 3.9 | 38.5 | 30.8 | 26.9 | -- |
| Middle (n = 20) | 0.0 | 15.0 | 60.0 | 20.0 | 5.0 |
| High (n = 15) | 0.0 | 13.3 | 66.7 | 20.0 | -- |
| **b) Provided effective, appropriate support for my school.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 61) | 6.6 | 8.2 | 62.3 | 19.7 | 3.3 |
| Elementary (n = 26) | 11.5 | 11.5 | 53.9 | 23.1 | -- |
| Middle (n = 20) | 5.0 | 5.0 | 65.0 | 15.0 | 10.0 |
| High (n = 15) | 0.0 | 6.7 | 73.3 | 20.0 | -- |
| District Respondents (n = 39) | 0.0 | 20.5 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 12.8 |
| **c) Understood issues faced by our school.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 61) | 3.3 | 9.8 | 59.0 | 26.2 | 1.6 |
| Elementary (n = 26) | 3.9 | 23.1 | 50.0 | 23.1 | -- |
| Middle (n = 20) | 5.0 | 0.0 | 65.0 | 25.0 | 5.0 |
| High (n = 15) | 0.0 | 0.0 | 66.7 | 33.3 | -- |
| **d) Spent adequate time at our school to learn about our needs and challenges.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 61) | 6.6 | 21.3 | 55.7 | 14.8 | 1.6 |
| Elementary (n = 26) | 11.5 | 23.1 | 50.0 | 15.4 | -- |
| Middle (n = 20) | 5.0 | 20.0 | 55.0 | 15.0 | 5.0 |
| High (n = 15) | 0.0 | 20.0 | 66.7 | 13.3 | -- |
| **e) Established a good rapport with our faculty and staff.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 61) | 8.2 | 13.1 | 52.5 | 23.0 | 3.3 |
| Elementary (n = 26) | 11.5 | 19.2 | 46.2 | 23.1 | -- |
| Middle (n = 20) | 5.0 | 10.0 | 55.0 | 20.0 | 10.0 |
| High (n = 15) | 6.7 | 6.7 | 60.0 | 26.7 | -- |
| **f) Was a critical factor in improving student achievement at my school.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 61) | 8.2 | 23.0 | 54.1 | 11.5 | 3.3 |
| Elementary (n = 26) | 11.5 | 26.9 | 46.2 | 15.4 | -- |
| Middle (n = 20) | 5.0 | 15.0 | 65.0 | 5.0 | 10.0 |
| High (n = 15) | 6.7 | 26.7 | 53.3 | 13.3 | -- |
| District Respondents (n = 39) | 2.6 | 28.2 | 28.2 | 30.8 | 10.3 |
| **g) I would recommend this external provider to other schools.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 61) | 3.3 | 14.8 | 50.8 | 29.5 | 1.6 |
| Elementary (n = 26) | 3.9 | 26.9 | 38.5 | 30.8 | -- |
| Middle (n = 20) | 5.0 | 5.0 | 55.0 | 30.0 | 5.0 |
| High (n = 15) | 0.0 | 6.7 | 66.7 | 26.7 | -- |

NOTE: These statements were analyzed only for schools that identified an external provider type (n = 61). The total number of respondents for these survey items (n = 61) is slightly larger than the total number of schools that responded "Yes" to having an external provider help develop the action plan (n = 57). Four schools that responded "No" in the earlier table later identified an external provider type.

School respondents that reported the use of an external provider in the development of the Action Plan were statistically significantly more likely to describe their plan as actively guiding school improvement efforts than respondents that did not know or did not use a provider (75

percent to 47 percent). However, given the tenuous link between the Action Plan and student achievement in our surveyed schools, this finding should be interpreted with some caution. Furthermore, there were no statistically significant differences in academic growth between schools whose respondents reported effective support from their provider and all other surveyed schools.[80]

District telephone survey respondents who reported an awareness of their schools' external providers were also asked their impressions regarding two of the questions shown in the exhibit above. While two-thirds of the 39 district respondents who were familiar with the external providers generally agreed that the providers' support was effective and appropriate for HPSGP schools in their district, 20 percent indicated that this was not the case. Nearly 60 percent of the 39 district respondents indicated that they had found their external providers to be a critical factor in improving student achievement. (However, the 12 district respondents reporting that the external provider was not a critical factor represent nearly one-third (126) of HP Only schools.)

In districts that perceived the providers to be effective or a critical factor, respondents described the providers as knowledgeable and helpful in providing direction by identifying critical areas of need, building data capacity, and coaching. Four districts pointed to evidence of the ongoing impact of the providers' support. Commending the provider's comprehensive approach to staff development, one district noted, "Years later, we still see these activities happening in the school. They weren't a passing fad; teachers saw the value in them." The following quote from a district respondent provides one example of how the effective engagement of an external provider was perceived as a benefit to improvement efforts:

> Some of our principals are very new and as the external providers were well-versed and veteran educators, they could help the principal see some of the pitfalls they were getting into, identify effective practices, demonstrate classroom walk-throughs. The external providers provided a coaching role. They were there consistently (about 3 times a month) and were committed to the schools.

District respondents who disagreed with the usefulness of the external providers did not seem to contest the value of external expertise, but rather questioned the quality and actions of particular providers. In providing reasons for the low opinion of the provider, one district administrator described the experience as demoralizing, because the provider blamed the staff and did not recognize the challenges of working in a very rural and impoverished area. Three districts were critical of the disconnect with district goals and efforts, with one noting, "It ended up making the school more dysfunctional because they were following what the provider was saying rather than working collaboratively [with the district]."

In a district with six HPSGP schools, the respondent reported general consensus among their participating schools that the providers were not worth the investment: "All our schools were complaining about paying somebody $20,000 to come in three times a year, shake their hand, and say, 'Hey, how are things going?' They really had problems with the providers because they didn't see them, and they didn't really get anything in return except paperwork when reporting

[80] "All other schools" include schools whose respondents did not report effective support and schools whose respondents reported no provider or did not know if a provider was used.

time came." Another district respondent lamented the lack of longevity in the reforms and quality control, noting that the competent providers already had full caseloads which opened the doors for people who had not been previously approved.

In summary, the survey responses regarding the value of external providers appear somewhat more positive than what was reported through the case study analysis. This discrepancy may be due to different respondents (with the case studies relying on responses from a broad array of participants as opposed to school surveys completed primarily by principals) as well as the much larger number of survey respondents. However, the fact that nearly half of the survey respondents indicated that they had not used or did not know about the school's external provider likely contributes to the difference in positive perceptions. As the use of an external provider was a program requirement, it likely suggests that the provider did not play a prominent role.[81] Where the provider had an impact and was successful, the memory may linger longer than in the case of one providing minimal and perhaps largely ineffective services.

At best, these results regarding the perceived usefulness of external provider assistance appear quite mixed. Clearly for some schools, the external provider was perceived as effective. These findings seem to suggest that an external provider to the school reform process could be quite helpful when a good one could be found. It seems this was not always easy, as articulated by respondents who expressed a need to know more about how to best select the providers. As one asserted, "I think we would have gotten where we are now much faster if we had a plan and were given some advice about who were the external providers who could get the job done." A school respondent in a different district corroborated this response, "We used a total of three different external evaluators/consultants, which caused a two year delay in determining and supporting the most effective course of action."

## District Support under the HPSGP

Although the HPSGP attempted to more clearly define the district role, over 40 percent of school respondents indicated that the district had not actively assisted them in the implementation of the program.

In another change from the II/USP, the HPSGP more clearly defined the district's role in school improvement by requiring their participation in the development of the Action Plan and a district monitoring component. According to the program application guidelines, after approval of the Action Plan developed in partnership with the school site council, the school and district administration are responsible for its timely and effective implementation. Participating districts are also required to maintain all fiscal records and submit annual data on various elements of the program.

While earlier in this report we presented survey results on the wider district context during the grant period, here we focus on the district's support specifically in relation to the program:

[81] One argument might be that the respondents who reported that the school did not use an external provider in the development of the Action Plan or that they did not know were not present at the start of the program. However, the responses of respondents who had been at the school for five or more years were similar to the overall average (56 percent said the school used an external provider, 33 percent said no, and 8 percent did not know).

development of the Action Plan and program implementation (see Exhibit 5.5). More than two-thirds of the surveyed schools believed that the district provided sufficient support in developing the Action Plan, whereas a smaller percentage (57 percent) agreed that the district actively assisted in the implementation of the program. High school respondents were more likely than other school types to have a favorable view of the district's support in the planning, but less likely in implementation. However, there were no statistically significant differences in academic growth between schools whose respondents reported that the district actively assisted in program implementation and schools whose respondents did not report this support.

**Exhibit 5.5. Percentages of Survey Respondents by their Perceptions of District Support Specific to the HPSGP**

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | No answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **The central district provided sufficient support in the development of the HPSGP Action Plan.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 3.8 | 24.5 | 51.9 | 12.3 | 7.6 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 9.1 | 22.7 | 40.9 | 15.9 | 11.4 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 0.0 | 35.3 | 52.9 | 5.9 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 14.3 | 67.9 | 14.3 | 3.6 |
| **The central district actively assisted in the implementation of the HPSGP.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 6.6 | 32.1 | 41.5 | 13.2 | 6.6 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 11.4 | 22.7 | 40.9 | 15.9 | 9.1 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 5.9 | 35.3 | 47.1 | 5.9 | 5.9 |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 42.9 | 35.7 | 17.9 | 3.6 |

Note: Charter school responses were re-coded as "missing."

Although these data indicate that a majority of school respondents found district support under the HPSGP to be generally sufficient, the perceived lack of sufficient district support reported by 30 percent of school respondents in regard to development of the Action Plan and 40 percent in regard to HPSGP implementation suggest an important source of implementation breakdown in these schools.

While districts are charged with maintaining fiscal records and – along with the school – ensuring the program's implementation, some school respondents leveled criticism at how the districts fulfilled these duties. As discussed in more detail later in this chapter, eight surveyed schools explicitly identified the district as a constraining factor in using the HPSGP funds to effect change. Evidence from our case studies and surveys indicate that the degree of district involvement in regards to monitoring and oversight varied substantially. Some districts acted as strong central authorities, meticulously approving and denying funds for very specific purposes, while others were more hands-off allowing schools more flexibility in their spending. An indicator of district involvement, as of June 2007, nearly 60 percent of the districts with HP Only schools still had not submitted 2005-06 data for all of their HP Only schools, which resulted in missing data for well over a third of these schools.

Among the eight surveyed district respondents who noted the need for more state guidance when asked about their most pressing concerns in regard to HPSGP implementation, two explicitly mentioned a lack of clarity around district responsibilities under this program. As one described, "We did not know the expectations until well after the grants were implemented in terms of what were the expectations, monitoring, or exiting [criteria]. Everything came after the fact and not part of the original grant application process." Confusion regarding the district role, however, may have been an artifact of moving from the II/USP to the HPSGP, or trying to support schools in both programs with different requirements. The other district respondent also noted the absence of follow-up regarding the annual reports, "We've submitted reports for four years now, and there was never any feedback. We're not sure if we're doing the right thing or if we don't receive feedback because we're doing okay. So we try to base it on ourselves whether things are working or not." While feedback on the Annual Report is not required by the HPSGP legislation, this comment nonetheless points to a district desire for more communication and guidance from the state.

Concerns regarding district support of school reform efforts were a theme of both evaluations of the II/USP, the predecessor to the HPSGP, perhaps leading to the more specific delineation of the district role and responsibilities in regard to the HPSGP. However, uniformity of district support appears to be a continuing problem in regard to the state's school reform efforts. One surveyed school respondent, who strongly disagreed that the district actively assisted in the implementation of the program, emphasized the need for district support:

> School improvement is only as good as the people carrying out the reform. Funding is a critical part of that picture, but it is not the only part. A lot of money given without supports in place to help the people who are charged with carrying out the plan for improvement is bound to fail. Having experience the reform at my school for the past five years, I have found that the support of the district in the reform movement is critical. The district must be actively involved in the reform that is expected to happen at the school site level. Without a deep knowledge of the plan for each school, the district can get in the way of the plan being implemented the way it is intended.

## HPSGP Funding

This section covers overall funding issues and spending patterns for the HP Only schools participating in the Year 1 survey, drawing also upon data on expenditures for all HP Only schools. It also explores the degree to which HP Only schools carried over unspent program funds, and concludes with an examination of annual available funding per student given the carry-over and changes in school enrollment.

## *Funding Overview*

Although the vast majority of HPSGP school respondents indicated an effective use of funds, half expressed concern about the number of years of the program, and nearly a third reported that the untimely arrival of funds did not permit appropriate planning and spending.

The infusion of fiscal resources is a significant component of the HPSGP, allowing schools to implement the Action Plan and recommendations made by the external providers. As described in the report's introduction, participating schools were provided $400 per student in implementation funds based on their 2000-01 enrollments.[82] Exhibit 5.6 below displays the total, per school, and per student amounts awarded each year. Over the course of four implementation years, the state awarded a total of $542 million dollars to HP Only schools, averaging $1.6 million per school and $1,511 per student.[83]

### Exhibit 5.6. Total Money Awarded to HP Only Schools, 2002-03 to 2005-06

Source: CDE HPSGP Expenditure Files 2002-03 through 2005-06**.**

| | 2002-03 (n = 338) | 2003-04 (n = 349) | 2004-05 (n = 349) | 2005-06 (n = 347) | **Four Year Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Funds to all HP Only Schools | $113,567,920 | $146,779,280 | $144,687,488 | $136,760,560 | $541,795,248 |
| Average Per School* | $336,000 | $434,258 | $428,069 | $404,617 | $1,602,945 |
| Average Per Student* | $310 | $397 | $402 | $401 | $1,511 |

* Year-specific enrollments for schools with non-missing values from the expenditure files were used to calculate these values. In 2002-03, schools were provided with 80 percent of the full implementation amount of $400 per pupil. This is why Exhibit 5.1 displays an average per pupil award amount of $310 – approximately 80 percent of the full $400 amount.

The vast majority of respondents participating in the school survey indicated that the HPSGP funding amount was appropriate, used effectively and gave them access to new opportunities (Exhibit 5.7, rows a-c). However, other factors, namely a limited spending timeframe, uncertainty in the delivery of funds and unclear instructions around funding provisions appear to have tempered the potential impact of the funds in approximately a third of the responding schools (Exhibit 5.7, rows d-f). About half the school respondents disagreed with the statement that the longevity of the funds aligned well with improvement efforts, while approximately one-third disagreed that the funding was timely and the provisions clear.

For the majority of these items there was consistency across school types. However, in comparison to the overall average, a greater percentage of high schools considered the funds timely and a smaller percentage of elementary schools perceived the funding provisions to be clear. The fact that 93 percent of the surveyed high schools versus 45 and 63 percent of the elementary and middle schools, respectively, are on traditional calendars may help explain these trends – evidence presented in the following sections suggests that school calendar and the perception of funding timeliness may be related.

[82] In 2002-03, schools were provided with 80 percent of the full implementation amount of $400 per pupil. This is why Exhibit 5.1 displays an average per pupil award amount of $310 – approximately 80 percent of the full $400 amount.

[83] After the 2004-05 school year, seven HP Only schools were identified for SAIT. These schools received the final 20 percent of the HPSGP funds in 2005-06.

District respondents were less confident than school respondents about the effectiveness of the use of funds – 70 percent of district respondents compared to 98 percent of school respondents agreed that the funds were used effectively. When questioned about the timing of the funds, about 60 percent of district respondents acknowledged that the funds were received in a timely manner. However, about a quarter of district respondents supported school claims that they experienced some level of delay or uncertainty with the delivery of funds.

### Exhibit 5.7. School Perspectives on Funding under the HPSGP

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

| | Strongly disagree / Disagree (%) | Agree/ Strongly Agree (%) | No answer (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **a) The HPSGP funds permitted the school to invest in strategies that otherwise would not have been possible.** | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 4.7 | 95.3 | -- |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 4.5 | 95.5 | -- |
| Middle (n = 34) | 5.9 | 94.1 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 3.6 | 96.4 | -- |
| **b) The HPSGP funds were used effectively in my school** | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 1.9 | 98.1 | -- |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 2.3 | 97.7 | -- |
| Middle (n = 34) | 2.9 | 97.1 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 100.0 | -- |
| **c) The amount of money received through the HPSGP seemed appropriate for my school's improvement efforts** | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 13.2 | 86.8 | -- |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 11.4 | 88.6 | -- |
| Middle (n = 34) | 11.8 | 88.2 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 17.9 | 82.1 | -- |
| **d) The number of years of funding under the HPSGP seemed appropriate for my school's improvement efforts.** | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 48.1 | 51.9 | -- |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 50.0 | 50.0 | -- |
| Middle (n = 34) | 44.1 | 55.9 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 50.0 | 50.0 | -- |
| **e) We received the HPSGP funds in a timely manner that enabled appropriate planning and spending.** | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 34.9 | 64.2 | 0.9 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 38.6 | 61.4 | -- |
| Middle (n = 34) | 38.2 | 61.8 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 25.0 | 71.4 | 3.6 |
| **f) The HPSGP funding provisions (e.g. carry-over) were clear.** | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 31.1 | 67.9 | 0.9 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 34.1 | 63.6 | 2.3 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 29.4 | 70.6 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 28.6 | 71.4 | -- |

## *Carry-Over of Funds*

Approximately one-quarter of HPSGP funds program-wide were carried over each of the four implementation years.

Under the HPSGP, schools were allowed to carry over unexpended grant funds. According to guidelines in the HPSGP application, carry-over was allowable for 2002-03 through 2004-05 only. In 2005-06, the final year of the grant, carry-over was not allowed. However, late in the 2005-06 school year, the CDE rescinded this policy.

Exhibit 5.6 shows that as of the end of 2005-06, a total of $55 million in HPSGP funds remained unused, averaging $158,458 per school and $161 per student. Due to previous carry-over amounts, schools were carrying over increasingly more each year of the program. By the end of Year 4, approximately 8 out of every 10 HP Only schools had spent less of the grant than they received. Schools used 73 percent of the available HPSGP money and carried over 27 percent over the duration of the grant. By 2005-06, due to the accumulation of unspent funds from prior years, the typical HP Only school had at their disposal the equivalent of one and a half times the value of their annual award.

**Exhibit 5.8. Total Money Carried Over by HP Only Schools, 2002-03 to 2005-06**

Source: CDE HPSGP Expenditure Files 2002-03 through 2005-06.

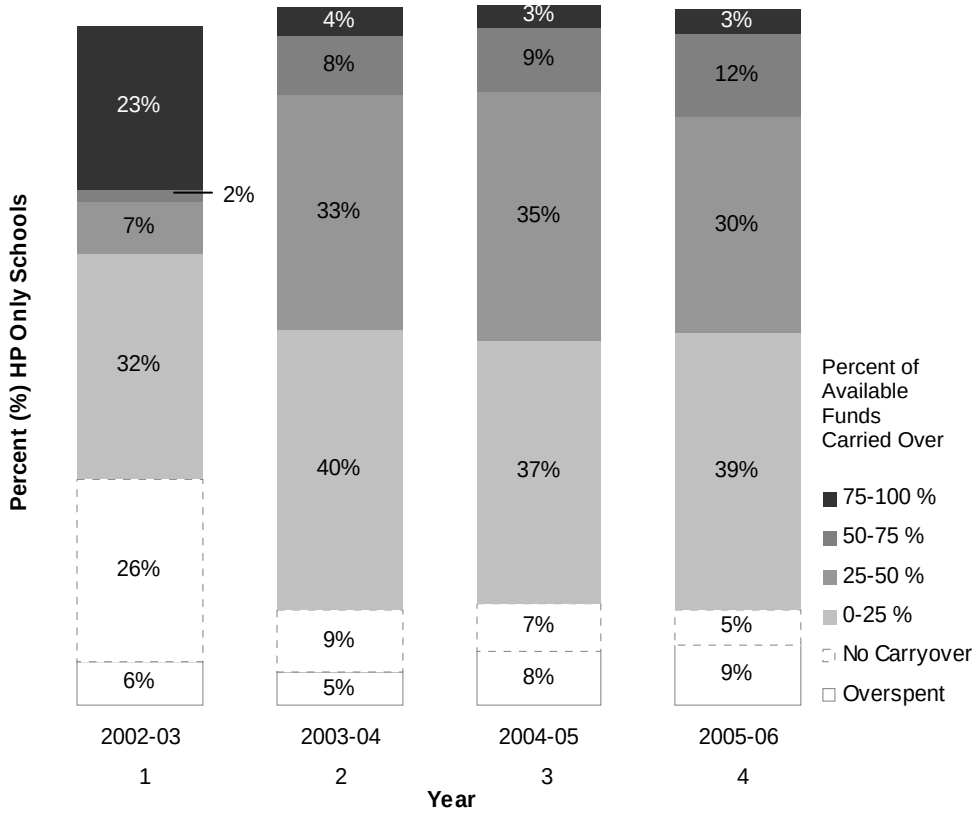
| | 2002-03 (n = 338) | 2003-04 (n = 348) | 2004-05 (n = 348) | 2005-06 (n = 347) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Carry-Over across all HP Only Schools | $28,792,182 | $47,590,252 | $52,622,548 | $54,985,024 |
| Average Per School | $85,184 | $136,754 | $151,214 | $158,458 |
| Average Per Student | $79 | $129 | $147 | $161 |

* Year-specific enrollments for schools with non-missing values from the expenditure files were used to calculate these values.

Exhibit 5.9 below displays the distribution of HP Only schools by the percentage range of available funds carried over during the implementation period. The distribution in Year 1 (2002-03) is striking in comparison to subsequent years given the relatively higher percentage of schools with carry-over levels between 75 – 100 percent of their award (26 percent versus 3 percent in following years). As it turns out, 80 percent of the schools in the largest carry-over category in Year 1 were schools that applied late and were funded towards the end of the 2002-03 school year. Given that most could not spend the money until Year 2, schools receiving the second round of funding reported carry-over levels near or at 100 percent of their available funds. If you consider only schools funded with first round funding in Year 1, three quarters carried over less than 25 percent of their available funds.

**Exhibit 5.9. Distribution of HP Only Schools by Percent of Available Funds Carried Over, 2002-03 to 2005-06 (N = 351)**

Source: CDE HPSGP Expenditure Files 2002-03 through 2005-06.




Over time, the percentage of schools without carry-over or carrying over less than 25 percent of their available funds declines from 58 to 44 percent. The percentage of schools carrying over more than 25 percent of their funds increases after the first year from 32 to 46 percent, but remains more or less constant in subsequent years. Only six HP Only schools fully spent the entire value of the HPSGP award each year of the program.

These observations raise important questions about the underlying conditions influencing how schools used the money: was the HP funding amount commensurate with the real needs of HP schools? Were there structural or systemic factors associated with program implementation that prevented HP schools from maximizing the use of the money? Was carry-over a strategic decision that benefited the school in some way? And finally, was carry-over an indicator of an incoherent spending plan among HP schools? These questions will be explored further in the following section that assesses factors limiting the use of the HPSGP funds — in many cases – carry-over was a meaningful indicator of deeper issues affecting how schools could spend the money.[84]

[84] Based on our survey sample of 106 schools, there were no statistically significant differences in academic growth on the CST between schools that carried over less then 25 percent and those that carried over 25 percent or more.

## *Re-visiting HPSGP Funding Levels*

As we have already seen, the criteria used by the state to identify the award amounts delivered to program participants was designed so that each school would receive a uniform amount every year – $400 per pupil based on the 2000-01 enrollment of the school. If we take enrollment changes from year to year, as well as carry-over into account, however, the actual award amount per pupil available to HPSGP schools becomes more varied each successive year of the program. To understand why, consider a school with 100 students in 2000-01 that carries over 25 percent of its HP funds and loses 10 percent of its students each year. In Year 1 of the program, this school would have received $400 per student or $40,000 in total. If 25 percent is carried over, the amount available in Year 2 increases to $500 per student. If this school loses 10 students, the actual per student amount in Year 2 is $555 per student. This is an example of what happened over the course of the HPSGP implementation period for a number of HP Only schools. Not only did the intensity of the funds increase over time on average (due both to carry-over and an overall decline in enrollment of 6 percent between 2000-01 and 2005-06) but there was much more variation between schools in terms of the amount of HP funds per-pupil they actually had available to spend in a given year. Exhibit 5.10 illustrates how changes in enrollment and carry-over affected the actual per-pupil awards for HP Only schools.

**Exhibit 5.10. Total Award per Pupil HP Only Schools, 2002-03 to 2005-06**

Source: CDE HPSGP Expenditure Files 2002-03 through 2005-06, CBEDS SIF Files 2000-01 through 2005-06.

| | Year 1<br>2002-03<br>(n = 338) | Year 2<br>2003-04<br>(n = 349) | Year 3<br>2004-05<br>(n = 349) | Year 4<br>2005-06<br>(n = 347) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(1) HPSGP Award** | | | | |
| a. Per Pupil Based on 2000-01 Enrollment | $312 | $403 | $398 | $376 |
| b. Per Pupil Based on Year-Specific Enrollments | $310 | $397 | $402 | $401 |
| **(2) Total Available HPSGP Funds (Award plus Carry-over)** | | | | |
| a. Per Pupil Based on 2000-01 Enrollment | $312 | $480 | $531 | $521 |
| b. Per Pupil Based on Year-Specific Enrollments | $310 | $472 | $538 | $555 |

Comparing rows (1a) and (1b) of Exhibit 5.10 reveals the impact of actual enrollment changes on the per student award amount. For the first two years of the program (when total enrollment in HP Only schools exceeded the enrollment in 2000-01), per student funding amounts were actually lower than the amount stipulated by the program. In 2003-04 and 2004-05, however, enrollment in HP schools relative to 2000-01 declined by 1 and 6 percent respectively resulting in larger per student funding amounts. Comparing rows (1a) and (2b) shows the combined impact on per student funding when both enrollment changes and carry-over are taken into account. After 2002-03, as carry-over funds were rolled into the yearly grant awards, actual per student funding amounts were substantially greater than the $400 per student stipulated by the program. In 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06, the per-student dollars added due to carry-over (the difference between rows (2b) and (1b)) was $75, $136 and $154, respectively.

In summary, HPSGP survey respondents reported that the funding received under this program was very instrumental to their school improvement efforts. Most also felt the amount of funding was sufficient to their needs. Only about half of the respondents reported the number of years to be sufficient in their opinion, and about one-third expressed concerns about the timeliness of the

arrival of these funds and confusion in regard to allowable carry-over. We further observe considerable variation in available funding, due to changes in enrollment and carry-over.

# Spending HPSGP Funds

Spending on personnel was reported as the most common as well as the most effective use of HPSGP funds.

School expenditures were guided in principle by the Action Plan: "Once the Action Plan is developed and implemented, expenditures must support the activities and strategies contained in the approved action plan and proposed budget." These fairly open-ended spending guidelines may partly explain the relatively lower understanding of the uses of the HP funds among surveyed school respondents and varying degrees of district involvement with regards to overseeing expenditures.

As shown in Exhibit 5.11 below, of the $542 million awarded through 2005-06, schools spent $487 million in total – averaging $1.4 million per school and $1,361 per student. The remaining $55 million in unused funds (due to under spending – particularly in the first two years) was carried over into 2006-07 and had to be spent by the end of that school year. In fact, across all four years, 73 percent of the total available HPSGP funds (award plus any carry-over from prior years) were used - the remaining funds were carried over; a closer look at the reported reasons for carry-over follows later in this section.

**Exhibit 5.11. Total Money Spent by HP Only Schools, 2002-03 to 2005-06**

Source: CDE HPSGP Expenditure Files 2002-03 through 2005-06.

| | 2002-03 (n = 338) | 2003 -04 (n = 347) | 2004 -05 (n = 348) | 2005-06 (n = 347) | **Four Year Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Spent | $84,775,736 | $126,731,768 | $140,695,728 | $134,467,456 | $486,670,688 |
| Average Per School | $250,816 | $374,946 | $416,260 | $397,833 | $1,439,854 |
| Average Per Student | $232 | $343 | $392 | $394 | $1,361 |

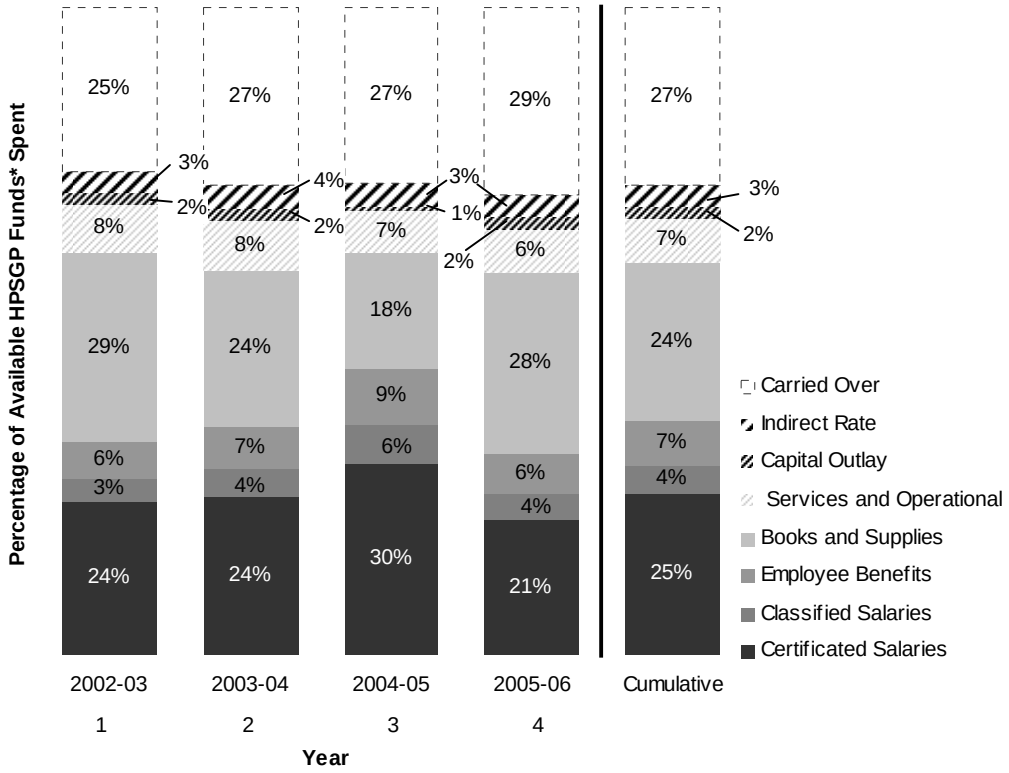
* Year-specific enrollments for schools with non-missing values from the expenditure files were used to calculate these values.

As part of the monitoring component, districts were required to submit year-end expenditure reports for each individual HP school, which specified the amount of program funds spent on the following categories: Certificated Salaries; Classified Salaries; Employee Benefits; Books and Supplies; Services and Operating; Capital Outlay; and Indirect Cost. Exhibit 5.12 details the average distribution of HPSGP expenditures across these categories per year among all HP Only schools.

Across all years, investment in certificated salaries and books and supplies were the largest expenditure categories, each absorbing a little under a quarter of the available HPSGP funds. Spending on employee benefits and services and operational expenditures followed, each averaging about 7 percent of available funds. The smallest expenditures were on indirect rate (expenditures associated with administration, budgeting, payroll and other program management costs) and capital outlay (expenditures associated with acquiring land, purchasing buildings, improving school sites or expanding libraries).

**Exhibit 5.12. Average Spending Profile among HP Only Schools (N = 351)**

Source: CDE HPSGP Expenditure Files 2002-03 through 2005-06.




*Available Funds are defined as Yearly HPSGP Award Amount plus funds carried over from the previous year.

Tracking spending over time reveals some interesting trends, namely the growing percentage of available funds spent on personnel (certificated salaries, classified salaries and employee benefits) and the diminishing pattern of expenditures on books and supplies over the first three years of the program. The underlying cause for this trend is likely associated with requirements built into state law (as a result of the Williams Settlement) mandating the state to ensure that students have up to date instructional materials that are aligned with State Board approved academic and content standards.

The HPSGP application required schools that had not "already adopted or purchased appropriate SBE adopted or aligned materials" to do so "immediately" using HPSGP funds. The relatively larger initial investment in books and supplies indicates schools potentially prioritizing compliance with the law in Year 1. Once this requirement was met, it appears funds were freed for other priorities such as spending on personnel-related activities. In Year 4 (2005-06), spending on certificated salaries dropped by 9 percentage points and spending on books and supplies increased by 10 percentage points. Evidence suggests that this decline may be associated with the interplay between uncertainty, late arrival, and carry-over policy related to Year 4 funds (these circumstances will be discussed in more detail in the following section).

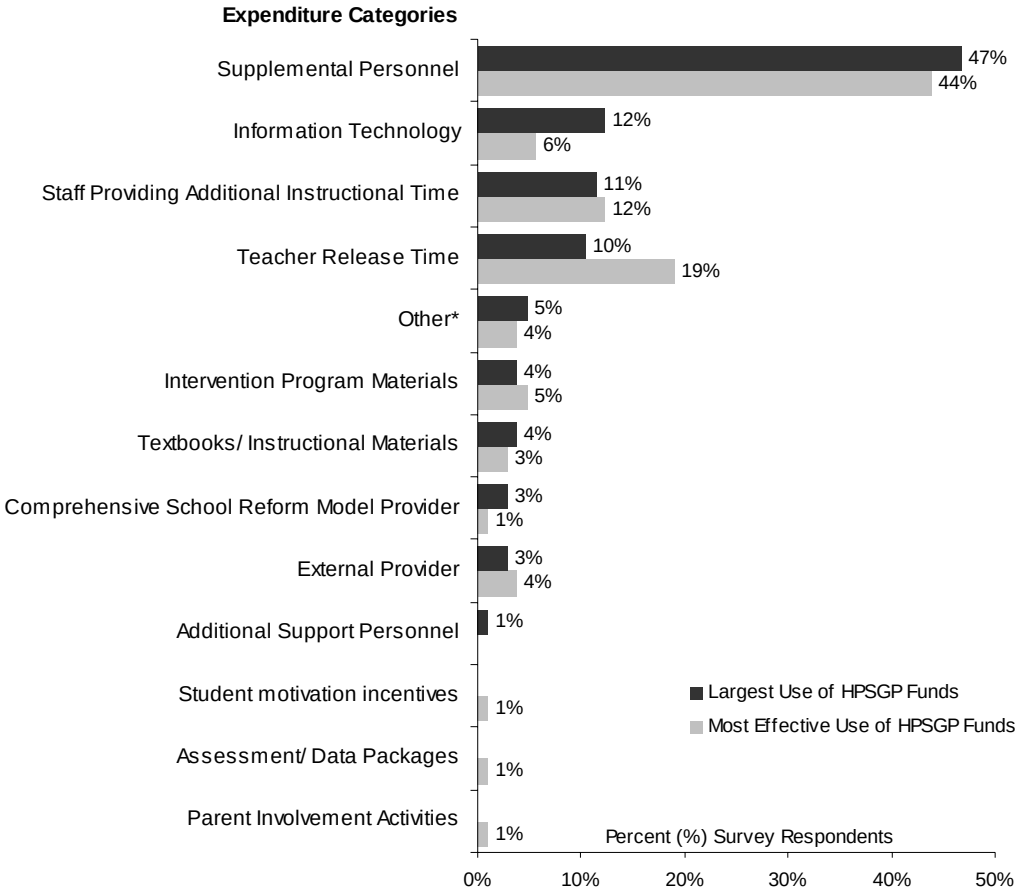
Unfortunately, the labels used by the state to categorize HPSGP expenditures do not shed much light on the exact nature of the spending. For instance, we do not know if salary-related

expenditures went to increase staffing levels with new personnel or to invest in existing staff (e.g., supporting more instructional or professional development time). While the expenditure reports can be used to observe broad spending patterns across all HP schools, the school survey results provide a more detailed description of spending for a subset of schools.

Exhibit 5.13 displays findings for the largest and most effective expenditure categories, as perceived by respondents to the school survey. This information was obtained from two school survey questions: one asked school respondents to select the three largest HPSGP expenditures from a list of categories (shown in the exhibit); the second requested schools to select the three most effective expenditures from the same list.[85]

**Exhibit 5.13. Perceptions of the Largest and Most Effective Uses of HPSGP Funds (N = 105)**

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)




*Other includes combinations of two or more expenditure categories that were mentioned by respondents.

Spending on supplemental personnel, reported by 47 percent of all respondents, was by far the most commonly cited primary use of the HPSGP funds. This category encompassed spending associated with instructional or administrative personnel such as teachers, literacy coaches or vice-principals. A distant second, information technology (such as computers, Internet access,

[85] For both questions, schools were allowed to write-in additional categories.

and software) was cited top expenditure for 12 percent of the schools, followed by additional instructional time (for example, paying teachers to stay before or after school) and teacher release time (for grade level meetings or other related professional development costs). Among expenditures reported as being the second or third largest (not shown in Exhibit 5.2), additional instructional time and teacher release time were most common.

As seen earlier in Exhibit 5.7, nearly all schools had a positive perception of the effective use of HPSGP funds. In regards to the perceived effectiveness of individual expenditures, there is similarity with categories identified as the largest expenditure (the ranking by expenditure size in noted in parentheses): 43 percent of respondents cited supplemental personnel (1) as the most effective; 19 percent cited teacher release time (4); 12 percent cited additional instructional time (3); and 6 percent cited information technology (2).

While the top four largest expenditures and the top four most effective expenditures coincide, they did not always match within the same school. More than half of the respondents selected the same category as both the largest and most effective funding use. Among these respondents, 61 percent selected supplemental personnel as both the largest and most effective expenditure category. The disparity between the largest and the most effective categories – 46 percent selected different items for each category – suggests that some schools may benefit from additional guidance in effectively targeting their funds, as raised in the Action Plan section of this chapter. When controlling for student and school characteristics, there were no statistical differences between schools that reported personnel as their largest or most effective HP expenditure and other schools. [86]

## Issues Affecting HPSGP Implementation

Nearly 60 percent of surveyed school respondents cited major factors limiting their ability to use HPSGP funds to improve student achievement at their school.

In order to better understand the relationship between spending HPSGP funds and student outcomes, school respondents were asked to describe through an open-ended question, what, if any, factors limited their ability to use these funds to improve student achievement. Exhibit 5.14 displays several common themes that were categorized from their narrative responses. As responses could have encompassed several of these themes, the percentages in the table represent the number of times that an issue was mentioned and therefore the sum of the percentages exceeds 100 percent. About 17 percent of school respondents did not provide a response, and while another quarter either reported that they did not encounter any limiting factors or that the question was not applicable. When barriers were identified, however, the most frequently cited factors pertained to the lack of flexibility and district control (cited by 21 percent of respondents), delivery and clarity of funding (15 percent), and personnel challenges (15 percent). The following sections explore each of these factors in more detail, providing important context

[86]Schools that reported personnel as their largest HPSGP expenditure showed average annual growth of 0.03 standard deviations in CST math and 0.06 in CST ELA, in relation to 0.09 and 0.04 standard deviations in math and ELA, respectively, in schools that did not report this. Schools that reported personnel as their most *effective* use of HP funds saw an average growth of 0.12 standard deviations in CST math and 0.09 in CST ELA, in relation to 0.02 in both subjects for schools that reported other categories.

as to why schools were not able to harness the HPSGP funds as productively as they might have liked.

**Exhibit 5.14. School Respondent Perceptions on the Factors Limiting Use of HPSGP Funds**

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

| What major factors, if any, limited your ability to use HPSGP funds to improve student achievement at your school? | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Themes** | N | % |
| **No response** | 18 | 17% |
| **"None" or N/A** | 28 | 26% |
| **Lack of Flexibility, District Control & Bureaucracy** | 22 | 21% |
| **Funding Irregularities** | 16 | 15% |
| *(e.g., delays or uncertainty in funding; lack of clarity around carry-over policies)* | | |
| **Staff Attrition & Hiring Constraints** | 16 | 15% |
| *(e.g., school administrative changes; lack of personnel and turnover)* | | |
| **Unions** | 4 | 4% |
| **Need more time for school reform** | 3 | 3% |
| **Challenging student population** | 3 | 3% |
| **Other** | 12 | 11% |
| Total School Respondents | 106 | -- |

## *Lack of Flexibility, District Control and Bureaucracy*

The most commonly cited theme reported as limiting schools' ability to use HPSGP funds to improve student achievement were bureaucratic controls, often stemming from state or district policies. Included in this theme were three distinct factors that were often interrelated: lack of flexibility (mentioned by 10 percent of respondents), strained district relations (8 percent) and bureaucracy (7 percent). The responses characterizing the funds as inflexible suggested that these schools had minimal control over how funds could be used. Reasons included restrictive district oversight, procedural hurdles associated with modifying the HPSGP Action Plan, and funding provisions associated with the timeline for spending and carry-over.

Some respondents offered no explanations, simply stating that the funds were too restrictive or that certain types of spending did not qualify under the program. Six school respondents identified the district as a limitation, expressing frustration stemming from bureaucratic barriers such as slow approvals of expenditure requests, inadequate and untimely budget adjustments, and inconsistent and inflexible decisions made by the district around how funds could be spent. One reported that the district control "greatly impedes progress and ability for sites to spend their funding allocations." Another respondent noted change in district personnel had resulted in "uneven and inconsistent policy" that impacted implementation. District irregularity was also observed by another school respondent who contended that the district initiatives conflicted with the Action Plan, "The district continues to push too many initiatives at once. Often these initiatives are not supportive of the HPSGP Action Plan. As a result, implementation of plans and strategies create more fragmentation and less cohesion."

A district that was in financial disarray and nearing state take-over was described by one respondent as a major obstacle, directly impacting improvement efforts under HPSGP:

> The unrest and turmoil caused by cash flow prevented purchases from being made in a timely manner and more importantly was the cause for several of the better teachers deciding to leave the district. Unfortunately due to the dysfunction of newly elected school board members our district will once again lose good teachers, and we will be faced with the lack of leadership and support from district level personnel….Unfortunately with the focus on our financial bankruptcy, there has not been a focus on our academic 'bankruptcy.'

## *Funding Irregularities*

Funding issues such as delays or uncertainty in funding (14 percent of the respondents) and lack of clarity (5 percent) around carry-over policies were cited by school respondents as implementation factors limiting the effective use of HPSGP funds.

### Carry-Over Concerns

Case studies conducted in Year 1 of the study illuminate some of the reasons schools did not spend the full amount of the grant. Among the more salient reasons were changes in school leadership, late notification or unclear communication from the state regarding the delivery of funds and carry-over policies (especially with fourth year funds), lack of oversight or guidance in relation to decision making around spending, and strained relations with districts due to financial or governance crises. When these factors coexisted, they created conditions that made it very difficult for schools to make timely and thoughtful decisions on how to spend the grant money, often resulting in ineffective investments and significant carry-over.

Through our school surveys conducted in Year 2, we asked schools with carry-over exceeding 25 percent to identify the causes of the carry-over. Exhibit 5.15 shows that among our respondents, 33 percent indicated that they did not have carry-over exceeding this amount (this is supported by the HPSGP expenditure data which show that these schools carried over on average about 17 percent of their available funds annually). The remaining two-thirds of respondents did report carry-over exceeding 25 percent (average annual carry-over among these schools, according to the CDE data, was 30 percent).

**Exhibit 5.15. School Respondent Reported Reasons for Carry-Over**

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

| If your school had substantial carry-over (e.g. more than 25 percent) of HPSGP funds in a given year, what were the reasons for this?* | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Categories** | N | % |
| **No substantial carry-over of funds** | 35 | 33% |
| **At least 25 percent carry-over** | 69 | 65% |
| **Missing** | 2 | 2% |
| **Reasons for carry-over**** | | |
| Late notification of funds | 23 | 33.3% |
| Late receipt of funds | 16 | 23.2% |
| Used other available funding first | 24 | 34.8% |
| Changes in school leadership | 23 | 33.3% |
| Other | 12 | 17.4% |

*This question specifically asked respondents to exclude 2005-06 due to funding being released at the start of the 2005-06 school year.

** Reasons analyzed only for schools that indicated substantial carry-over. Percentages add up to more than 100% as respondents provided more than one answer.

Among the schools reporting 25 percent or more in carry-over funds, all four of the reasons cited as causing them were generally identified as pertinent. Reasons related to implementation concerns such as late notification, late receipt, and changes in school leadership were nearly as commonly cited as the more strategic response of using "other available funding first."

Late notification and late receipt of funds imply funding irregularities: either schools were not aware they would be receiving funds or they received funds so late they were not able to fully mobilize the money before the year's end. Responses from open-ended questions among school and district respondents reveal additional irregularities and uncertainty regarding carry-over policy. Eleven percent of the district administrators who were surveyed reported that not knowing when funds could and could not be carried over was a source of confusion and frustration.

Responses in the open-ended "other" category in this survey item revealed schools making strategic choices to defer spending in order to assess programs before investing in them, to realign the single site plan to reflect changing needs and in one case to "extend the benefits of the grant into future years where funding would be less." One respondent noted that insufficient funds in the district created a "cash-flow" problem that limited the school's ability to make purchases in a timely manner, and another mentioned that the inability to find a provider for AB 466 teacher training as the cause for delayed spending.

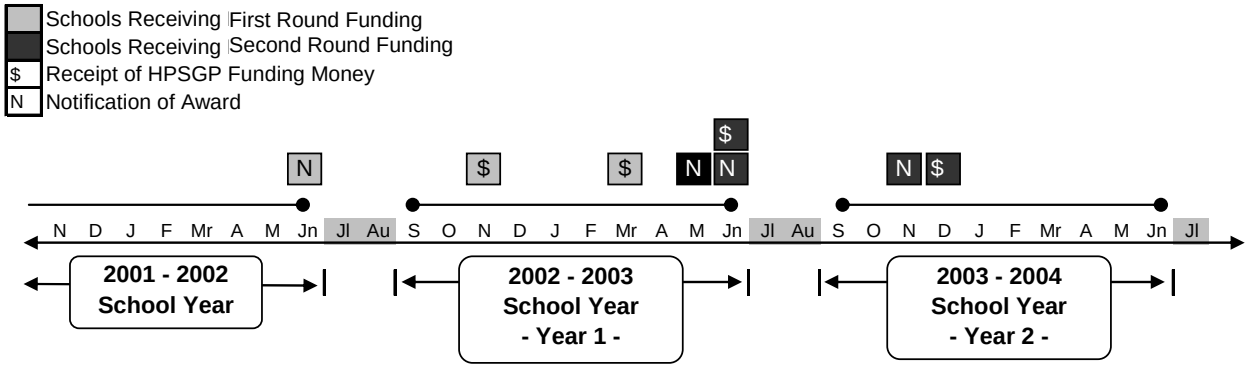
## Late Funding Concerns

In the summer and fall of 2003, 98 additional schools were selected for participation in HPSGP (of which 79 were HP Only Schools) when additional state funds became available. Exhibit 5.16 displays the funding timeline for Year 1 implementation funds. Schools funded in the first round received the award in November 2002 and March 2003. There were two groups of schools that received the second round of funding: schools that were notified of the award in May 2003 and received the funds in June 2003, and those that were notified in November 2003 and received the

award in December 2003.[87] When schools received the funds, not only did they receive almost two years worth of funding but they were also beginning Year 2 of the program. Furthermore, the one-month planning window between the notification and release of funds for the second round schools was much shorter than six months available to schools part of the first round of funding.

**Exhibit 5.16. Implementation Funding Timeline for First and Second Round Funding**

Source: Communication with School Improvement Division, CDE




The CDE expenditure reports show that between the 2003-04 and 2005-06 school years, schools funded in the second round consistently carried over a higher percentage of their available funds (33 percent) compared to schools funded in the first round (24 percent). One respondent from a second round school reveals the challenges they faced in using HP funds:

> …The uncertainty of funding [and] receiving the funds late negatively affected our ability to truly make thoughtful decisions that would result in increased student learning. We did not receive our Year 1 funding until the beginning of Year 2. In one year, we had two years worth of funding. We were informed that carry-over would not be allowed. Hence, it precipitated a series of decisions that were not as sound as they should have been had we had accurate and timely information.

Another school respondent who received the funds in May 2003, "We felt behind the whole four years of the grant."

## Funding Delays and Uncertainty

As referenced in the above quote, the combination of receiving late funds and the uncertainty of future funding disrupted the school's ability to plan strategically. Responses to the school survey suggest that funding delays were not exclusive to schools funded in the second round in the first year of implementation and in the fall of the second year. As shown earlier in Exhibit 5.14, 15 respondents (17 percent) indicated that funding delays had adversely affected how HP funds

[87] These schools were identified for funding late due to the legislature releasing additional funds through supplemental budget bills.

were used. Only three of these were among the group of schools funded in the second round. One respondent mentions how a clear plan for improvement is limited by an unclear funding schedule:

> Our school had visions of creating a group of teachers that were highly skilled and research driven. We wanted to create a team of educators that used data to drive instruction and had time to review data, plan instruction, meet collaboratively and plan as grade levels. To some degree these goals were met through HPSGP. However, when funding was delayed and adequate time was not available, we were not able to fully implement our plan as we intended it.

Both district and school respondents raised concerns that highlight how uncertainty in funding procedures and timelines, coupled in some cases with late notification and arrival of funds, undermined both their planning efforts and their ability to make decisions that aligned with established priorities. The 15 respondents who noted funding delay challenges were fairly evenly split between traditional calendar and year-round schools. Four school respondents said that the arrival of funds was out of step with the academic cycle in year-round schools: "Receiving funding in September or October puts a hold on how we spend the money effectively to provide our students academic success when our school year actually begins in July." In two other school sites and one district, respondents described how the arrival of funds late in the school year was not aligned well with the hiring cycle, thus creating difficulty for schools wanting to hire qualified personnel for needed intervention or support positions such as literacy and math coaches.

### Fourth Year Funding

As observed during our case studies and further supported by the survey responses, the provisions associated with the fourth year funds were particularly 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. As eligibility for fourth year funds was just determined the summer before, several case study and survey schools – not knowing they would have additional funds available – released key personnel paid for by HPSGP. The combination of the late arrival of funds and the initial prohibition of carry-over in Year 4 created substantial pressure among schools and districts to spend the available funds before the deadlines (including internal district deadlines well in advance of the state's original June 2006 deadline).[88] This oftentimes caused schools to divert funds away from established priorities towards rushed, one-time purchases, and potentially explains the spike in spending on books and supplies and a decline of spending on personnel in Year 4 compared to previous years (see Exhibit 5.12).

Although the fourth year funding may be considered an anomaly, responses to the surveys suggest that spending headaches continued beyond the fourth year. One district administrator revealed a situation at the end of the 2006-07 school year (after HPSGP had ended) where spending residual HPSGP funds was rushed and not necessarily aligned with any plan: "Between now (April) and June 30, we're spending close to $30 million of carry-over funds. Schools are unloading the money, and all they can spend on now is on products and goods…."

[88] CDE in May 2006 allowed funds to be carried over into 2005-06.

These experiences underscore the importance of consistency and timeliness in the delivery of funds. Irregularities in funding contributed at times to ineffective decisions and counterproductive spending patterns. If there is uncertainty in funding, a school's ability to make decisions, plan, and make financial commitments is very limited. For example, if a school wants to buy books or computers, it cannot place orders; if a school wants to hire someone, it cannot commit to hiring. The funding irregularities, where experienced, seem to have undermined schools' ability to engage in a committed and cohesive spending plan.

### *Staff Attrition and Hiring Constraints*

Fifteen percent of the school responses described difficulties associated with personnel – primarily resulting from turnover at both the administrative and teacher level and hiring constraints. Turnover at the principal level drew concerns primarily around the consistency of vision, focus, and coherence of reforms initiated under HPSGP. As one school respondent noted, "Turnover in leadership disrupted the coherence of the reforms as each new principal had to get up to speed on the plan and the tenets of HPSGP in addition to becoming familiar with his/her new school and staff." It was also noted as a reason for carry-over in one-third of the schools that reported substantial carry-over.

Teacher attrition caused challenges for similar reasons. One school respondent wrote that disruptions in personnel resulted in "uneven and inconsistent policy." Another respondent described how turnover diluted the impact of professional development: "Forty percent of the training the school received was lost due to high turnover," while another described how attrition offset the momentum of reform: "The cycle of new teacher training was continuous because we had to constantly train new staff. Reform is hard to maintain at a high level when staff is new and need to be trained. It prevents the whole school from moving at the pace it needed to."

Difficulties hiring personnel to meet key staffing needs were also mentioned; one respondent cited a shortage of teachers to teach an extended day program and the reluctance of the human resources office to hire. Another reported that shortages in the supply of qualified math teachers posed hiring challenges, and in one case the short-term nature of the HP funds was cited as limiting the schools' ability to make the long-term financial commitment. Loss of experienced and qualified staff due to frustrations with school and district administration was also identified as a factor that limited the use of program funding.

### *Other Factors Limiting the Use of HPSGP Funds*

Some of the other limiting factors cited less often relative to those just discussed included teacher union contracts, limited time available for reform, and the challenges associated with teaching high-need student populations. For example, four school respondents felt that the structure of teacher union contracts was "constraining" and "limiting" in regards to using the funds. When time was cited as an issue, schools generally felt that more time (more specifically, a longer funding cycle) was needed not only to achieve their reform goals but also to sustain them.

Other isolated factors mentioned by respondents included confusion about state policies in regards to allowed expenditures, misalignment of the HPSGP funding cycle with the NCLB

Program Improvement cycle, investments in staff (professional development and collaboration) that did not yield the desired changes in instruction, and a weak action plan guiding spending.

## Summary

As noted in Chapter 3, despite the considerable resources invested in this program, no corresponding boost in test score performance was discerned among HPSGP schools in relation to similar schools not participating in the program. This chapter explored issues regarding some of the key elements associated with the HPSGP implementation that may inform those results. How salient was the required HPSGP Action Plan perceived to be among program participants? To what extent was the required external provider component perceived as useful? To what extent were districts perceived as supportive in the implementation of the program?

Perceptions were mixed in all of these inter-related components of the program. The major rationale for the external provider component of the HPSGP was to assist schools to thoughtfully assess their strengths and weaknesses and to jointly formulate an Action Plan for reform. While 47 percent of school respondents found this support to be quite helpful, nearly half reported not using an external provider, or did not know if the school utilized one. As this was a required program component, the fact that a positive impression (or any impression) was so often missing seems a major breakdown in regard to HPSGP implementation.

Given that HPSGP participants are by design among the state's most struggling schools, some form of special and supplemental district support and attention to allow them to substantially turn around in a relative short four year period would seem an essential component of success. While the majority of school respondents indicated that the district had actively supported them during the implementation of the program, only about 13 percent of respondents "strongly agreed" that this had been the case, and a third disagreed with this point. This seems another important area of implementation breakdown for a substantial proportion of participating schools.

In addition to the important implementation components listed above, HPSGP is above all else primarily a grant program as is reflected in its name, whereby participating schools receive an infusion of funds. Given this, the areas of funding and spending would seem crucial to effective program implementation. To what extent did the funds reach the schools in a sufficiently timely fashion to allow thoughtful spending? Were the rules governing these allocations in regard to how they could be spent well understood? Did participating sites encounter limitations in using HPSGP funds to improve student achievement?

Again, the results for funding and spending were mixed. Virtually all sites found the money critical to their school reform efforts and that the amount of funds was sufficient to address their reform challenges. However, only about half of the responding sites felt that the time period for reform was sufficient, and one-third expressed concerns about the timely receipt of funds and carry-over provisions. While more than 40 of the school respondents did not provide a response or reported that there were no major factors limiting their ability to use HPSGP funds to improve student achievement at their school, nearly 60 percent raised concerns such as lack of flexibility, carry-over, funding timeliness, and staff turnover.

As a whole, there appears to be considerable implementation break-downs that may help explain the limited program effect observed in the aggregate on student achievement, and may also point to areas for improvement in future policy formulations.

# Chapter 6: Perspectives on the Impact of HPSGP

## Introduction

While Chapter 3 reported little to no HPSGP effect on student achievement, the majority of school survey respondents were more positive in their subjective determinations of the program's impact on their schools. However, while the results shown in this chapter indicate fairly positive perceptions from school leaders participating in this program, we are not able to compare these results with similar, non-participating schools. For example, it may be that the small majority of school respondents citing lasting HPSGP impact in areas of school capacity may not differ from the perceptions of bolstered school capacity in schools not in the HPSGP.

**Key Findings**

- **HPSGP was perceived as having a major role in student achievement gains. However, these positive perceptions should be tempered with the nearly identical academic performance during this period between HPSGP and non-HPSGP comparison schools.**
- **A slight majority of respondents reported a lasting HPSGP positive impact on school capacity.**
- **While 60 percent of school respondents indicated confidence in sustaining the impact of HPSGP, only 40 percent reported they had been able to find funding to continue these reforms.**
- **Nearly 84 percent of school respondents expressing confidence about continuing reform characterized their districts as being highly or reasonably supportive, whereas only 63 percent of respondents from the less confident schools did so.**

Nonetheless, it is interesting to note the perceptions of participating school respondents regarding the perceived impact of this substantial state investment, as well as the specific areas of impact. This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first discusses the perceived importance of the HPSGP on the school's improvement efforts. Next, we turn to the perceived impact of the program, both at the school level as well on the district support schools received. Last, this chapter reports on school and district respondents' views of their school's ability to sustain what they have been able to achieve during program implementation over time and the district role in sustaining reform.

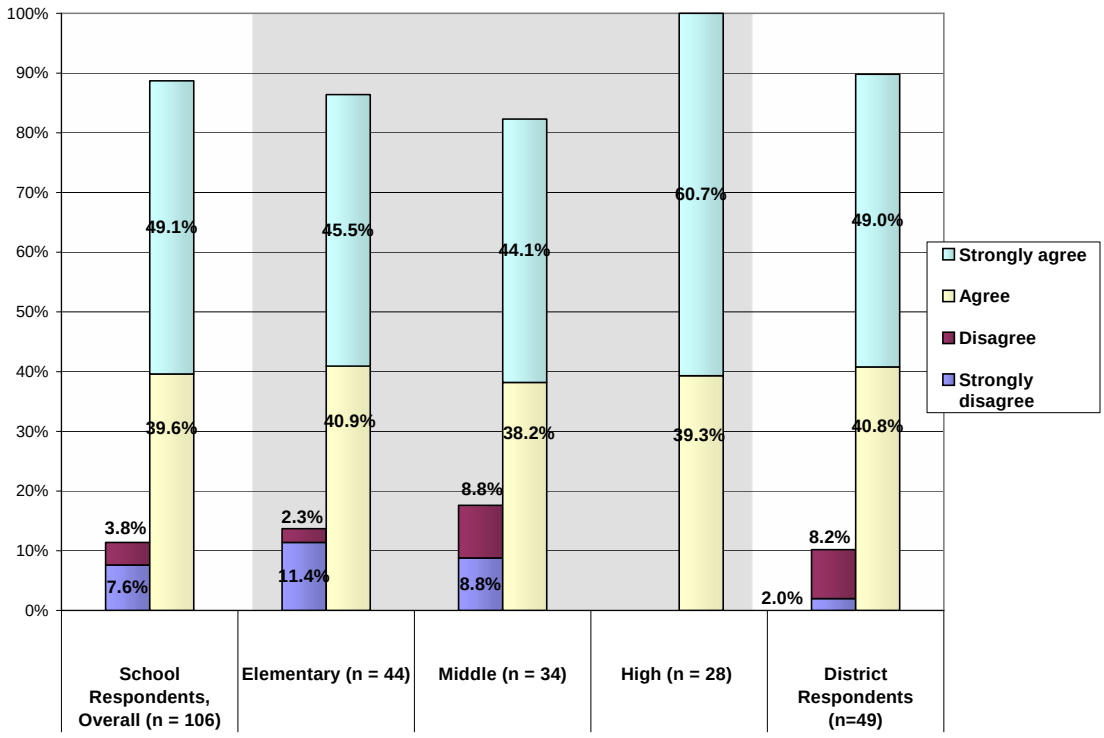
# Perceptions of HPSGP Overall Importance to School Improvement

HPSGP was perceived as having a major role in increasing student achievement among respondents who believed their school experienced substantial gains during the period of program implementation. These positive perceptions should be tempered, however, with the nearly identical academic performance during this period between HPSGP and non-HPSGP comparison schools.

Both the school and district surveys measured the perceived overall importance of the program to school improvement. As shown in Exhibit 6.1, the vast majority of schools believed the HPSGP was very important to the school's progress during the five years of program implementation. Across the school types, the program registered highest in high schools, with all agreeing that HPSGP was a significant factor (more than 60 percent strongly agreed). In contrast, some elementary and middle schools, as well as five districts (10 percent), disputed the overall significance of the program. Of these districts, one credited the district for the progress made, particularly since the state HPSGP guidance was perceived as lacking, and two others pointed to the schools' failure to make gains as reasons why they believed the HPSGP had weaker importance. One school respondent who strongly disagreed that the HPSGP was critical to its reform attributed the school's success to its Reading First program. In a similar fashion, over a quarter of the districts acknowledged that the Program Improvement, SAIT, and Reading First programs carried equal, if not greater, weight in school reform efforts.

**Exhibit 6.1. Survey Responses to "The HPSGP has been very important to my school's progress over the past five years"**

Source: HPSGP School and District Surveys (AIR)



Aside from the funds, which ranked high on districts' reasons for why the HPSGP was perceived as instrumental, 20 percent of the districts believed the program was important as it provoked a meaningful dialogue about change or provided much needed focus and structure for tackling reform. As one district respondent described, "That was the [program] that got enough people involved and upset because things had to change. It stopped people in their tracks to have a real honest discussion." The program requirements, including the needs assessment and external provider, provided the leverage to institute necessary change in schools with reluctant staff.

While respondents generally believed that the HPSGP was very important to their progress over the past five years, as shown in Exhibit 6.1, the program seemed to have greater impact on some measures in relation to others. School respondents were asked to assess the role that the HPSGP played in the changes observed in regard to students, staff, and resources. For each of these areas, schools reported whether they experienced substantial or marginal gains, declines, or no change over the past five years, as well as the degree of impact of the HPSGP (e.g., major, moderate, minor, or no role).[89] Exhibit 6.2 focuses on schools in which survey respondents reported substantial gains and the perceived impact of HPSGP on those gains.

**Exhibit 6.2. School Respondents' Perceptions of the Role of the HPSGP in Schools that Reported Substantial Gains on Certain Outcomes**

| | | Surveyed schools that reported substantial gains | | % of schools with substantial gains that reported that the HPSGP had… | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | N | % | Major Role in Change | Moderate Role in Change | Minor Role in Change | No Role in Change |
| a. | Student achievement | 67 | 63.2 | 71.6 | 25.4 | 3.0 | -- |
| b. | School administration knowledge/skills | 69 | 65.1 | 60.9 | 26.1 | 10.1 | 2.9 |
| c. | Teacher knowledge/skills | 72 | 67.9 | 69.4 | 22.2 | 8.3 | -- |
| d. | Teacher collaboration | 68 | 64.2 | 76.5 | 22.1 | 1.5 | -- |
| e. | Student attitude/motivation | 47 | 44.3 | 57.5 | 29.8 | 8.5 | 4.3 |
| f. | Student attendance | 27 | 25.5 | 55.6 | 22.2 | 14.8 | 7.4 |
| g. | Student discipline | 28 | 26.4 | 53.6 | 25.0 | 14.3 | 7.1 |
| h. | Parental involvement | 27 | 25.5 | 59.3 | 37.0 | 3.7 | -- |
| i. | Community support | 25 | 23.6 | 56.0 | 36.0 | 8.0 | -- |
| j. | Use of assessment data to plan instruction and curriculum | 70 | 66.0 | 74.3 | 20.0 | 5.7 | -- |
| k. | Number of instructional staff | 31 | 29.2 | 83.9 | 9.7 | 6.5 | -- |
| l. | Level of non-personnel resources (e.g., materials, supplies) | 58 | 54.7 | 81.3 | 15.5 | 3.5 | -- |

[89] One school did not provide a response regarding change for all outcomes. Non-personnel resources had two schools missing.

Exhibit 6.2 shows that about two-thirds of the surveyed school respondents reported substantial gains in several key measures over the past five years. Given the primary objective of the HPGSP, undoubtedly the most important of these is their perceptions regarding gains in student achievement; 70 percent of the schools with reported substantial gains in student achievement attributed a major role to HPSGP.[90] These positive perceptions associated with the primary outcome goal of the program, i.e., gains in student achievement, are substantiated by the academic gains made on average by HP Only schools during this period. On the other hand, they are tempered by the nearly identical academic performance during this period between HPSGP and comparison schools when controlling for student and school characteristics as shown in Chapter 3.

Other frequently cited outcomes with substantial gains included teacher knowledge and skills, the use of assessment data to plan instruction and curriculum, teacher collaboration, and school administration knowledge and skills. On the other end of the spectrum, only about a quarter of the schools reported substantial gains in community support, parental involvement, student attendance and discipline. Although only 29 percent of the surveyed schools cited substantial gains in the number of instructional staff, the perceived impact of the program was greatest for this domain, with 84 percent of respondents reporting the program had a major role in this gain. A similar pattern existed for the level of non-personnel resources, with a little more than half of the surveyed school reporting substantial gains in this area and 81 percent of those schools attributed the HPSGP as having a major role. On outcomes in which fewer schools reported gains – such as student attendance and parent/community support – the HPSGP was perceived as playing a lesser role. Schools with substantial gains were statistically significantly more likely than those with marginal gains to report that the HPSGP had a major role across all outcome measured.[91]

## Perceptions of HPSGP Impact

> While it is encouraging that a slight majority of respondents indicated as lasting impact of HPSGP in areas of school capacity, this may also be seen as somewhat disappointing given the considerable investment in school capacity that HPSGP represents.

This section on the perceived impact of HPSGP is divided into two main components. As part of the narrative section of the survey, school respondents were asked to identify the *lasting* impact of the HPSGP, if any, at the school level. This discussion is followed by perceptions of HPSGP impact on the amount of district support received by responding schools.

[90] When controlling for student characteristics, schools with reported substantial gains experienced an average 0.10 standard deviation growth in CST math and .08 in CST ELA from 2001-02 to 2005-06. By contrast, schools that did not report substantial gains had an average 0.01 standard deviation growth in CST math and -0.01 standard deviations in CST ELA during that same period.
[91] Significant at the 1 percent confidence level.

### *Perception of HPSGP Impact at the School Level*

Among the surveyed schools, 13 did not answer the open-ended question about the lasting impact of the program. Many of the responses shown in Exhibit 6.3 overlap considerably with the HPSGP expenditure categories described in Chapter 5 of this report. Given these similarities, it was not always clear if the responses to the narrative question truly reflected ongoing, lasting practices as opposed to describing how the HPSGP funds were used during the grant period. Nonetheless, the responses provide additional understanding of how these funds were used strategically to enhance school capacity. The responses were coded into four major areas: school capacity, resources, instructional programs, and school culture. Trends in reporting within each of these four major sub-areas of perceived impact as well as selected quotes underlying these responses are reported below.

**Exhibit 6.3. School Respondents' Perceptions of the Lasting Impact of the HPSGP**

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

| To date, what has been the lasting impact of the HPSGP in your school, if any? <1> | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **N** | **%** |
| **No response** | **13** | **12%** |
| **School capacity*** | **60** | **57%** |
| *Professional development* | *41* | *39%* |
| *Staff collaboration* | *27* | *25%* |
| *Use of data to inform instruction* | *25* | *24%* |
| **Resources*** | **40** | **38%** |
| *Additional Staff* | *19* | *18%* |
| *Technology* | *18* | *17%* |
| *Materials* | *21* | *20%* |
| **Instructional programs*** | **34** | **32%** |
| *Changes in instruction/delivery* | *13* | *12%* |
| *Enhanced programs (e.g., interventions)* | *24* | *23%* |
| **School culture / Focus on achievement** | **21** | **20%** |
| **Parent outreach** | **8** | **8%** |
| **Other** | **13** | **12%** |
| **Total School Respondents** | **106** | **--** |

<1> This was an open-ended question in the school survey. Responses were coded into broad themes.
Note: As respondents provided multiple examples of the impact of the program, the sum of all categories will add to more than 100 percent. Percentages of the main categories are based on the entire survey sample of 106.
* The total for these categories is an unduplicated count and will not add up to the sum of the sub-categories, as school respondents reported multiple answers.

## School Capacity

The most commonly reported perception of lasting impact was in school capacity (57 percent) in such areas as enhanced professional development (both in quality and quantity), staff collaboration, and the use of data to inform instruction. These findings suggest that more than half of the surveyed schools, in some form or another, believed that the program had maintained lasting progress in capacity building areas such as enhancing teacher knowledge, opportunities for teachers to collaboratively plan classes, and fostering a teaching culture based on evidence.

For example, one school respondent reported, "The HPSGP process continues to help us create a shared vision through team effort. We establish and maintain a coherent, ongoing professional development program in which we focus on analyzing student work and writing aligned to state

standards." In addition, among schools that reported at least one of these school capacity categories, nearly half reported at least two of these areas working in tandem. For example, staff development generally revolved around data analyses, standards and content knowledge, and effective instructional strategies (including differentiated instruction).

Through the HPSGP, respondents at a quarter of the schools reported more formal opportunities for collaboration; one school instituted weekly planning meetings, while another moved to a block schedule to provide for more collaboration time. Other schools took advantage of the release time to use teacher observations to build "better skills by seeing good instructional practices modeled on a regular basis." Extending beyond strictly the instructional staff, one school noted multiple levels of collaboration: principal to principal, principal to district personnel, and teacher to teacher.

Nearly a quarter of the responding schools cited data use as particularly helpful for teachers to identify and appropriately target students for interventions, as well as grounding other decisions. As one school wrote, "Decisions about what we teach students and how we allocate our resources is more strongly tied to relevant data. It's about student achievement and not what the teacher has 'taught.'"

## Resources

Nearly 40 percent of responding schools cited greater levels of resources as a lasting impact of the program, namely supplemental staff, technology, and materials and supplies. Again, while this may be seen as a positive result by some, it also raises questions as to why resources were not cited more often in relation to a program allocating such substantial fiscal resources to participating schools.

The finding that less than 20 percent of the surveyed schools identified additional staff as a lasting impact seems to align with the resource analysis shown in Chapter 4 of this report showing little difference in staffing between HP Only and other schools well into program implementation. Nonetheless, some schools did report lasting personnel impact, such as class size reduction. One school described the benefits of additional instructional personnel for this purpose as allowing for more personalized instruction and eliminating combination classes. Supplemental resource personnel, such as literacy coaches, teachers on special assignment, and technology personnel, were also identified as ongoing supports. Another school invested considerably in personnel, which included long-term substitutes to work alongside teachers to implement interventions, teachers for before- and after-school programs, a literacy coach, a technology coordinator, and noon directors. While survey respondents tended to report such staff investments as among the most effective (Chapter 5), they also may be often unsustainable once the grant ends.

Some of the other reported areas such as improved student and teacher access to technology may have a more sustained resource impact. Acquisitions included software, computer labs (including mobile labs), and printers, which according to one school, "brings classrooms into the 21st century." Although described in less detail, 23 percent of the school respondents referred to instructional materials, such as intervention packages such as High Point, and textbooks. Although these items may be more easily sustained than on-going expenditures, school

respondents perceived them to be less effective in relation to personnel investments (e.g., supplemental staff, professional development), as shown in Chapter 5.

### Instructional-Related Changes

Nearly a third of the examples cited as long term impacts of HPSGP fell under the broad category of instructional-related changes. During the course of the program, schools adopted standards-based instructional strategies and implemented unified curriculum in an effort to raise student achievement. Almost twice as many schools, however, cited bolstered instructional interventions, primarily tutoring, extended day programs, and Saturday school. Some interventions had a specific focus, such as CAHSEE or Academics Skills Classes. However, one school noted the challenge of continuing this support in the near future, again raising questions about lasting impact: "We have a system that works: Before school, after school, Saturday School and off track tutoring. However, since this program is very expensive, it will be difficult to maintain over the next three years."

### Positive School Culture

About 20 percent of the schools reported a heightened focus on student achievement, clearer vision, and improved school atmosphere as a result of higher expectations. Some of these changes were attributed to other changes noted above, such as professional development and increasing use of data.

### Parent Outreach

Eight schools cited increased parent involvement through parent centers and education classes as having a lasting impact and in the words of one school, "a direct and tangible impact on student learning." Two schools had fully staffed centers, and others noted improved student-parent communication through newsletters and autodialer. One school used the HPSGP to fund a student intervention specialist to serve as a liaison between the school and the community. The specialist worked with students on a personal basis and makes phone calls and home visits on a regular basis. According to the school, as a result there had been an improvement in student attendance, student behavior, and student academic performance.

### Other Examples

School respondents described other lasting impacts of HPSGP. Some highlighted improved outcomes, such as meeting the federal AYP, recently exiting Program Improvement status, and higher rates of college-bound students and students taking rigorous coursework. Other outcomes included stable student attendance and increased teacher retention. Two schools referenced ongoing assessment of reform efforts – one through the action plan and the identification of schoolwide goals. Another continued to utilize the external provider to help implement and revisit strategies.

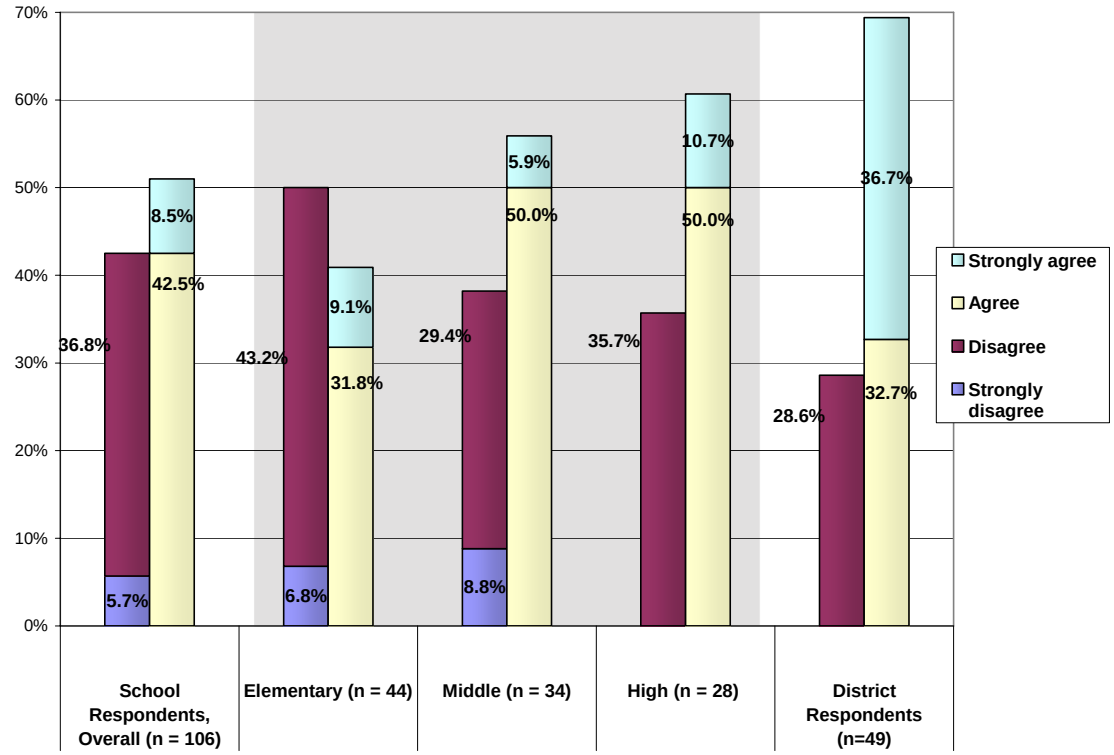
## *Perceptions of HPSGP Impact on District Support*

While HPSGP figured fairly prominently in school-level reform, the perceived impact of HPSGP on the district's role in supporting the schools was mixed. As discussed in Chapter 5, the

program specified a greater role for the districts in relation to its predecessor, the II/USP. [92] Both the school and district surveys included a question on the degree to which the district was more active in supporting the schools as a result of the HPSGP. As shown in Exhibit 6.4, compared to their perceptions of the program impact on their own reform efforts, school respondents more frequently disagreed that the HPSGP had an impact on districts. With 70 percent of district respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing, they were more confident than school respondents that the HPSGP influenced how the district supported low performing schools.[93] Districts that described themselves as being focused on school improvement and having cohesive goals[94] were statistically significantly more likely to perceive an impact of the HPSGP on the district, than those that were in the process of developing their goals.[95] At the school level, high schools and middle schools were fairly similar, with around 60 percent observing more active district support due to the HPSGP. By contrast, more than half of the elementary schools did not believe the program had an impact on district support.

**Exhibit 6.4. Survey Responses to "I believe that the central district has taken a more active role in supporting my school as a result of the HPSGP"**

Source: HPSGP School and District Surveys (AIR)




Note: Percentages will not add up to 100 percent due to missing responses. Charter school responses were re-coded as "missing."

[92] The guidelines for the first cohort of HPSGP schools noted, "The role of the district is greater under HPSGP than under II/USP."

[93] When limiting the sample to the 86 schools for which we obtained both school and district surveys, districts were still more likely to report a program impact (69 percent), in relation to schools (56 percent).

[94] Districts were grouped according to their responses to a survey question which asked respondents to select one of the following as best describing their district: a) The district has clear, cohesive goals and is focused on supporting school improvement; b) The district is developing or reforming school improvement goals and support; or c) The district does not have clear school improvement goals and support.

[95] Significant at the 5 percent confidence level.

Across all school types, the perception of impact of increased district support for HPSGP schools as a result of this program was mixed. A majority of schools (54 percent), however, did attribute change in the district role as a result of HPSGP. Some may see this as a positive result, while others may view this as a reason for concern given the more clearly stated role of the district through this program. However, the data above may understate the degree of district support for these schools in that at least half of the 14 district respondents noting little impact of HPSGP on its support for participating schools (as shown in the last set of columns above) clarified that they were supportive, but not necessarily as a consequence of the program. Of those, one indicated that the district support was fairly recent, while five others attributed their heightened district involvement to the SAIT or Program Improvement programs.

Districts that did report a program impact on their role were asked to describe the influence of HPSGP. Although several referred to the additional funding that supported school-level reform, more respondents cited the program focus and the needs assessment for improving their district's understanding about the schools to target and the fundamental changes and resources necessary for reform in those schools. The process promoted a dialogue about change and illuminated needs that some districts were not aware of previously. The program structure allowed districts to better target and prioritize their existing support, such as professional development. As one respondent described, "Before [HPSGP], we were trying to figure out what the priorities have to be. It allowed us to formulate a framework for supporting low performing schools with very specific goals. We prioritized the schools so the way we provide support changed. We don't just provide equal support all over the place."

One district acknowledged the particular advantage of joining forces with the HPSGP schools to maximize the results:

> Because they had the HP funds as well as the other supports in the program, it is a win-win for us to partner with them because we know we can make a difference. When we bring what we have to the table and the schools in HP bring what they have to the table, collectively we can make a difference in moving forward. We can really make sure that it happens.

Another district respondent said, "It has made us more aware that we need to be active partners, and that in order to secure and ensure school success, the district office needs to be there in the trenches."

In some instances, the HPSGP was said to indirectly affect non-participating schools as well. Greater awareness of school needs and more effective support (e.g., professional development, monitoring) was seen as benefiting all schools, and some districts reported implementing district-wide reforms which replicated some of the efforts initiated under the HPSGP. As one noted, "We did not just let the other schools *not* have support." Interestingly, it compelled one district to level the playing field for the non-participating schools:

> Since we were keenly aware of the funds the HP school had, we wanted to maintain equity. We strived harder in trying to find creative ways to provide

> funding for the other schools. We want all of our schools to feel as if they are 'have' schools rather than 'have-nots.' I think that was an important motivator for us to look for funding for other schools.

The statement of above is worthy of note, and could be interpreted in several ways. For example, to the extent that enhanced training designed to meet the needs of HPSGP schools can be leveraged to benefit other schools as well with no corresponding diminished benefit to the HPSGP schools, this kind of spillover effect would seem beneficial. It might also at least partially explain how non-HPSGP schools could have benefited from the program such that no substantial test performance differential between HPSGP and comparison schools is seen.

On the other hand, the statement above can be seen as a potential cause for concern in regard to program implementation. To the extent to which HPSGP funds going to targeted schools are causing a disproportionate allocation of other district funds to non-HPSGP schools in an attempt to "maintain equity," it is possible that HPSGP funds are simply displacing other funds these schools would have received through the district. Such a practice would undermine a major objective of the HPSGP, which is to provide the state's most struggling schools with a resource supplement in relation to what they would have received anyway.

School respondents indicating that the program did not have a major effect on shaping or improving district strategies and attitudes towards participating schools cited the lack of specific guidance from the state and the impact of heightened district-level accountability from other state and federal programs. In explaining the reasons why there was little effect of the program on the district's support of HPSGP schools, three district respondents compared the HPSGP to the highly structured SAIT:

> "There was really no impact [on the district] until we had the schools starting to fall into the SAIT process. That brought attention with things that need to occur there as well. The district looked at the HPSGP as something that the schools were responsible for implementing and maintaining."

> "The HPSGP guidance from the state was blurry; we just treated them like other schools in the district…. [District support] was more related to the sanctions of the SAIT process and the PI process. It forced us to look at how we provide support."

> "There are no teeth behind the HPSGP as opposed to when we look at the SAIT schools – there's a difference in those schools. I can see a difference because of the local district participation and the mandate that they are part of the district-school leadership team piece, where none of that was required in the HP schools."

# Sustaining the Impact of HPSGP

While 60 percent of school respondents indicated confidence in their ability to fully continue their school improvement efforts even though the HPSGP is over, only 40 percent reported they had been able to replace HPSGP funds, or re-allocate current funds, to continue the reforms initiated under the program.

Considering the investment of more than $540 million in implementation funds,[96] one major policy concern is the capacity of schools to sustain student achievement growth and to continue other reforms instituted under this program. A major concept underlying the design of this program is a capacity building effort with payoff beyond program the period of program implementation. As shown in Chapter 3, HPSGP schools performed, on average, no differently than non-HPSGP comparison schools, rendering the question of sustainability in the aggregate moot. However, individual schools may experience significant achievement gains under the program, and, the findings above show respondent perspectives of other improvements at participating schools that may not be fully reflected in student test scores. The final section of this chapter presents perspectives on sustainability of improvements made under HPSGP at the school level and from the district.

## *Respondent Perspectives on Sustainability*

Our case study findings were fairly split on the issue of sustainability. Although individual staff at the same school did not necessarily share the same views, about half the sites generally expressed optimism in regard to their ability to carry reforms beyond the termination of the HPSGP and the other half were less, or not at all, optimistic. Across our broader survey sample, both school and districts generally held favorable views on the sustainability of school reforms and student achievement progress.

Exhibit 6.5 presents a summary of the survey questions that assessed schools' confidence levels about continuing improvement beyond the HPSGP grant. More than 8 in 10 school respondents believed that they would likely meet the API growth targets over the next three years. Nearly 60 percent reported that the school would be able to continue improvement efforts beyond HPSGP, whereas a greater percentage of the district respondents (82 percent) shared this view. Contrary to these positive perspectives of sustainability, more than 60 percent of the school respondents noted that they were not able to replace HPSGP funds, or re-allocate current funds, to continue the reforms initiated under the program.

On all three survey questions regarding sustainability, there appeared to be consistent and notable differences between the middle schools and other school types. In relation to their counterparts, middle school respondents were less likely to be able to replace HPSGP resources (70 percent in relation to an overall of 60 percent). These respondents also had a more doubtful

[96] This reflects schools that did not participate both in HPSGP and other state programs, such as II/USP and CSR. Including jointly funded schools, the total HPSGP funds amounted to $740 million between 2002-03 and 2005-06.

outlook, with only half believing that the schools would be able to continue reforms beyond the program in comparison to over two-thirds of high schools.

### Exhibit 6.5. Survey Responses to Questions of Sustainability of Reform and Improvement

Source: HPSGP School and District Surveys (AIR)

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | No answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **My school will likely meet its API growth targets over the next three years.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 1.9 | 10.4 | 62.3 | 23.6 | 1.9 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 2.3 | 6.8 | 63.6 | 25.0 | 2.3 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 2.9 | 14.7 | 58.8 | 23.5 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 0.0 | 10.7 | 64.3 | 21.4 | 3.6 |
| **Even though the HPSGP is over, my school will be able to fully continue its school improvement efforts.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents, Overall (n = 106) | 7.6 | 32.1 | 39.6 | 19.8 | 0.9 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 11.4 | 25.0 | 36.4 | 25.0 | 2.3 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 2.9 | 47.1 | 32.4 | 17.7 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 7.1 | 25.0 | 53.6 | 14.3 | -- |
| District Respondents (n = 49) | 2.0 | 16.3 | 59.2 | 22.5 | -- |
| **We were able to replace HPSGP funds or reallocate current funds to continue the reforms initiated under the HPSGP.** | | | | | |
| School Respondents (n = 106) | 13.2 | 47.2 | 32.1 | 5.7 | 1.9 |
| Elementary (n = 44) | 15.9 | 40.9 | 36.4 | 4.6 | 2.3 |
| Middle (n = 34) | 8.8 | 61.8 | 20.6 | 8.8 | -- |
| High (n = 28) | 14.3 | 39.3 | 39.3 | 3.6 | 3.6 |

While a high degree of confidence in sustainability combined with the perceived limited ability in securing replacement funds may seem counter-intuitive, spending patterns under the HPSGP may help explain why. For example non-personnel expenditures (e.g., technology and materials) are easier to maintain and will likely last beyond the life of the program. Longer term commitments involving personnel, on the other hand, require continuing resources. Indeed, a greater percentage of schools that were optimistic about their ability to fully continue reforms (40 percent) deliberately spent HPSGP funds primarily on one-time or short-term items, in comparison to less confident schools (24 percent).[97] Nearly three-quarters of schools that were concerned about sustainability spent HPSGP funds on release time for staff collaboration or professional development activities, compared to less than 45 percent of the confident schools.[98] Similarly, over a third of the less confident schools spent funds on supporting teachers' time to provide additional instruction, such as before school and Saturday programs, while less than 24 percent of the other schools reported this as one of their top three expenditures.

Strategies such as collaboration, additional instructional time, and more personnel are more challenging to continue in absence of ongoing financial support, as evident from one school respondent, "We were forced to displace resource personnel who were providing invaluable support to our students due to the discontinuance of the HPSGP, including intervention

[97] While the survey question provided "materials" as an example of a short-term item, the meaning of one-time or short-term items was open to respondents' interpretation.
[98] Based on survey question 16, which asked respondents to report the top three largest HPSGP expenditures.

programs, supervision staff during and after school, instructional assistants to help students during instructional time and for English Learners." Another reported, "The extra personnel for class size reduction and remediation courses, along with money for staff development *made the difference*. However without the funding we've had to cut back in those areas." Several schools provided similar examples of personnel cuts, and districts also expressed a reduced capacity to maintain personnel-related strategies beyond the grant's tenure. For instance, despite the benefits of a longer school day for its English learners, one district returned to a regular school day due to insufficient fiscal resources. Retaining additional personnel secured through HPSGP funds has been made more difficult by districts' declining enrollments, which has reduced their general funds.[99]

As HPSGP is a short-term funding program, the financial burden of maintaining reform efforts lies with the schools and districts after four years. Indeed, guidance in the application package for the first cohort explicitly stated that the CDE discourages using HPSGP implementation funds to hire teachers for class size reduction, presumably because it would be difficult to continue this effort beyond the duration of the program.[100]

Although hiring new teaching staff was discouraged, spending on supplemental personnel was reported as the most effective expenditure by school respondents, followed by staff release time for collaboration and supporting staff time for additional instruction, as shown earlier in Exhibit 5.12 in Chapter 5.[101] This is troubling, as it suggests the strategies perceived as most effective for these types of schools are also the hardest to sustain without ongoing financial support. The dilemma of investing in effective strategies only to have them cease with dire effects was described by a school respondent: "Effective positions, such as our very successful parent liaisons, were summarily cut as soon as the major portion of our funding ended, and our parent interest plummeted accordingly." Another district respondent also observed a decline in student achievement after school personnel were let go after the grant ended.

However, school respondents' positive views on sustainability do not appear to be strongly related to their prior progress. Schools that did *not* make their schoolwide and comparable targets in 2005 were only slightly less likely as those that did to believe that they would meet their targets in the next three years (86 percent versus 93 percent). Moreover, these results were similar when examining schools by their annual growth rates in CST math and ELA, averaged across 2003 to 2005, with the higher performers only slightly more likely to agree that they would meet the API targets. This is in line with our case study findings, in which confidence in sustainability did not differ appreciably between schools shown to be experiencing success under this program as opposed those not showing success. This suggests that some schools may have an unrealistic view of continued progress, or more specifically, schools that showed little academic progress previously may believe it is easy to continue to make minimal improvement.

[99] Among districts with HP Only schools (n = 95), 48 percent show declining enrollment from 2001 to 2005; the five districts with the largest number of HP Only schools observed an average 4 percent decline in enrollment during that time period.

[100] The cohort 1 HPSGP guidelines read: "The district must bear in mind that they will be accountable for the achievement benchmarks delineated in the approved Action Plan. The CDE discourages using HPSGP implementation funds for [class size reduction] purpose."

[101] Based on responses to a survey question asking for the top three most effective expenditures.

## *District Role in Sustaining Reform*

> Nearly 84 percent of school respondents expressing confidence about continuing reform characterized their districts as being highly or reasonably supportive, whereas only 63 percent of respondents from the less confident schools did so.

In addition to investing in shorter-term items, schools more confident about sustaining reform may be receiving additional support from the district. As one school respondent noted, "The impact will last because we have invested in both materials and professional development and support, which will continue with the support of leadership at the school site *and at the district level*." The respondent subsequently wrote that the district office was "extremely supportive and provided clear guidance on HPSGP." Nearly 84 percent of respondents confident about continuing reform characterized their districts as being highly or reasonably supportive, whereas only 63 percent of the less confident schools did so.[102] Conversely, 17 percent of the less confident schools described their district as failing to provide support or seriously hurting improvement efforts, in relation to 5 percent of the confident schools.[103] This finding is further supported by the district responses. More than 40 percent of districts that described themselves as focused on school improvement with coherent goals strongly agreed that the schools would continue reforms, whereas only 4 percent of the other districts did.

As mentioned previously, more than 80 percent of all surveyed districts believed that their schools would fully continue the reforms. While three districts appeared to place the onus on the schools (e.g., "the *schools* will need to be creative in terms of finding resources to continue them"), about half of these districts pointed to evidence that improvement efforts were ongoing with support from the district. Even though they agreed that schools would sustain reforms, some districts acknowledged that fiscal constraints prevented them from *fully* implementing strategies.

Irrespective of their confidence in the continuation of reforms, nearly all district respondents identified some key district supports in an attempt to provide some degree of continuity, including professional development (39 percent of the respondents), coaches and other resource staff (37 percent), and assistance with data analysis/monitoring (29 percent). Other less frequently identified district supports included supporting principals (through support teams and monitoring); budgetary and planning guidance; and prioritizing resources to lower performing schools (in terms of data and staffing).

While not consistently specified across all respondents, these district supports were available for all schools in 13 districts, while 9 targeted HPSGP or lower performing schools. Nearly a quarter of the districts planned to supplement the schools' loss of HPSGP resources by seeking additional funding (e.g., grants, particularly the Quality Education Investment Act) or re-allocating existing categorical/general funds. More than 20 percent of the districts attributed larger reform efforts and other programs, such as SAIT, Reading First, and most commonly Program Improvement, for helping maintain the momentum.

[102] These figures exclude charter school responses. Significant at the 5 percent confidence level.
[103] These figures exclude charter school responses. Significant at the 10 percent confidence level.

When asked about the challenges of sustaining improvement, respondents most often reported limited funding, with some districts reporting a further financial hit from declining enrollments. One district lamented, “You can’t infuse something with money, take it away, and expect things to continue. You need constant infusion of cash in a low wealth area. We are limping along trying to do the same things. We have tried to get funds from other areas, but will our improvement efforts be as robust? No. We have the goals, but we don’t have the money.” Added to this was the difficult task of maintaining focus and positive attitude for overworked, exhausted teachers and administrators. Recruitment and retention of high quality staff, particularly in light of staff attrition, further taxed districts’ capacity to sustain improvements.

## Summary

This chapter summarized school and district perspectives on the importance, impact, and sustainability of the HPSGP. Overall perspectives on all three of these measures were positive on average. Respondents believed the program had been important to their school’s improvement efforts; that it had an impact in such important domains as teacher knowledge, resource levels, and academic performance; and that they would be able to sustain achievement gains over time. In response to the survey’s last open-ended question which asked respondents if there was anything else they wanted to share about the HPSGP, 30 percent expressed their unsolicited appreciation for the program. Clearly, respondents believed the HPSGP had made a difference for their schools.

This overall sense of optimism, however, must be considered within the context of our other findings. These include the negligible (and essentially non-educationally significant) program effect observed in Chapter 3; the high percentage of schools that reported they were unable to replace HPSGP funds; and some notable concerns regarding breakdowns in program implementation reviewed in Chapter 5.

As an example of this possible contradiction, after indicating agreement that their school would be able to meet their API growth targets in the next three years, in their follow-up narrative response several school respondents clearly indicated concerns about loss of funding and sustainability. As one explained, “Once the funding is discontinued, so are the programs and services that were funded by High Priority. The challenges of working with at-risk students continue even though the funding does not.”

# Chapter 7: Summary of Findings and Recommendations

This concluding chapter begins with a general discussion of observations and findings, followed by recommendations. This latter section starts with HPSGP-specific recommendations provided by district and school respondents to our Year 2 survey efforts. It concludes with overall and program-specific recommendations from the study team based on information derived from the multiple data collection and analysis efforts of this study as described in Chapter 2.

## Observations and Key Findings

The following general discussion starts with our general observations and selected program-specific findings resulting from this two year evaluative effort.

### *General Observations*

Given the primary purpose of the HPSGP, some may consider the only relevant finding to be the one that showed no substantial difference in student performance between HPSGP and comparison schools. Overall performance of low-performing schools (both those participating and not participating in the HPSGP) is improving in an era in which state and federal accountability systems have been introduced. The accountability movement, including interventions like the HPSGP, has cast an important spotlight on chronically underperforming schools. An expectation is being conveyed to state, district, and school administrators that the status quo for these schools is no longer acceptable.

This increased attention paid to the state's lowest-performing schools is laudable, and has yielded some positive results for these schools on average as well as for all schools statewide. State and federal accountability efforts have likely made a substantial contribution to this improved performance, and it seems likely that in a generic sense, the HPSGP has contributed to these overall gains as well.

At the same time, analyses of school- and student-level achievement for this evaluation show no meaningful difference between schools participating in the HPSGP and comparison schools. Likewise, two prior evaluations of the II/USP (which was similar in many ways to the HPSGP) found that while the program focused attention on student achievement and low-performing schools, there appeared to be negligible overall impact on student achievement in participating schools (O'Day & Bitter, 2003; Bitter et al., 2005).

The II/USP and HPSGP efforts to shore up performance in the state's lowest performing schools are well-intentioned. At the same time, it also must be acknowledged that these programs (which in many ways are quite similar) constitute a substantial state investment over a considerable period of time with no discernable differential gains in student performance at target schools on average. Given these consistent findings, the state may wish to consider alternative approaches to improving student outcomes in low performing schools.

The vast majority of our district and school survey respondents and nearly all of the sites we visited clearly appreciated this program. At some of these locations, it was cited as a primary basis for improving student performance. On the other hand, the best empirical evidence we have does not show participating schools in the aggregate as making substantial gains. While we observe growth in student performance in HPSGP schools, it does not differ in a meaningful way from the performance of schools not in the program (i.e., not receiving a supplemental $400 per year per student over three to four years).

Perhaps the major question arising from these findings is why such a large investment shows no appreciable results. In addition, it seems important to ask whether the program should be more rigorously implemented as is, should be changed in modest ways, radically altered, or dropped altogether.

One argument is that interventions like the II/USP and HPSGP are simply supplements to an overall system that is fundamentally flawed. Even though the fiscal investments associated with these interventions are fairly substantial, because they are partial, short-term solutions attempting to overcome much more substantial system flaws, they have relatively little chance of effecting measurable progress in low performing schools.

The contention that categorical programs like the HPSGP have little chance of making substantial impact given the fundamental areas of weakness of the overall state system was a major conclusion of a recently completed evaluation effort of the state's K-12 public education system. Funded by a consortium of foundations,[104] and led by Professor Susanna Loeb of Stanford University, this collection of studies – known as *Getting Down to Facts* – was conducted by request of state leaders at the highest levels, including the Governor, the leaders of the Senate and Assembly, and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

A summary paper resulting from these studies (Loeb et al., 2007:1) starts with an overview of the problem: "On many different measures of achievement, California's students fall far behind those in other states." After reviewing the considerable body of evidence amassed through this comprehensive collection of studies, the authors further conclude (2007:5):

> There is no evidence to support the idea that simply introducing yet more new programs will produce the desired achievement gains. California already has far over 100 well-intentioned categorical programs, and there is no reason to think

[104]These included the The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, and The Stuart Foundation.

> that adding one or two more will make much difference, no matter how carefully targeted or lavishly funded. The marginal impact of any new program will be small. Quite simply, the finance and governance system is broken and requires fundamental reform not tinkering around the edges.

If this assessment is correct, it would explain the lack of observable HPSGP impact and would further suggest that additional iterations of limited program interventions like the HPSGP, regardless of the degree to which implementation is improved, will not likely substantially impact the state's low performing schools.

An alternative perspective is that substantial gains can result from programs like the HPSGP with some redesign and shored up implementation. For example, the relatively short-term design underlying the HPSGP may be one reason for its lack of impact. That is, a three- to four-year funding cycle may be insufficient to substantially affect school performance. Other possible reasons include implementation breakdowns, such as weak external providers, short-lived action plans, insufficient district involvement and support, excessive principal turnover, and constraints related to the sometimes untimely arrival and use of HPSGP funds.

The case studies left the site visit 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. Through the case study site visits and surveys, there was clear evidence that the program worked well at individual school sites. Reasonable continuity of capable leadership and staff in the school appeared to encourage the long-term planning and implementation that is needed for supplemental funds of this type to be strategically spent. Under these conditions, it appeared that schools 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 these results is open to question.

A clear majority of the survey respondents perceived that the program had made an impact. However, there was also a fairly sizeable percentage of respondents indicating implementation concerns that could substantially impact the observed lack of a program effect in the aggregate. For example, over 40 percent of school respondents indicated that the district had not actively assisted them in regard to program implementation. Half of the school respondents expressed concern about the length of the program and a third said that funding had not arrived in a timely fashion and therefore did not fully permit appropriate planning and spending. Considerable HPSGP funds were carried over each year, which was often described as reflective of other systemic implementation break downs.

Using survey data, we attempted to test the general contention that more rigorous implementation would result in improved outcomes. However, examining the relationship between the perceptions of survey respondents and student outcomes did not yield clear results. While we believe that better implementation would increase the

potential of the program making a difference – and a substantial number of survey respondents (although a minority) also indicated implementation concerns – we simply could not document this based on available data.

## *Listing of Selected Program Findings*

- On average, HPSGP schools showed gains in student performance during the period of program implementation. However, the differences in student performance between the schools participating in this program and comparison schools across a variety of comparative analyses were negligibleAlthough more than 60 percent of school respondents reported that a plan for school improvement prominently guided their reform efforts, this reported impression was not reflected in measured academic gains.
- While nearly half of the school respondents described their external provider support as appropriate and effective, nearly 45 percent of the surveyed respondents reported that the school did not use, or reported that they did not know if the school used, an external provider in the development of the Action Plan, even though it was a program requirement.
- Although the HPSGP attempted to more clearly define the district role, over 40 percent of school respondents indicated that the district had not actively assisted them in the implementation of the program.
- Although the vast majority of HPSGP school respondents indicated an effective use of funds, half expressed concern about the short length of the program and nearly a third reported that the untimely arrival of funds did not permit appropriate planning and spending.
- Approximately one-quarter of HPSGP funds were carried over each of the four implementation years.
- Spending on personnel was reported as the most common as well as the most effective use of HPSGP funds.
- HPSGP was perceived as having a major role in student achievement gains, despite nearly identical academic performance during this period between HPSGP and non-HPSGP comparison schools.
- A slight majority of respondents reported a lasting HPSGP impact in areas of school capacity.
- While 60 percent of school respondents indicated confidence in sustaining the impact of HPSGP, only 40 percent said they had been able to find funding to continue these reforms.
- Nearly 60 percent of surveyed school respondents cited major factors limiting their ability to use HPSGP funds to improve student achievement at their school.

# Recommendations

The following section reviews key program recommendations made by the school and district respondents surveyed for this evaluation. These are followed by study team recommendations, which are categorized into general state-level recommendations, irrespective of the future of the HPSGP, and specific improvements to the program that may foster a greater impact.

## *Respondent Recommendations*

As part of the narrative section of the school survey, school respondents were given an opportunity to recommend a single most important improvement to HPSGP. These open-ended responses fell into six broad categories, as shown in Exhibit 7.1. Among the 80 school respondents who answered, most made recommendations relating to the design or structure of funding under the program. The reader should note that while the question specified a single improvement, most respondents provided more than one response.

### Exhibit 7.1. School Respondents' Recommendations to Improve the HPSGP

Source: HPSGP School Surveys (AIR)

| **What is the single most important improvement to the HPSGP that you would recommend to state policymakers?** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Theme** | N | % |
| **Longer Term Funding**<br>Examples: Provide lower level of annual funding over longer time period<br>Gradually reduce funding levels to facilitate budget/ strategic adjustments<br>Provide continued funds to successful schools | **36** | **34%** |
| **Timely Funding and Consistent Carry-Over Policies** | **15** | **14%** |
| **Increase Flexibility in Spending** | **15** | **14%** |
| **More Explicit Funding Guidance or Required Uses** | **12** | **11%** |
| **External Provider-Related**<br>Example: Allow schools to opt out | **6** | **6%** |
| **Dissemination of Knowledge / "Best Practices"** | **4** | **4%** |
| **Other** | **18** | **17%** |
| **Total Responses** | **80** | -- |

Note: Percentages are based on 106 respondents, and add up to more than 100% as respondents provided more than one answer.

Nearly 35 percent of the school respondents recommended that funding under the HPSGP be provided for a longer period of time, reflecting the idea that reform takes, in addition to money, time: "Three or four years is too short a time period to make permanent changes. The funding was a short-term solution to a long-term problem." How and under what conditions respondents proposed continuing funding varied. Six school respondents favored the idea of diluting the yearly funding amount in order to stretch the money over a longer period of time. One respondent underscored the importance of self-sustainability, saying that a gradual reduction of yearly grant awards could help schools

phase in alternative funding. Others recommended that continued funding should be coupled with specific performance benchmarks in order to both reward "successful" schools and ensure the viability of their programs. In addition to these 36 school respondents, 7 districts also noted concerns with the short length of the grant period.

Fourteen school respondents as well as 7 district respondents expressed a need for more clarity around funding, primarily consistent and predictable funding allocation timeline and carry-over requirements. One school response deserves special note, as it effectively captures the concerns expressed by others:

> The one recommendation I would make is for the state to be very clear about its funding and to commit to providing the funding in a timely way. Money given after the fact does not facilitate thoughtful planning on the district or the school levels. Resources, supports, and appropriate trainings cannot be planned for and implemented if funding is not given until the last minute.

Six respondents from year-round schools stressed that the delivery of funds needed to better align with the school calendar.

Another recommendation pertained to governance over the use of funds. Fourteen school respondents cited that increased flexibility and decision making authority over how funds are spent would facilitate reform efforts. In most cases, these recommendations were based on the notion that school sites are most attuned with student needs and therefore in the best position to determine a spending plan customized to those needs. Three of these responses suggested that the allowed uses of the funds were too narrow, with respondents often citing specific expenditures that would have been beneficial if they had been allowed (such as facilities, school safety and bilingual materials). Lastly, three of these respondents mentioned excessive district control and bureaucracy as a reason for enhancing site-based authority over spending decisions.

On the other hand, a different 14 school respondents recommended that clearer, more targeted goals and specific requirements be associated with the grant money. Responses under this category often recommended setting specific spending requirements or strategies such as class size reduction, technology, opportunities for extended learning and collaboration, among others.

On a related topic, four school respondents recommended broader dissemination of best practices and successful strategies in HPSGP schools, including research-based interventions. One in particular suggested "a conference or gathering for HPSGP schools to share successes so we can learn about different ways to improve student achievement."

Eight district respondents pointed to a lack of state guidance on best practices and technical assistance as a weakness of the program. Six of these districts recommended that the state build knowledge of effective school reform models, with particular emphasis on what works for districts. Two of these districts described examples of research-based strategies they had learned about at conferences – information that they

thought would be helpful for the state to disseminate on a statewide basis, as opposed to having to seek out the knowledge through other means. Another district respondent remarked, “We spend too much time roaming in the unknown.”

In making recommendations to improve the program, five school respondents and nine district respondents provided feedback on the external provider component. One of the school respondents noted a need for more clarification regarding the responsibilities of the provider, and three others called for a reduced role by allowing schools to opt out of the requirement or focusing on building capacity *within* the school instead.

Of the nine district respondents mentioning this as an area for improvement, six proposed more guidelines in the selection of eligible providers, including greater quality control and screening. One in particular recommended an evaluation of provider quality. Based on its mixed experience, one district learned the importance of carefully selecting the providers, “There is some un-evenness in how prepared these external providers are to really provide the level of support the schools need.” Four districts sought more prescriptive roles for the external provider, such as working regularly with the schools; a long-term involvement for the duration of the grant, and district-level involvement. Describing a school whose key program efforts ceased at the end of the grant, one respondent stressed the importance of including district in the external provider work to help sustain reform.

Several of these provider-based recommendations are reflected in the new cohort 2 expectations, which require regular communication between schools, districts, and external providers, as well as ongoing external support to both the school and the district in the implementation of the plan. Although it was not identified by school respondents as an area for improvement, seven districts recommended bolstered state oversight and monitoring, including interim progress reports (with three districts citing the SAIT structure as a framework for this).

## *Recommendations from the Study Team*

These recommendations are divided into two major categories: 1) overall state recommendations and alternative investments in lieu of programs like HPSGP, and 2) HPSGP-specific recommendations, some of which reflect the recommendations made by the survey respondents. In keeping with the discussion at the onset of this chapter as to whether the failure of the HPSGP appears more due to global limitations of K-12 education in the state overall as opposed to programmatic issues, the first set of recommendations takes more of a global perspective. What changes might be made to the overall state system to enhance student performance in low performing schools? These recommendations are more general and are not specifically limited to the HPSGP or similar programs. Nevertheless, they are drawn largely from what has been observed and heard from site respondents throughout this study, as well as lessons of successful school practices from the II/USP evaluations, e.g. the value of data driven decision making. In addition to these suggestions which were specifically generated as a result of our evaluation of the HPSGP, we again refer the reader to the *Getting Down to Facts* findings and their implications in regard to overall state K-12 education reform.

Second, we make recommendations regarding future implementation of programs like the HPSGP. Should such programs continue, these recommendations are intended (but certainly not guaranteed) to increase the chances of future program success. 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 provider components of the HPSGP more effective.

## General State-Level Recommendations

Based on our findings, it appears that a short-term categorical approach to school reform is insufficient to overcome much larger system inadequacies that fail to provide the kinds of long-term support and assistance needed to substantially and consistently improve student performance in the state's most challenged schools. We suggest terminating categorical interventions like the HPSGP in favor of more comprehensive statewide school reform that provides long-term administrative and resource support to the state's lowest-performing schools enrolling our most academically challenging students.

However, we also understand broad-reaching state reform to be an unlikely immediate alternative. In the interim, we recommend that the state consider alternative investments to bolster the performance of the state's lowest-performing schools, as opposed to relying on II/USP- and HPSGP-type interventions.

For example, the most fundamental element supporting effective reform efforts at the schools we visited was constancy and strength of school leadership. To provide the state's most challenged schools a reasonable chance to successfully compete with other schools in the state (and across the nation), it seems imperative as a first step that we test alternative methods for attracting and retaining some of the best instructional staff at these sites. Because it will be difficult to know with any confidence at the onset that any of these strategies will show a measurable impact on student performance, we recommend trying several of these alternatives in different parts of the state with a corresponding evaluation design to see which ones seem most productive and worthy for consideration of replication on a larger scale.

### *1. Keep the attention on student learning and low-performing schools.*

State and federal standards-based policies have been very successful in capturing the attention of the education community and the general public and focusing that attention on student outcomes system-wide and on low-performing schools in particular. We urge that this attention continue.

### *2. Consider the resources needed for sustained academic success in low-performing schools, and ensure that they are present and maintained in these schools and their districts.*

The state should identify the resources needed in the state's most challenging, highest-

poverty schools, fund them accordingly, and ensure that these resources are allocated effectively by districts to schools.

Since the district was found to be a key intermediary between state-level policy and school-level implementation, the state should ensure that districts have the resources to provide the necessary assistance and support to their schools, and that they allocate them to low-performing schools as needed. For example, they might be required to ensure a teaching force in these schools that at least equals, or exceeds, the district average on such characteristics as experience and degree level.

Three of the studies included in the *Getting Down to Facts* project described above systematically considered the funding needed for public education given the state's specified academic goals and the composition of student needs in districts across the state including students living in poverty, English learners, and students with disabilities. These studies provided alternative estimates of the resources needed on an ongoing basis to meet the state's educational goal, and concluded that money alone would be insufficient to enhance educational outcomes in the state. However, all studies concurred on the need to target enhanced resources in schools with the most challenging populations on an ongoing basis. These clearly include schools currently targeted for such temporary interventions as HPSGP.

#### *3. Use data on an ongoing basis to identify the extent to which state-level programs make an impact, and use these data to inform and alter state-level policy and programs in support of low-performing schools as needed.*

As the state sets expectations for schools and districts and encourages them to regularly use data as a basis for shaping policy and practice, we suggest the same process for the state. The state should attempt to actively determine fairly early on how well state-supported interventions are working.

We recommend early and rigorous assessment of a formative nature that can serve to guide and adjust implementation, and that is designed to compile evidence as early as possible about the extent to which anticipated outcomes are likely to be forthcoming. External evaluations provide a means to gain formative and summative information on programs. However, given the high-stakes environment and urgency to improve student outcomes, the state itself should establish more mechanisms to review policies regularly, assess what components of its policies are on the right track, and adjust policies on an ongoing basis as needed.

#### *4. Enhance the power of CBEDS*

Several of our case study sites and survey schools exhibited alarming principal turnover, and teacher turnover was also noted as a particular challenge to reform efforts. However, we were not able to compare this reported turnover to our designated comparison schools or other groups of interest, as this critical information is lacking in CBEDS. We recommend enhancing CBEDS to include questions on the number of years that principals and teachers have been at their current school, and the number of years in that

same position in other schools. This enhancement to the database would serve as a powerful tool to understand staff turnover and its implications for student achievement.

### *5. Foster data-driven decision making.*

Many of the successful schools we have examined (through evaluations of the HPSGP, Proposition 227 (Parrish et al., 2006), II/USP (O'Day and Bitter, 2003; Bitter et al., 2005), and high poverty schools (EdSource, 2006)) 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. Unlike a number of other factors that have been repeatedly cited as making a difference in regard to school reform (e.g., strong leadership), data-driven decision making may be much easier to replicate.

### *6. Recognize the influential role districts play in facilitating or constraining school improvement, and incorporate mechanisms into accountability policies to encourage positive and productive actions at the district level.*

One of the key findings of this study was the potential influence of district context on schools' achievement growth. Although the HPSGP attempted to increase the involvement of the district in these reform efforts in relation to the II/USP, the findings from this study show that there is considerable room for improvement. The state's District Assistance Intervention Team (DAIT) process should further clarify the role of districts and counties in regard to assisting the state's lowest-performing schools.

### *7. Consider methods to better align the state and federal accountability systems.*

Site-level respondents in this study largely reported that while they consider the API to be a better outcome measure, they feel pressure to address AYP targets. This is not surprising given that 80 percent of the HP Only schools are in Program Improvement (PI), with nearly half of the PI schools in Year 4 or 5 of the sanctions. Given the conflict and confusion associated with two overlapping accountability systems, we recommend that the state focus further on their alignment. However, we recognize that this is not an easy task and should be done carefully to preserve the most effective aspects of the state system.

For low-performing schools that are far from reaching the AYP targets set through NCLB, API growth targets provide incentives for schools to make continuous improvement. These targets account for the fact that these schools are starting from a very low base of performance.

Potential actions the state can take include examining better ways to align the expectations and associated sanctions of the state model with the federal model. For example, the state could focus on having the *same* schools identified under *both* programs for similar sanctions. Having some schools recognized for success within one model, but

designated as failing in another, can result in confusion and unclear expectations. Additionally, the state can continue to press the federal government for greater incorporation of the state API into the AYP measure. Since there appears to be greater buy-in to a growth model and to the API measure in general, this may be an important aspect of the state model to attempt to preserve.

***8. Develop and foster policies that will strive for strength and continuity of school leadership, especially at low-performing schools.***

Through the site visits and survey data, we have documented the common problem of excessive turnover in the leadership at low-performing schools. Conversely, where schools have appeared to thrive under these types of interventions, strong and ongoing school leadership was commonly found to be an integral part. While change in leadership may be the catalyst necessary to meaningful change, it appears very difficult for meaningful long-term planning and change to take hold without subsequent stability of leadership. We believe that a valuable role for the state, and a possible alternative investment to the HPSGP, would be to allocate funds for recruiting, training, and retaining strong principals in our state's most challenging schools.

***9. Work with districts to develop learning networks where districts and schools in need of improvement can be linked with, and can learn from, districts and schools that have been successful in improving outcomes with comparable populations of students.***

In light of the limited communication reported and evident among schools participating in our evaluation, we recommend that the state and districts consider working in tandem to create opportunities for districts and schools to learn from one other. This could enhance knowledge transfer from schools showing substantial progress under reform efforts over time to schools new to and struggling with reform. Such learning networks might feature pairing of schools ("sister" schools) or clusters of schools that would collaborate and work together toward the common goal of enhancing student achievement.

Although it is likely that costs will be associated with this kind of system (e.g., stipends to staff from successful schools offering assistance to similar, struggling schools), this may prove a more effective use of state funds than such mechanisms as external providers. It seems reasonable to expect that the state's greatest talent pool in regard to turning around low-performing schools resides in the administrators and staff who have demonstrated that this can be done.

Similarly, the state should identify *districts* that have successfully improved student outcomes in their low-performing schools, and facilitate opportunities for other districts to learn from them. Given that districts can play a key role in improvement efforts at their schools, and influence the implementation of state-level programs like HPSGP, we recommend a similar effort as above, but targeted at districts. In this case, the state would again set simple and straightforward criteria for high-growth districts that can be reviewed on a yearly basis. Using these data, we recommend that the state provide

opportunities, either through regular conferences and meetings, or through a more intensive partnering program, to facilitate learning across districts.

It has been reported that the state Title I office previously proposed matching their "Achieving Schools" with struggling schools, but the successful schools did not want to distract from their schools reform efforts by having key personnel districted and frequently off site. In research we have conducted in the past, it also has been our experience that some of the most successful districts we have identified in regard to demonstrating that they can shore up schools with challenging student populations sometimes discourage site visits and other opportunities to share what they are doing. Much of their success is likely associated with deterring these kinds of distractions while maintaining a strict focus on their primary goals.

With fiscal incentives, however, successful schools and districts may very likely be willing to reconsider and see this as an opportunity to retain the resources they need to maintain their reform efforts through sharing what they have learned with others. We believe the costs associated with this kind of system (e.g., stipends to staff from successful schools offering assistance to similar, struggling schools) is a possible alternative use of state funds the state may wish to consider in shoring up struggling schools and districts. It seems reasonable to expect that the state's greatest talent pool in regard to turning around low-performing schools resides in the administrators and staff who have demonstrated that this can be done.

***10. Look at other states' efforts to support their lowest-performing schools. Assess what investments they are making toward these ends and the degree to which they are experiencing results from these efforts.***

As a result of national and state accountability systems across the country, many states are experimenting with interventions with the same basic intentions as the HPSGP, i.e., to improve performance in their most challenged schools and districts. We suggest an investigation into what other states are doing and what evidence they have found in regard to a return on these investments.

***11. Require participation in future evaluations.***

As a grant precondition for any state program, districts and schools should agree to participate in state-approved evaluations of the programs. Soliciting the participation of districts and schools for this study took considerable persistence. As the state makes substantial investments in programs of this type, a reasonable pre-condition for participation is the state's right to collect data regarding whether this investment is cost effective.

## Specific HPSGP Recommendations

If the decision is made to continue with interventions like HPSGP, we suggest continued efforts to address some of the implementation challenges outlined in this report.

1. ***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 provider. 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).

Another possible component of the accountability provision listed above is that external providers might be required with input from the District/School Liaison Team (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 provider. 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 provider, 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.

2. ***Enhance the district role: The role of the district should be explicitly enhanced and the district should be held accountable for school progress and for establishing and maintaining "conditions" for success.***

We recommend that bolstered assurances for which districts will be held accountable be a prerequisite for school participation in the HPSGP. The analyses from this study 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 continued program participation. Ultimately, if districts do not comply and schools are continuing to fail, ongoing program funding should be withheld. Rewards for gains in student performance might come in the form of increased local discretion.

As mentioned in this report, 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.

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. 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).

***3. Improve monitoring: The CDE (perhaps with the assistance of the County Offices of Education) should enhance its monitoring of non-achievement-related measurements, such as compliance with the district assurances and expenditures.***

Along with these district assurances, we recommend regular reporting and monitoring. As the CDE is charged with allocating HPSGP funds, they should also be given the responsibility and authority 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. In order to ensure that districts do not lose sight of these obligations, the Annual Reports should include data that will enable districts and the CDE to assess progress towards such assurances (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 DSLT 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.[105]

***4. Redesign Annual Report: Collect data necessary to monitor assurances and school progress, and review on a regular basis.***

As described above, we recommend enhanced monitoring, and an important step in this direction is the modification of the current data collection under this program. While our survey collected respondent perceptions about key program components such as the external provider and district support, the fact that the evaluation was conducted at the end of (and even after) the program made collecting reliable measurements of implementation fidelity a challenge. We encourage the state to learn from evaluations of CSR model providers, such as *High Schools That Work*, that use ongoing survey measures to assess the extent to which participating schools are implementing the model with fidelity and how that relates to student outcomes. We recommend that the CDE redesign the Annual Report as a carefully constructed survey instrument that will provide indicators of implementation which can then be used, with other measures, to monitor schools as well as assess the relationship between implementation and student outcomes.

The research team did not find the current Annual Report data to be particularly helpful in evaluating the program, nor had these data been analyzed in any systematic way prior to this evaluation. 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

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

schools. These would need to be converted to percentages to determine the degree of parental involvement or trained teachers.

In conducting the principal analysis presented in Chapter 4, 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 HP Only schools were missing data for this question in either 2002-03 or 2003-04. As of June 2007, well over a third of the HP Only schools were missing 2005-06 Annual Report data altogether.

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. Changes to the Annual Report data collection could make the data more powerful and meaningful for monitoring HPSGP schools and districts.

5. ***Ensure predictable funding: The timing of the funds should be carefully considered for the next cohort, with explicit timelines to allow for effective school planning and clear expectations regarding a transition phase prior to program completion.***

The state and districts should provide clear directives and assurances as to when the funds will arrive at the school, how much, and with what degree of flexibility in 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 on time. 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 provider and District-School Liaison Team) 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 resources necessary (e.g., financial and personnel) to 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.

For the second cohort of HPSGP schools, CDE has prohibited annual carry-over. We strongly recommend that the CDE reconsider this restriction. While we observed considerable carry-over in all years of the program, our case studies suggested that carry-over was an indicator of more systemic problems, such as disruption in school leadership. As an alternative, we encourage closer monitoring of carry-over, such as requiring schools with substantial carry-over to submit an explanation of the reasons and the implications for future planning.

6. ***Ensure a supply of qualified external providers statewide, consistently describe the nature and duration of their role, and add measurements of their effectiveness to the program.***

Study respondents expressed concerns regarding the overall supply of qualified external providers. If this component is required as part of the HPSGP, the state has an obligation to be more proactive in ensuring an adequate and qualified supply. If the state does not have the capacity to develop this pool, then perhaps this component should not be required, or alternative options should be allowed.

In addition, a number of school respondents reported the external provider component as vaguely defined. This component also showed substantial variation in implementation. Although the external provider role is only required in legislation for the development of the Action Plan, it is further described in the second cohort guidelines as to "provide ongoing technical assistance to the school site administrative and teaching staff." This language seems to imply a relationship with the external provider for the duration of the grant. The requirement should be fully clarified and the supporting language made as consistent as possible. Establishing annual activities for external providers, such as required meetings with the DSLT 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 provider in the school reform process.

Last, the regular cycle of the continuous improvement process described in the second

cohort guidelines should include an assessment of the effectiveness of the external provider, as currently there appears to be no accountability for these individuals who share a large responsibility in assisting the lowest-performing schools in the state.

One indicator of effectiveness 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 provider 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 providers 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 providers are actually assisting schools.

It is also not clear if the participating schools are required to replace external providers if the provider 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.

## Conclusion

On average, the state's lowest-performing schools progressed during the period of HPSGP implementation. Although the schools participating in this program did not show gains that statistically differ from non-participating schools, all of the schools — as well as the state — deserve credit for their advances. The findings from this evaluation should not in any way detract from these accomplishments.

The challenge facing the state's lowest-performing schools are daunting. Many of the educators who participated in the site visits and surveys convinced us of their dedication and determination in producing a brighter future for their students. It may simply be that the HPSGP was not enough. Ongoing systems of supplemental fiscal resources, selective staff placement, and other support are needed to substantially impact student outcomes in the state's most challenged schools.

Given the primary purpose of the program, some may say that the finding of no substantial difference in student performance between HPSGP and comparison schools is the only result that matters. As this is the third study issued on behalf of the state showing virtually no return in terms of enhanced student performance from the HPSGP and its predecessor II/USP, the question of whether to continue to invest in HPSGP-type interventions should be carefully considered by policy makers. Issues related to the need to improve student performance in the state's most challenged schools will not go away regardless of the future of the HPSGP.

We recommend that the state's commitment to low-performing schools not be diminished, but enhanced and re-directed. Because the current investments have not fully

yielded the desired results, the need for a bolstered state commitment to equal educational opportunities for all children in California is perhaps greater than ever.

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