THE SECRET TO SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE

BY PUBLIC IMPACT

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Acknowledgements

The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools' mission is to transform schools and revolutionize school systems to empower all students with a high-quality education. For more on the Partnership, please visit **www.partnershipla.org**.

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BUILDING GOOD CHARACTER

The mention of Los Angeles conjures images of celebrities, the iconic Hollywood sign, and luxury shops on Rodeo Drive—a sprawling urban playground that is often the backdrop for blockbuster movies and must-see television. It is also home to the second-largest public school district in the United States. Los Angeles Unified School District (L.A. Unified) covers 710 square miles, including most of the city of Los Angeles and all or portions of 26 cities and unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County.[1] L.A. Unified serves more than 633,000 students in grades K–12 in over 1,300 district and charter schools, at more than $7 billion a year.[2]

The district serves primarily minority and low-income students. More than three-quarters are from low-income families.[3] Seventy-four percent of the students are Latino; 10 percent are white; 8 percent are black; and 6 percent are Asian.[4] A quarter are English language learners (ELLs).[5]

Like many large districts in urban U.S. cities, L.A. Unified struggles to produce strong results for all students. On 2015–16 end-of-year state tests, 60 percent of students did not meet state standards in English language arts (ELA).[6] Students fared even worse in math: 70 percent performed below grade level.[7] High-need students are struggling the most: 95 percent of ELL students performed below grade level in both math and ELA;[8] among economically disadvantaged students, 66 percent performed below grade level in ELA and 76 percent in math.[9]

Eleven years ago, outcomes for students were even bleaker. A 2006 study found that the district's graduation rate was at 44 percent, placing L.A. Unified sixth from the bottom of the nation's 50 largest school districts in graduation rates.[10] The district's data for the 2007–08 school year reflected a dropout rate of 54 percent.[11]

That's when the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools entered the scene. Since 2007, the Partnership has worked to improve some of Los Angeles' lowest-performing schools and has achieved strong results. (See "The Partnership's History," page 9) The overwhelming majority—about 90 percent of its schools—have improved student outcomes, and 60 percent have improved student outcomes significantly.[12] Most notably, the high schools that joined the Partnership have increased graduation rates to more than 80 percent, on average.[13]

But the data tell only half the story—expectations and mindsets have also shifted. Eleven years ago, when Melanie Lundquist, along with her husband, Richard (the Partnership's founding philanthropic benefactors), first started talking to students in Partnership schools about going to college, they told her, "We can't afford it, we are not prepared, and we are not smart enough." These days, she gets a different response: "The Partnership has changed our schools. Everyone has high expectations for students now, and that has changed our own expectations for the future."

Deycy Hernandez, director of Boyle Heights Promise Neighborhood Initiative at Promesa, a community-based organization that works with Partnership schools to increase graduation rates, confirms the more intangible but consequential impacts of the Partnership's work in schools. "The difference between a Partnership school and a non-Partnership school is dramatic. The receptivity of principals and teachers to school improvement is markedly different," she says.

How has the Partnership brought change to its students and schools? Public Impact aims to tell that story in the pages that follow. The Partnership's model is unique. L.A. Unified lets it manage a set of the district's highest-need schools, but it is organizationally distinct from the district. It is neither charter operator nor district contractor; rather, the Partnership is best described as an independent, nonprofit school management organization. But even that nomenclature does not fully capture the Partnership's mission to transform schools and revolutionize school systems to empower all students with a high-quality education (see "The Partnership Model," page 15). Nor does it fully reflect its unique approach of working in L.A. Unified schools in partnership with the district as an independent advocate for all district schools (see "The Partnership Model: A Unique Approach to School Turnaround," page 37).

By working directly with school leaders and staff to implement strategies proven to improve student performance, and advocating for resources that will help Los Angeles' highest-need schools build their capacity to create and sustain long-term change, the Partnership is demonstrating one way that Los Angeles and other urban cities can achieve school improvement in traditional district schools at scale and change district systems to better serve all students.

Established in 2007 as an independent, nonprofit organization, the Partnership began with a mission to "transform schools and revolutionize school systems to empower all students with a high-quality education." It came out of an effort initiated by former L.A. mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to turn around the lowest-performing schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (see "The Partnership's History," page 9). The Partnership was created to work with L.A. Unified's historically highest-need, lowest-performing schools to achieve stronger student outcomes. By working side by side with district staff in these schools, the Partnership gains insight into the barriers that impede success in all high-need schools and the changes needed to turn them around. Through private dollars and community partnerships, the Partnership supplements—rather than replaces or replicates—the supports and resources the district gives traditional public schools to help them build their capacity to achieve stronger student outcomes.

The Partnership's mission is to transform schools and revolutionize school systems to empower all students with a high-quality education.

Results to date suggest that the approach is effective. Most of the schools that joined the Partnership network—particularly high schools—have had steady gains in student achievement and other student outcomes, including graduation rates and eligibility for matriculation to California's state universities and colleges (see "The Partnership's Impact," page 43). When they joined the network, most Partnership schools were among the state's lowest performing. As of this writing, one-third of Partnership schools are performing at or above the state average in math and English language arts, and one school is in the top 20 percent of schools statewide. Together, the data and the changes modeled in Partnership schools signal what may be achieved district-wide to ensure that all L.A. Unified students have access to a high-quality education.

As of the 2017–18 school year, the Partnership network includes 18 schools in Los Angeles—nine elementary, four middle, and five high schools. They are in three neighborhood hubs—Watts (Local District–South), Boyle Heights (Local District–East), and South L.A. (Local District–Central)—each part of an L.A. Unified local school district.[14] (See Figure 1, page 8.)

Figure 1. Map of Partnership schools, 2017–18
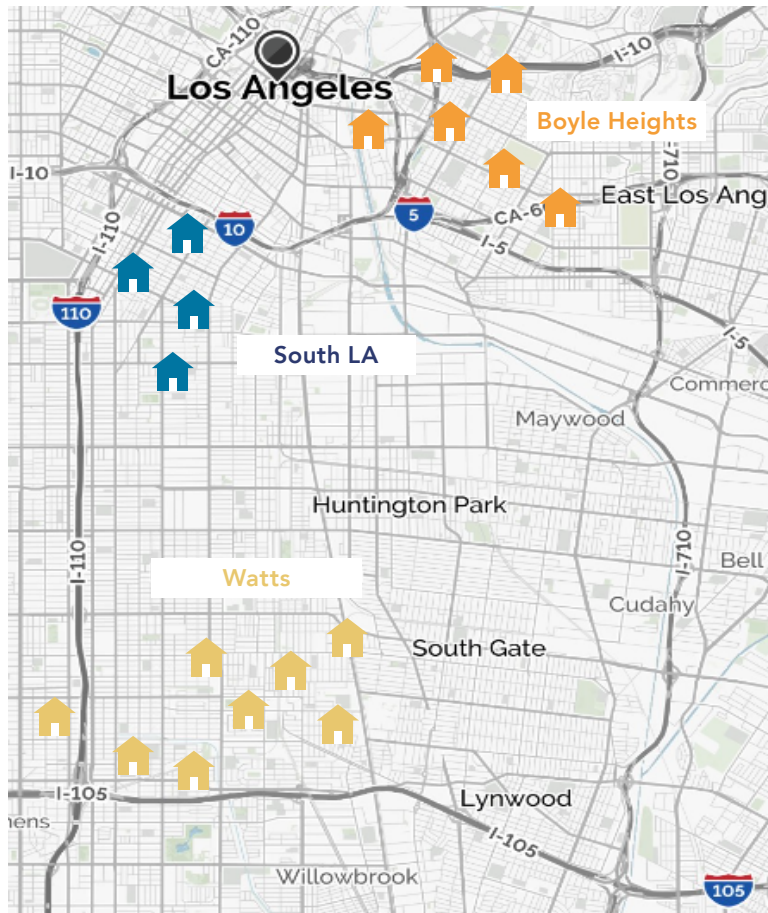
LAUSD Local Districts
■ East ■ Central ■ South

🏠 **Boyle Heights**
Sunrise Elementary School, 2008
Hollenbeck Middle School, 2008
Stevenson Middle School, 2008
Mendez High School, 2009
Roosevelt High School, 2008
Math, Science, and Technology Magnet Academy
   at Roosevelt High School, 2008

🏠 **South L.A.**
20th Street Elementary School, 2016
Dolores Huerta Elementary School, 2010
Carver Middle School, 2010
Santee Education Complex, 2008

🏠 **Watts**
107th Street Elementary School, 2015
99th Street Elementary School, 2008
Figueroa Street Elementary School, 2008
Grape Street Elementary School, 2016
Florence Griffith Joyner Elementary School, 2009
Ritter Elementary School, 2008
Edwin Markham Middle School, 2008
Jordan High School, 2011

*Year indicates when each school
joined Partnership*

The Partnership is supported almost entirely by philanthropy. A 10-year, $50 million grant from leading Southern California philanthropists Richard and Melanie Lundquist is the Partnership's largest single source of funding and stands as the largest contribution to L.A. Unified schools in district history.[15] (See "Partnership Funding," page 19.)

THE PARTNERSHIP'S HISTORY

Antonio Villaraigosa became Los Angeles' mayor in 2006, intent on ensuring that all of the city's students had access to an excellent education that put them on a path to college, work, and a good life.[16] Seeking accountability for graduation rates that were reportedly under 50 percent,[17] Villaraigosa pursued legislation to gain mayoral control of the district. That same year, a California state assembly bill passed that retained the school board but gave the mayor significant authority over the district. The school board and teachers' unions immediately challenged the law. Within months, state courts overturned the law because it violated the state constitution's separation of powers provisions.

Undeterred, Villaraigosa created the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, and won agreement from the district for it to manage some of the district's lowest-performing schools. Marshall Tuck left his post as president of the Green Dot Public Schools charter network, one of the nation's few charter management organizations engaged in turning around struggling schools, to join the Partnership as CEO in 2007. With a $50 million grant from leading Southern California philanthropists Richard and Melanie Lundquist, the Partnership began its work with schools in the 2008–09 school year.

Lundquist investment

Real estate investors Richard and Melanie Lundquist both graduated from Los Angeles public schools. Melanie Lundquist attended school in Los Angeles since kindergarten, and her father attended Roosevelt High School, which would later become a Partnership school. Believing a good education to be the foundation for successful participation in the economy and society, she was inspired by Villaraigosa's vision for Los Angeles schools when she first encountered him during his 2005 mayoral campaign. In 2007, the Lundquists committed to supporting Villaraigosa and his plan to improve the district. Propelled by a vision of the private sector working collaboratively with the public school system to improve education for all students, they hoped that their investment would inspire additional philanthropic investments in public schools. The Lundquists pledged $50 million to the Partnership over 10 years, underwriting nearly all of the Partnership's initial budget.

Strategy

The Partnership's approach in the early years was grounded in "The Schoolhouse: A Framework to Give Every Child in LAUSD an Excellent Education,"[18] a report that

Villaraigosa had commissioned during his initial bid to take over the district. The Schoolhouse framework had six critical education strategies: high expectations; safe, small, and clean schools; empowered leadership; powerful teaching and rigorous curriculum; family and community involvement; and more money to schools. Each of the strategies highlighted the practices of successful schools across the country that are critical to ensuring success for all students.[19]

Initially, the Partnership organized its own plan of action around the Schoolhouse principles. Their blueprint encompassed multiple strategies focused on empowering great leaders; highly effective teaching; engaging families and communities; collective impact; and preparing students for college. But, early Partnership staff members recalled, the organization met challenges implementing all the strategies in its turnaround schools.

"We had just taken on 10 schools. We were facing great need and were trying to solve many problems at once," said Marshall Tuck, the Partnership's founding CEO. "We had passionate people committed to making a change, but we were under-resourced and understaffed given the number of issues we were trying to address. With more time and experience, we got better at differentiating and prioritizing issues and supports. By year three, we were well grounded and more effective at focusing on a smaller number of areas that could have the most impact."

According to Tuck, the first three years of work in schools and with the district yielded a more focused approach centered on a strategy of adding to, not replicating, support that the district gave schools and students. By 2011, the Partnership had further refined its adaptation of Schoolhouse principles to concentrate on enhancing school supports through teachers, school leaders, and parental and community engagement. For example, the Partnership began a teacher-leader program, working with principals to help them form and use leadership teams to improve instructional practice. Though primarily focused on refining and delivering supports for existing staff, the Partnership also worked with principals and school hiring teams to recruit qualified teachers best suited to meet the particular needs of students in Partnership schools as vacancies arose.

By 2014, the Partnership further honed its approach to focus on building the capacities of school leaders, teachers, parents, and community partners to lead and engage in efforts to improve schools and student outcomes, and develop systems for sustaining those improvements. For example, the Partnership refined its principal training approach to focus on helping principals develop long-term school improvement goals and align school improvement plans with annual goals sequenced cohesively to meet long-term objectives. The Partnership also refocused its advocacy work to emphasize

Courage
Aim high, do what's right, and
hold ourselves accountable

Creativity
Seek creative and scalable solutions

Continuous Improvement
Relentlessly pursue excellence

Collective Action
Lead together

Figure 2. Partnership for Los Angeles Schools' core values

improving Partnership schools' access to all the instructional and operational re-
sources available to them through the district.

In 2018, in accordance with its core values—courage, creativity, continuous im-
provement, and collective action (see Figure 2)—the Partnership continues to
refine its approach as necessary to achieve its mission.

SERVING HIGH-NEED SCHOOLS IN LOW-RESOURCE COMMUNITIES

The Partnership first began working with schools in the 2008–09 school year. Its network started with 10 schools, collectively serving kindergarten through 12th grade, in the South and East L.A. regions of the city. The Partnership schools are in one of three areas in the city that have historically been "under-sourced and neglected," according to the Advancement Project, a Los Angeles-based civil rights and advocacy organization.[20] The Advancement Project, in close collaboration with Community Coalition and InnerCity Struggle, two community-based advocacy organizations serving South and East L.A. neighborhoods, created an index ranking L.A. Unified schools to help identify those most in need of additional funding under the state's new education funding formula, enacted in 2013. To determine the level of a school's need, the index uses factors such as the number of high-need students (including students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, English language learners, and youth in foster care), student achievement, school disciplinary and drop-out rates, and neighborhood conditions (including exposure to violence, health outcomes, and access to community resources such as youth programming and early childhood programs).[21] According to the Advancement Project and its partners, students attending the highest-need schools are at significantly increased risk of expulsion, suspension, and exposure to gun violence, and have significantly less access to youth violence prevention services and other youth programming.[22] The Partnership network includes the highest-need elementary school, the second-highest-need high school, and three of the highest-need middle schools.[23]

At the district's request, the Partnership took on its three newest elementary schools, consummating a partnership rooted in a shared commitment to the district's success.

Partnership schools are spread across three neighborhoods: Boyle Heights, South L.A., and Watts. These three communities are characterized by intensely concentrated levels of poverty and lack of educational attainment. About 40 percent of residents in these neighborhoods live below the federal poverty level. By contrast, the national

Figure 3. Poverty and educational attainment levels in Partnership school communities

Income and Education Statistics	United States	City of Los Angeles	Watts*	South LA**	Boyle Heights~
Median household income	**$53,889**	$50,205	$29,206 to $32,506	$30,251	$27,622 to $35,736
Percentage of residents with income below poverty level	**16%**	22%	37%–39%	42%	31%–37%
Median age	**38**	35	26–31	28	29–31
Percentage of residents 25 years and older with bachelor's degree or higher	**30%**	32%	3%–6%	4%	5%–6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-15 American Community Survey 5-year estimates
*Based on data for zip codes where Partnership schools are located: 90003, 90044 and 90059
**Based on data for zip codes where Partnership schools are located: 90011
~ Based on data for zip codes where Partnership schools are located: 90023 and 90033

poverty rate is 16 percent. Less than 8 percent of those over 24 years old in these neighborhoods have completed a four-year college degree. (See Figure 3.)

In the 2017–18 school year, the Partnership manages 18 schools.[24] (See Figure 1, page 8.) Its decisions to add new schools reflect a balance of considerations regarding potential impact for change. The Partnership recognizes that increasing its footprint over time is one way to reach the ultimate goal of a high-quality education for all L.A. students. At the same time, the Partnership appreciates that scaling up gradually and strategically helps ensure that it has adequate resources to serve schools well, and keeps costs at a level that the district can replicate the Partnership's work on its own at other district schools. By working with schools within common feeder patterns, the Partnership can concentrate support and resources on high-need neighborhoods, potentially serving many students throughout their K–12 years. The Partnership's working relationship with the district has also contributed to its growth as a network. For example, the Partnership took on its three newest elementary schools, 20th Street, 107th Street, and Grape Street, as a result of collaboration with the district to develop strategies to improve these schools' outcomes. When confronted by various challenges, including a potential "parent trigger" action at one of the schools that would have allowed parents to vote for a charter operator to take over the school, L.A. Unified asked the Partnership to work with local sub-districts to come up with solutions. Ultimately, at the district's request, the Partnership adopted these three schools, consummating a partnership rooted in a shared commitment to the district's success.

Led by an executive team with deep experience working in traditional districts, including L.A. Unified, and charter school systems, the Partnership's staff includes experts in education, nonprofits, finance, business, international development, and other areas. These experts provide hands-on support to manage and advocate for historically underserved district schools. Their work, focused on building school capacity to create and sustain long-term change, has these five important characteristics, detailed below:

- **Work with the district** to achieve change in low-performing schools and gain insight into changes the district can make to better support such schools.
- **Use private funds** in a nimble, focused manner to supplement existing district supports and resources and address gaps when needed, at the overall, annual cost of about $650 per pupil.[25]
- **Focus on school leaders, teachers, and engaged parents and community partners** to ensure that each group is working effectively to improve student achievement.
- **Make schools and classrooms restorative communities** to create a school culture and environment conducive to academic achievement.
- **Model the actions needed district-wide** to illuminate barriers to success and illustrate what is possible in other schools.

Work with the district

Although separate from L.A. Unified, the Partnership works within district structures and schools, allowing it to operate as both a district partner and an advocate for access to all district and community resources needed to improve student outcomes in the highest-need schools. By mutual agreement, L.A. Unified and the Partnership work together in a collaborative relationship with the goal of achieving academic improvement at those schools.

The Partnership's relationship with L.A. Unified is undergirded by the fact that the Partnership works inside the district, rather than as an outside operator. (See "The Partnership Model: A Unique Approach to School Turnaround," page 37.) "We have relationships and 'credibility' because of our in-district commitment to work side by side," says Shauwea Hamilton, the Partnership's chief external relations officer. "The Partnership's operating model makes it so the district solution is our solution. There is inherent unity and buy-in that we have to see the district succeed." In this way, the

district benefits from the Partnership's success beyond its network of schools—the solutions formed are designed to work throughout the district. Michelle King, L.A. Unified's superintendent, echoes the point. She values having a "thought partner with shared goals—an organization willing to work with the district intentionally and with clear communications and expectations."

> "We value the Partnership as a thought partner with shared goals—an organization willing to work with the district intentionally and with clear communications and expectations."
> —Michelle King, L.A. Unified superintendent

Formal autonomy for Partnership schools. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) formalizes and operationalizes this relationship. Renewable every five years, the MOU outlines school management responsibilities the Partnership must undertake, such as complying with district rules regarding student data and administration of state student achievement assessments, and general flexibilities from district rules and practices that the Partnership may exercise in the schools it supports. Some key autonomies have allowed the Partnership to hire school leaders; deliver professional development for school staff; adopt new curricula; and support school principals in recruiting and selecting teachers and creating teacher-leader positions. In some instances, the Partnership has negotiated with the district to clarify what it can do. For example, when the Partnership decided to implement the Eureka Math[26] curriculum in its schools, it did so under the language in the MOU giving the Partnership authority to develop an education program for its schools. To clarify that the MOU allowed the Partnership to use a different curriculum from that prescribed by the district, the Partnership secured a waiver from the district spelling this out.

Though the MOU does give the Partnership some staffing flexibilities, it honors the district's agreements with all collective bargaining units, including administrator and teacher unions. Partnership schools are also held to state policies regarding budgeting requirements, hiring freezes, and layoffs.

Work within district administration system. In addition, the MOU does not exempt the Partnership from district shifts in priority and structure. For example, in 2014 the L.A. Unified superintendent changed the district's support structure for high-need schools. Previously, a centralized office, the Intensive Support and Innovation Center, had provided support to all district high-need schools. The district's new

organizational structure created localized sub-districts, or "local districts" organized by geographic zones — each responsible for supporting its own high-need schools, and each with its own leader, staff, and priorities. Partnership schools fell into three of the new local districts, tripling the number of district offices the Partnership would have to work with to support its schools. Though the reorganization resulted in additional district relationships for Partnership staff to navigate, it also created an opportunity for the Partnership to expand its influence and work directly with district leaders exclusively focused on localized school needs.

Relationships between Partnership and district offices. The Partnership highly values and actively cultivates relationships between its staff and their district counterparts. "In order for us to work in partnership with the district, we have to have deep relationships throughout the district and at all levels," says Joan Sullivan, the Partnership's CEO since 2013. The organization has forged relationships with the central district office and each of the three local district offices, from the L.A. Unified superintendent on down. This ensures that the Partnership has strong relationships with district staff who can facilitate changes needed in Partnership schools and influence system change. For example, the Partnership's work with the district's central enrollment office has helped illuminate the impact of district enrollment policies on Partnership schools and other traditional district schools. The Partnership has developed recommendations on a unified K–12 enrollment system for the district, which are being used as that is developed. (See "Advocacy," page 34.)

Use private funds in a nimble, focused manner

Working within the district gives the Partnership access to all district supports and structures, such as food and transportation services, so it can focus its own resources on providing new services or enhancing existing ones to boost students' academic success. For example, the use of the district's system to collect school and student data (such as attendance, suspension, and graduation rates; Advanced Placement test pass rates; and end-of-year state standardized testing results) frees resources that have allowed the Partnership to collect other student data on formative reading and math assessments administered throughout the year, which it uses in addition to end-of-year test data to assess school progress and make instructional decisions and set goals and improvement strategies. The Partnership also uses its resources to monitor its own progress using an annual school leader and teacher survey to assess staff satisfaction and impact of Partnership programs.

Further, the Partnership provides a level of intense support that the district cannot achieve given its large volume of schools and limited resources. For example, whereas the district employs, on average, one principal supervisor for every 15 schools, the Partnership's director-to-schools ratio is about 1:5. Susana Ansley-Gutierrez, principal at Santee Education Complex, and previously at Dolores Huerta Elementary School, says, "Because the Partnership directors have smaller caseloads, they are able to individualize and differentiate supports. With the Partnership, we receive academic support tailored to our school needs."

> "The Partnership is nimbler than the district."
> —Rica Rodman, Wasserman Foundation executive director

In addition, the Partnership's size allows it to test new programs and connect schools to community-based organizations, as described throughout this report, with greater ease and efficiency than the district (see "Pilot programs," page 33).

Such agility attracts funders. The Partnership's status as a nonprofit organization independent of the school district and its small size help attract private resources from funders who might shy away from investing in a large urban school bureaucracy. As Rica Rodman, executive director of the Wasserman Foundation, noted, "The Partnership is nimbler than the district."

PARTNERSHIP FUNDING

Since 2013, the Partnership has operated with $9 million to $11 million in annual revenue from foundation, corporate, and individual philanthropy (see Figure 4). Its annual expenditures in 2015–16 equaled about $650 per pupil, mostly to fund direct work with Partnership schools or work with local district offices and community partners that provide services and supports to those schools (see Figure 5).

In-kind 3%

Corporate 3%

Other <1%

Foundation
23%

Individual
71%
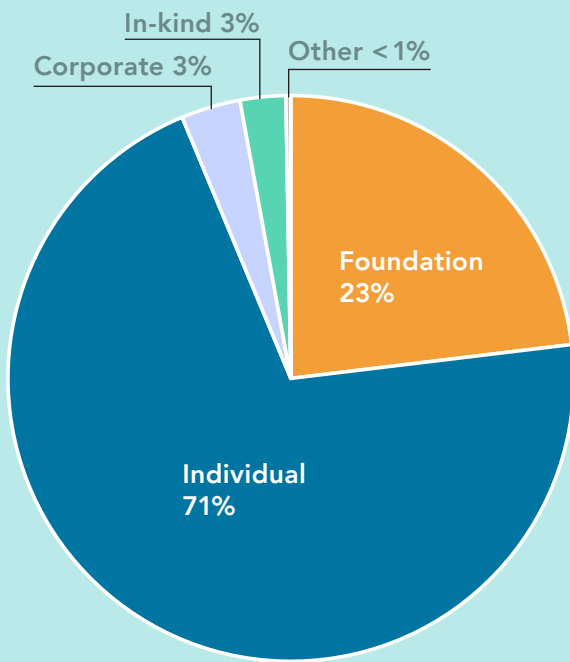
Figure 4. Partnership fundraising, 2015–16 fiscal year

Fundraising
1%

Communications
2%

Systems
Change
8%

Engaged and
Empowered
Parents and
Communities
10%

Home Office
18%

Great School
Leaders
20%

Highly Effective
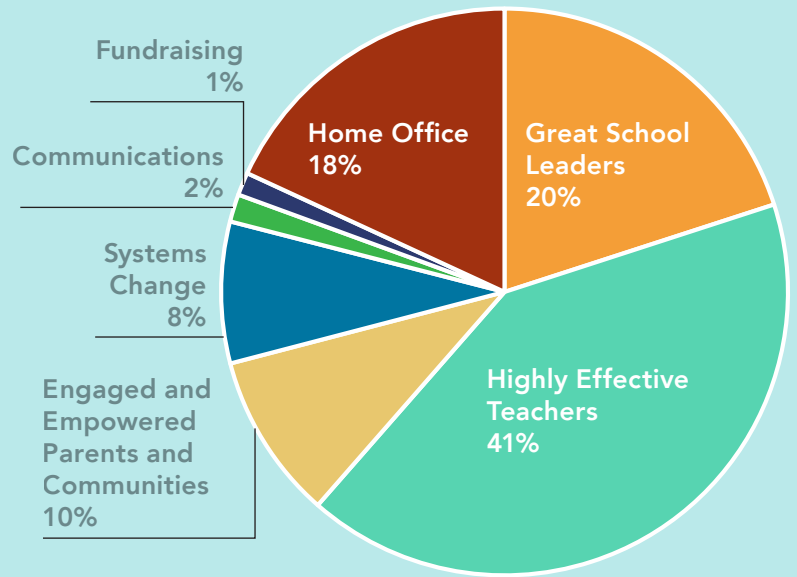Teachers
41%

Figure 5. Partnership expenses, 2015–16 fiscal year

Source: Partnership for Los Angeles Schools.

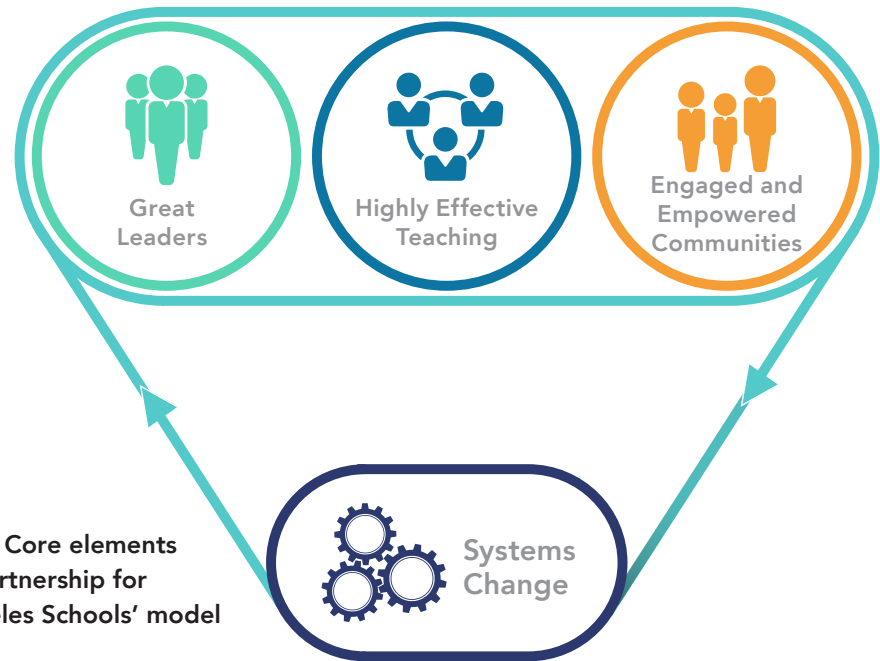Note: Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Figure 6. Core elements of the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools' model

Focus on school leaders, teachers, and engaged parents and community partners

The Partnership's work with its schools focuses on what research and experience show are key to school transformation: great school leaders, highly effective teachers, and engaged and empowered families and communities.

Great school leaders

Research shows that after teachers, principals are the second most important school-related factor affecting student performance, due largely to their influence over teacher and instructional quality.[27] "If we hire and develop great leaders who fully implement effective, sustainable systems driven by a shared school vision, then we will dramatically transform outcomes for our students and inform our broader system change efforts," says Ian Guidera, the Partnership's chief academic officer since 2014, of the Partnership's approach to school leadership. Hence the Partnership seeks to identify strong leaders, give them authority over critical school-based decisions, provide intensive coaching and support for them to make effective decisions, and hold them accountable for changes in schools that drive dramatic improvements in student outcomes.

> **"If we hire and develop great leaders who fully implement effective, sustainable systems driven by a shared school vision, then we will dramatically transform outcomes for our students and inform our broader system change efforts."**—*Ian Guidera, Partnership chief academic officer*

Selecting great leaders. The Partnership has autonomy to recruit and select school leaders. It sets out high expectations for school leadership and pays more from its philanthropic funding to attract, support, and retain great principals. The Partnership uses a rigorous principal selection process, and also develops talent from within. Several Partnership school administrators and staff have joined the Partnership's home office staff, and at least six principals and nine assistant principals have been promoted within the Partnership's school network. For example, as the former English language coordinator at Hollenbeck Middle School when it became a Partnership school, Mauro Bautista had developed and implemented new criteria for assigning ELL students to classes that established a student's level of ability more accurately than the standardized district placement test in use at the time. Distinguished for his leadership and innovation at Hollenbeck, Bautista became the assistant principal at Mendez High School—in the Hollenbeck feeder zone—in 2009 when it became a Partnership school. In 2010, he was named principal.

To cultivate a supply of leaders for Partnership and other high-need schools, the Partnership established the Partnership Leadership Fellows Program, a leadership development program with Center X's Principal Leadership Institute at University of California Los Angeles's Graduate School of Education. Focused specifically on preparing and supporting K–12 teachers and administrators to address educational inequities in the highest-need schools, Center X offers both teacher and principal preparation programs.[28] Participants serve their fellowships in Partnership schools, providing them with opportunities to apply and hone leadership skills they have learned through Center X's rigorous curriculum, under the mentorship of an experienced Partnership principal. The first cohort of leaders graduated from the program in June 2017.

Empowering great leaders. To adopt new instructional policies and roles for teachers, Partnership principals have relied on the Partnership's MOU authority to make decisions about curriculum and student instruction (see "Highly Effective Teachers,"

page 23). Principals have also used their autonomy to adopt curricula different from those prescribed by the district. Mendez High School began using the College Board Springboard math and English language arts curriculum in 2012 to help increase the number of students taking Advanced Placement classes. "Since the College Board oversees AP exams, we thought, 'what better curriculum for AP classes than the one that the College Board developed?'" Bautista said. The change paid off. In the 2013–14 school year, only 23 percent of Mendez students took and passed AP exams; three years later, 48 percent did.[29] Further, the percentage of Mendez students accepted to four-year college programs increased from 36 percent in 2014–15 to 48 percent in 2016–17 (see "Impact on Academic Achievement," page 43). Following Mendez, all L.A. Unified high schools now use the Springboard math curriculum.

Supporting great school leaders. To help school leaders develop leadership skills, the Partnership provides regular coaching focused on supporting principals as transformational leaders. Senior level directors work directly with principals—an average of five each—to develop comprehensive school growth plans ("Call to Action" plans), and the instructional leadership teams (see "Highly Effective Teachers," page 23) to help implement and monitor the plans. These plans have provided a useful means of internal organization for the schools, Guidera says, requiring principals to be more thoughtful about how to strategically set goals for their schools. He described them as "living documents," monitored throughout the year, that help celebrate and advance improvement strategies fluidly.

Additionally, directors work with principals on using data to set goals and evaluate progress, build and coach instructional leadership teams, identify community resources to support implementation of instruction and school culture objectives, and address any district practices or policies that impede execution of school and student growth strategies.

The Partnership provides regular professional development opportunities for principals and assistant principals. Using end-of-year outcome reports to set a scope and sequence of professional development topics and learning objectives, the Partnership's leadership development program includes biannual institutes for instructional leadership teams, including principals, assistant principals, and teacher-leaders, and monthly leadership conferences for principals and assistant principals. The leadership institutes are designed to develop team cohesion, individual knowledge and skills, and support for principals and their instructional teams in developing and implementing their Call to Action plans. Leaders also attend monthly leadership conferences, with similar learning objectives for both principals and assistant principals, and "level alike" convenings in which principals in the same school level address a real-time problem of practice.

The Partnership has also developed the Partnership Implementation Framework (PIF), which, with the school's Call to Action plan, helps principals monitor school progress. The PIF articulates the stages of implementation of a school's systems for ensuring high-quality teaching and learning, a positive and healthy school culture, use of data to monitor progress, instructional leadership and capacity building, and family and community engagement, and allows principals to assess the quality of schools' systems and effectiveness of implementation. Unlike other tools used to assess school systems, the PIF also measures individual practice. Accordingly, it can be used for individual and collective reflection and goal-setting as well as for monitoring school progress and quality throughout the year.

Holding leaders accountable. Under its MOU, the Partnership determines how to evaluate school leaders and can make leadership changes as needed, subject to collective bargaining agreements. To date, the Partnership's selection and professional development strategies have largely resulted in retention of strong principals and minimized the costs and risks associated with turnover in school leadership.

Highly effective teachers

The Partnership's work is grounded in conclusive research showing that teacher quality is the most important school-related factor affecting student achievement.[30] "If we hire and develop teachers with growth mindsets, extensive content knowledge and effective pedagogical skills, who build healthy relationships, then we will dramatically transform outcomes for our students and inform our broader system change efforts," Guidera says.

> **"The Partnership is focused on quality teaching and getting the right people into the right roles. They treat teachers like professionals."**
> —Jonathan Lopez, City Year managing director

The Partnership aims to cultivate effective teachers by recruiting strong candidates to fill vacancies (when they arise), offering leadership opportunities and incentives, and providing supports for all teachers to develop professionally. "The Partnership is focused on quality teaching and getting the right people into the right roles. They treat teachers like professionals," says Jonathan Lopez, a managing director at City

Year. This national organization has community-based teams working in schools across the country — including 10 Partnership schools in the 2017–18 school year — to address problems that contribute to students dropping out.

Recruiting excellent teachers. The Partnership has worked on two fronts to ensure that its schools can hire strong candidates who can meet the needs of their students. As discussed in greater detail below, the Partnership has advocated for changes to district policies that create staffing instability and inequitable distribution of effective teachers in high-need, hard-to-staff schools. (See "Revolutionizing school systems," page 51.) The Partnership has also worked with the district to secure flexibility for its principals to hire from a larger pool of applicants, and has worked with school leaders and hiring teams to develop screening tools and a rigorous selection process that help them identify and recruit excellent teacher candidates who are a good fit for their schools. According to Ben Gertner, principal at Roosevelt High School, the strength of the Partnership's work and reputation has begun to attract strong teachers from other local schools. In addition, the Partnership has worked collaboratively with L.A. Unified to host an annual early hiring fair, so it can recruit the most competitive teaching candidates to its highest-need schools early in the hiring season. In 2016–17, the fair resulted in eight hires. "This showcase gives our schools an opportunity to shine and not live in the shadow of other schools," said Mikelle Willis, the Partnership's chief strategy and operating officer. "With an early hiring fair, our school leaders have a more effective opportunity to distinguish the unique strengths of their individual schools."

Cultivating and empowering teacher-leaders. Research suggests that engaging teachers as leaders in school decision-making can improve instructional programs and practices, and produce higher levels of student learning.[31] The Partnership first established teacher leadership roles to help test a new multiple-measure teacher evaluation model focused on teacher growth and development. These "pioneer" teacher-leaders were later offered the opportunity to become peer observers, providing development support for pioneers at their schools. When California began using the Common Core State Standards, the Partnership brought together a group of teacher-leaders with expertise in reading and math to help plan and support implementation of the standards and corresponding state assessments.[32] These early teacher-leader roles resulted in increased leadership capacity within schools and deepened school-based support for teacher growth and development.

In the 2017–18 school year, more than 150 Partnership teachers serve in several pathways of teacher leadership, including team leads, who lead grade and department teams; peer coaches, who coach and observe their peers and support planning of professional development; and Restorative Community leads, who lead schools in

implementing restorative community practices (see "Make schools and classrooms restorative communities," page 32). Paid stipends for taking on additional responsibilities, teacher-leaders serve on school instructional leadership teams (ILTs) that work with principals and assistant principals to build, implement, and monitor the school's Call to Action plan (see "Great school leaders," page 20). As noted, the Partnership works with principals on using their teams to improve instructional practice among other teachers and to customize supports to provide competency-based professional development and coaching according to staff needs. The Partnership also coaches ILTs, and coordinates their learning with that of school leaders to ensure alignment of skills and roles across the school leadership teams, consistent with an effective distributed-leadership model.

The Partnership also works with ILTs to use data effectively. It collects and analyzes student data (observational, student assessments, surveys, etc.), and develops teacher-leaders to use the data to assess student needs and the effectiveness of current strategies. For example, the Partnership worked with ILTs to implement "Illuminate," a data-tracking program that organizes and analyzes student data. According to Ben Gertner, principal of Roosevelt High School, Illuminate helped teachers see the value in common student assessments, because it produces actionable data that they were equipped to use. "Before Illuminate, teachers administered tests because they had to. Now they can see assessment results in a way that helps them understand how they can improve their practice."

“Before Illuminate, teachers administered tests because they had to. Now they can see assessment results in a way that helps them understand how they can improve their practice.”
—Ben Gertner, Roosevelt High School principal

Supporting teachers in their profession. To help ELA and math teachers improve, academic directors and coordinators from the Partnership provide regular coaching, modeling, and other teaching supports. The Partnership also provides coaching and professional development opportunities aligned with the academic goals in a school's Call to Action plan. Thus, teachers at Partnership schools receive supports tailored to meet their students' needs. Further, the Partnership deploys support for teachers using a smaller staff-to-teacher ratio than the district can provide. Partnership academic directors and coordinators coach no more than nine teachers at a time.

The Partnership provides specific supports to address special issues that affect all its schools. For example, when L.A. Unified incorporated the California State University system's admission requirements into its graduation requirements, the Partnership provided training for school counseling teams to help students and families adjust to the change. When California began using Common Core State Standards and corresponding state assessments,[33] the Partnership provided workshops and coaching on the new standards for all teachers. Similarly, the Partnership provided implementation support for elementary teachers when the state adopted the Next Generation Science Standards.[34] And to address a significant technology deficit in Partnership schools, the Partnership in its early years built the necessary technological infrastructure in schools (devices and licenses), then shifted to supporting schools to use software to support blended learning. The Partnership now works with schools that have a vision for using technology to supplement and enhance teacher-led instruction. Teachers appreciate the Partnership's resources and opportunities, noting that they have gained access to materials and resources that are not accessible to other schools.

Engaged and empowered parents and communities

The Partnership's family and community engagement is rooted in research that demonstrates a positive relationship between family and community involvement and education benefits for students, including higher achievement outcomes.[35] Grounded in the belief that parents are essential to their child's academic success, the Partnership's family and community engagement work focuses on raising parents' awareness of what is happening at their children's schools and empowering them to advocate for systems change.

> *"The Partnership brings a level of intensity to the parent and community engagement work that a large school district would have difficulty replicating on its own given its limited resources."*
> *—Tommy Chang, Boston Public Schools superintendent*

The Partnership also engages local and national community-based organizations to help meet the individualized needs and performance goals of its schools. The Partnership brings a "level of intensity to the parent and community engagement work that a large school district would have difficulty replicating on its own given its limited resources," said Tommy Chang, the superintendent of Boston Public Schools. Chang had

been superintendent of L.A. Unified's Intensive Support and Innovation Center, which provided supports for all L.A. Unified low-performing schools.

The Partnership takes a three-pronged approach in this area: It works with parents to empower them as partners with teachers and school leaders in their children's education; it works to build the capacity of schools to effectively engage parents; and it identifies a strategic mix of partners with expertise to address the most pressing needs of individual campuses and accelerate school transformation.

Engaging and empowering parents. In 2010, the Partnership started Parent College, its signature parent engagement initiative intended to increase parents' capacity to engage in their children's education and advocate for their educational needs. A year-round program, Parent College offers monthly workshops on a range of topics focused on helping parents understand what their children experience in school, how to support learning at home, and how to advocate for their children's present and future education. Programs have addressed restorative community practices, reading

and understanding report cards, advocating for schools to meet student needs, pre-paring for and applying to college, and college financial aid. The Partnership recruits and trains principals, teachers, and counselors from its schools to lead Parent College sessions, which are translated in Spanish to accommodate its large Hispanic popu-lation. Parents may also participate in leadership training that prepares them to help teach Parent College programs.

The Partnership operates the Parent College program in each of its three district hubs, and opens it to parents in all the hub schools (Partnership or not). Parents must attend four workshops offered in the year-long program to graduate from Parent College.

Since its implementation, more than 7,000 parents have attended Parent College, including 1,840 individuals related to students attending Partnership schools in the 2016–17 school year, and more than 60 have completed training to help lead efforts to mobilize other parents to engage in systemwide policy and advocacy efforts upon graduation from the program. This success has led several charter management or-ganizations and another California school district to adopt the Parent College model. L.A. Unified also plans to expand it to other sub-districts. Superintendent King is an enthusiastic supporter: "Parent College has empowered parents to navigate the system and support their kids. It is a strong model, and our parents give us glowing feedback," she says.

Building school capacity to engage parents. The Partnership implements several strategies to enhance school capacity to draw parents in to schools and empower them to support strong student achievement. Family Action Teams and Parent Cen-ters give parents school-based supports and services, and the Partnership's Family and Community Engagement staff work with school staff on developing strategies for engaging parents.

Family Action Teams. Each Partnership school has a Family Action Team (FA Team) consisting of administrators, parents, and community leaders who meet monthly to plan and implement the school's family engagement plan. The FA Team is charged with developing programs and events that help address what families need to support their children's success in schools. Usually led by an assistant principal, FA Teams plan and organize events to get parents involved in supporting academic achievement, in-cluding math and literacy family nights and college resource fairs. The teams also plan workshops on the online literacy and math instructional programs and assessments used in Partnership schools, strategies for taking standardized tests, parenting strate-gies, and various health topics. Because each school's family engagement plan aligns with its specific Call to Action plan, FA Team programs relate directly to the school's

academic goals. For example, to support efforts to achieve increased student literacy levels, FA Teams have developed programs intended to ensure parental awareness of their children's reading level and access to tools to support literacy development at home, and have convened schoolwide events such as Family Reading Nights to promote and reinforce the focus area.

Parent Centers. Every Partnership school operates a Parent Center, with computers, Internet access, copy machines, and other materials, open to parents during and after school. Each Parent Center is staffed by a trained, part-time "community representative" whose job is to manage the Parent Center and interact with parents. Community representatives also serve on the FA Team, creating continuity between these initiatives. Intended to be a welcoming and empowering space for parents—the Partnership has helped direct private philanthropy to the physical improvement and updating of Parent Center spaces, typically a classroom, to enhance their appeal—the centers help draw parents to Partnership schools. When not in use for FA Team meetings, Parent Centers serve as a gathering space for parents to meet and discuss school issues, use online resources (such as homework or college financial aid supports) or provide

volunteer services for teachers. Some families without Internet access at home use Parent Centers to conduct job searches.

Support for school staff. The Partnership's Family and Community Engagement (FACE) team works directly with school staff to increase their effectiveness in engaging with parents and community partners. FACE managers work closely with Partnership directors (principal supervisors) to identify issues affecting student or school performance and strategies for addressing those needs, including matching schools with community-based partners as described below. At the school level, FACE managers provide direct supports to school staff, including coaching teachers, counselors, and FA Team leaders on how to engage parents in achieving academic goals in the school's strategic growth plan.

Engaging community partners. The Partnership cultivates and coordinates local and national community-based organizations with expertise to address the individual needs and performance goals of its schools and communities. Its community engagement strategy unfolds in three stages.

First, the Partnership aims to connect its schools to community-based organizations that can help address specific needs and fill resource gaps at schools, such as mental health and social service-related issues, structured playtime supports, and extended learning time after school and in summer. Some key community partnerships include City Year, which works in 10 Partnership schools to address problems that contribute to students dropping out of school; PlayWorks, which is active in three schools and aims to ensure positive free-time experiences during recess; and Promesa Boyle Heights, a community collaborative focused on improving educational and economic opportunities for Boyle Heights residents, which works with three schools to increase graduation rates by providing tutoring, counseling, and credit recovery supports to the students most at risk of not finishing high school. The value of community-based partners to Partnership schools is further enhanced by the coordinated approach of the Partnership's community partner engagement strategy. The Partnership intends that its schools will manage their partners in a way that leads to a strategic and collaborative response to address school needs. For example, with the support of Promesa Boyle Heights, Mendez High School facilitates strategic conversations among its community-based partners to identify school and student needs and the resources necessary to address those gaps. The Partnership attributes strong academic gains at Mendez in part to the collaborative network the school has created among its partners.

Second, the Partnership works with schools to help them build their capacity to sustain and cultivate their own partnerships. On a case-by-case basis, the Partnership may initially subsidize schools needing a community partner but lacking the funds to support the services. In some cases, the partner is able to contribute to the financial support of its own work at Partnership schools. But schools are ultimately responsible for maintaining relationships with community-based partners, including paying for them. The Partnership helps school leaders adjust their budgets to do so.

Third, the Partnership facilitates broader strategic community partnerships. It works with other community groups that are not necessarily focused on school supports or outcomes, but whose interests are aligned with ensuring that Partnership schools produce strong student outcomes. For example, the Partnership has developed relationships with some local colleges and universities that they recognize as being strong potential post-secondary options for Partnership graduates, because they provide strong nonacademic supports that help high-need students stay in college. The Partnership has also developed deep relationships with community groups focused on increasing safety in Partnership school neighborhoods. The Partnership works with We Care Outreach Ministries to operate several "safe passage" programs that provide protected travel routes for students who walk to three Partnership schools in the Watts neighborhood. The Partnership also maintains relationships with community-based

coalitions such as the Watts Gang Task Force and community-based service providers such as the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Police Department, which are actively involved in Partnership school neighborhoods.

Make schools and classrooms restorative communities

Based on the premise that school climate affects teacher effectiveness and student achievement, the Partnership has implemented restorative practices in its schools to create an environment conducive to learning.[36] Specifically, the Partnership seeks to address school culture and climate issues that contribute to student absenteeism, disciplinary issues, and students leaving school before graduation through the proactive development of a healthy school culture. "Our highly effective teaching practice means students are taking academic risks in classrooms. They need to feel safe — intellectually, emotionally, and physically — to perform academically and reach deeper levels of rigor," says Tanya Franklin, the Partnership's director of school culture and restorative communities. She works directly with restorative community teacher-leaders, school culture teams, and other school leaders to build their restorative practice skills, including de-escalation and developing socioemotional skills in students.

The restorative communities framework, outlined in the PIF (see page 23), focuses disciplinary methods, when needed, on the root cause of problems between students, and between students and staff, and encourages all involved parties (including other school community members who may be indirectly affected) to positively engage with one another. Restorative community practices also include regularly using "restorative circles" in which students in a classroom talk openly about their feelings and other sensitive topics to build support, respect, and trust among students.

As of this writing, all but one Partnership school have restorative community leads who each year complete 40 hours of professional development on restorative practices. They coach and mentor other school staff, and work with their school leaders to set goals for school culture and monitor progress on those goals.

Model the actions needed district-wide for systemic change

Through its work in district schools, the Partnership experiences firsthand the state and district policies that impede school transformation. But as a nonprofit operationally independent of the district, it has the ability and capacity to illuminate those barriers, call for change, identify change partners, and test new approaches that lead the way to change. "For meaningful, sustainable change to happen, we have to

understand the needs; collaborate with partners to build on and enhance existing assets; and, recognizing that inequities create barriers to student learning, make systemic changes to remove those impediments," says Carolyn Webb de Macias, chair of the Partnership's board.

> *"For meaningful, sustainable change to happen, we have to understand the needs; collaborate with partners to build on and enhance existing assets; and, recognizing that inequities create barriers to student learning, make systemic changes to remove those impediments."*—*Carolyn Webb de Macias, Partnership board chair*

The Partnership has pursued systemic change using several strategies: programs that test solutions to practices that impede student success; advocacy to illuminate policies that impede student success; and legal action challenging laws and policies that create inequities between high-need, low-resource schools and other district schools. Although these strategies vary in approach and public visibility, the Partnership's status and position within the district help draw L.A. Unified's attention to these issues and enhance the Partnership's ability to effect change in the district and beyond.

Pilot programs. Modeling change has been a largely fruitful strategy. With its flexibilities from district policies, organizational nimbleness, and access to private funding for pilot programs, the Partnership has had the flexibility and resources to test several changes from L.A. Unified's traditional approach, which the district subsequently expanded to all schools. For example, in 2008 when the Partnership began working in schools, black and Latino students were vastly underrepresented in academically gifted programs, in Partnership schools and district-wide, due primarily to the district's reliance on parent and teacher referrals for identifying academically gifted students. Seeking to provide equitable access to these programs, the Partnership spent $12,000 to deploy district psychologists to assess all second-graders in Partnership schools. The number of students identified as gifted jumped from a collective eight students

at four Partnership elementary schools in 2008 to 74 in 2009.[37] In 2009, L.A. Unified began assessing all second-graders for gifted status, resulting in a 9 percent increase in the number of black students identified as gifted within six months.[38]

The Partnership also piloted school report cards, Parent College, and a personalized online high school credit-recovery program that the district subsequently adopted. (See "Revolutionizing school systems," page 51.)

Advocacy. In recent years, the Partnership has deployed publications and media-based communications to illuminate barriers to student success and potential solutions. For example, in 2017 the Partnership released two policy briefs addressing two critical issues that impede success for all students: inequitable access and inequitable funding.

Inequitable access to school options. L.A. Unified offers families the opportunity to send their students to schools outside of their traditional neighborhood schools. However, students seeking to enroll in other traditional schools, magnets, or charters have had to navigate separate application processes for different schools. As a result, many families default to their neighborhood school. The effect, as the Partnership has seen in its schools, is that families with greater resources enroll in charters and magnets, leaving traditional neighborhood schools to serve students from families with the greatest needs.

Recognizing that low-resource families effectively have unequal access to school choice, the Partnership has advocated for the district to adopt a unified enrollment system that includes all public school options, including charters. In April 2016, Superintendent King announced that the district would adopt a unified K–12 enrollment system.[39] The Partnership brief on this presented guiding principles and recommendations for designing and implementing the system,[40] which should take effect for 2018–19 enrollment.[41]

Inequitable funding for high-need, low-resource schools. Given its in-district position supporting schools in low-resource communities, the Partnership is acutely aware of the impact of district budgeting policies on high-need students. Its second brief illuminates an opportunity to more effectively allocate state funds to high-need schools.

In California, the state allocates a certain grant fund to districts for specific categories of high-need students, including students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, English language learners, and youth in foster care. Since 2014, L.A. Unified has ranked schools on a student need index to decide the amount of needs-based funds each district school should receive. In 2016–17, L.A. Unified received $870 million in state funds. But the Partnership's brief indicates that the district's use of the index to

differentiate funding for schools based on need resulted in the distribution of only $19 million of the $870 million—or just 2 percent of L.A. Unified's state appropriation for high-need students, and less than one-quarter of 1 percent of the district's entire 2016–17 $8.4 billion operating budget.

Moreover, the Partnership's brief suggests that the index inaccurately identifies the district's highest-need schools because it does not include any additional variables beyond student demographics, such as academic performance or the level of challenges or resources present in the school community (e.g., the level of gun violence or the availability of mental health resources). The Partnership's brief contends that L.A. Unified has an opportunity to develop a more equitable formula for distributing state funds earmarked expressly for high-need students—such as the Advancement Project Index (see "Serving High-Need Schools in Low-Resource Communities" page 12) that better accounts for factors beyond student demographics.[42]

Legal action. Primarily as a measure of last resort, the Partnership has also taken legal action to effect change. This has included impact litigation to address intractable issues rooted in state law. The Partnership has supported multiple legal actions that resulted in additional supports for Partnership schools and other high-need L.A. Unified schools, and it participated in two lawsuits that led to significant policy changes in California.

Reed v. State of California.[43] The Partnership's first legal action arose after dramatic cuts in state education funding beginning in 2008 resulted in L.A. Unified laying off thousands of school staff. Because of state law dictating layoffs based on seniority, low-income schools lost a disproportionate percentage of their teaching staff compared to schools with more veteran teachers. In 2010, Sharail Reed was an eighth-grader at Markham Middle School in Watts when more than half of Markham's teachers were laid off. That year, she had 10 substitute teachers in her history class alone. A good student, she knew she wasn't getting the education she needed. Facing another round of layoffs in 2010, the Partnership helped file a class-action lawsuit, with Reed as lead plaintiff, to stop the layoffs. The lawsuit produced a landmark victory creating ways to protect teachers at high-need schools and providing tangible improvements at 37 of the district's highest-need schools. (See "Revolutionizing school systems," page 51.)

Cruz v. State of California.[44] The Partnership supported a second class-action lawsuit asserting an infringement of students' right to equal educational opportunity if they attended schools that were unable to provide them with a full day of meaningful instruction, often because students were assigned to classes without educational content. For example, students were assigned to "service classes" to perform administrative tasks or were allowed to go home early. The Partnership worked with the ACLU

and Public Counsel to develop the background and theory of the case and connected the attorneys with school staff who could provide the necessary testimony and evidence. Plaintiffs in the lawsuit included parents from one Partnership school where violence in the community and other interruptions prevented students from receiving the same amount of instructional time as students at other schools. They won, resulting in legislation prohibiting service classes and other practices that denied students a full day of meaningful education. (See "Revolutionizing school systems," page 51.)

THE PARTNERSHIP MODEL: A UNIQUE APPROACH TO SCHOOL TURNAROUND

Civic leaders across the U.S. are eager to find ways to dramatically improve their most challenged schools. At a glance, they seem stuck with one of two approaches: hoping the big-city school district can fix the schools itself, or turning over schools to outside charter school operators.

The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools has found another way. Partnering with 18 high-need schools in the nation's second-largest school district, the Partnership has had a big impact in its ten years in the schools. Most of its schools have made impressive gains (see "The Partnership's Impact," page 43), while the vast majority of school turnarounds nationally have fallen short.[45] These contrasting results suggest that civic leaders seeking a new approach should consider the Partnership model.

The challenge for civic leaders

So far, most large urban districts have not successfully transformed their struggling schools to provide a high-quality education for all students.[46] Studies point to the inability to attract and retain excellent educators to fill teacher and principal vacancies; a lack of capacity by districts to execute big changes; a resistance by schools and districts to implement successful practices from other districts and sectors; and the challenges large urban districts have serving students with the greatest needs.[47] Further, national superintendent churn and contentious school board politics continue to disrupt even the most promising school-level initiatives. If civic leaders and philanthropists are skeptical of investing in districts, it's with good reason.

Over the years, many grant makers have turned toward investing in charter schools, hoping to avoid some of the pitfalls associated with school districts. While some charter operators have beaten the odds and outperformed traditional schools, the supply of these successful operators is low. That is even more true outside of the few urban areas that have substantial charter sectors, and the sector is not showing signs of significant growth in the near future.[48] Additionally, charter schools sometimes lack the supports that high-need students require, such as transportation to and from school. For that reason and others, charters are also often politically divisive. Charter school

operators sometimes struggle to gain community buy-in and support because they are viewed as "outsiders" who have come from elsewhere to usurp schools and power. So, civic leaders thinking of charters as "the answer" may need to think again.

A unique model

In response, civic leaders in Los Angeles conceived of and created the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools—an alternative to leaving it all to the district or going completely outside with charters. The Partnership is a uniquely positioned nonprofit organization focused on transforming Los Angeles' highest-need schools and changing the school system by modeling scalable and sustainable approaches for improving student outcomes. Neither an arm of the district, nor an autonomous school management organization, it operates a network of schools within the district. It advocates for equitable district policies not just for the benefit of students in schools it manages, but all students and schools in the district. For cities eager for a new approach to addressing chronically low-performing schools, the Partnership model offers a unique option. The Partnership's approach combines many of the best of district do-it-yourself school turnaround and charter practices.

The Partnership has charter-like autonomy in key areas. A memorandum of understanding with the district outlines general flexibilities from district policies that the Partnership may exercise in the schools it manages regarding curriculum and the selection, hiring, development, and evaluation of school principals and teacher-leaders. The Partnership's schools operate under most of the conditions as other schools in the L.A. Unified School District, giving the Partnership a unique understanding of the challenges and impediments to student achievement that schools throughout the district face and the motivation to tackle these challenges. But rather than duplicate and create a dual or competing system, the Partnership provides supports for schools in core areas and in ways that address gaps in district support.

The Partnership's unique "in-district" position helps it avoid "outsider" status. Charter management organizations seeking to start new schools or take over existing district schools are often hampered by the reality or perception that they are outsiders. In contrast, the Partnership is recognized as a local effort to improve student outcomes in neighborhood schools. Founded by local leaders and with staff that includes former district staff, the Partnership does not present the threat of "takeover" that communities often attribute to charters when they are given charge of neighborhood

schools. Though operationally independent from the district, the Partnership works in district schools, in close collaboration with district partners, parents, and community-based organizations to address both in-school and out-of-school issues that affect student performance.

The Partnership is uniquely positioned to innovate from within the district. Its in-district status and flexibilities from district policies have allowed the Partnership to pilot high-impact initiatives and approaches that have helped retain and attract educator talent, invigorate parent engagement in their neighborhood schools and their children's education, and influence the district to use throughout the district practices that Partnership schools have proved improve student achievement. Though many education reform organizations and school operators have developed ideas to address the issues facing high-need students in low-resource schools, not all work directly with schools or from within schools to transform them or promote system change. Where charters have fallen short on their original purpose of serving as a laboratory for school improvement ideas, the Partnership model offers another avenue for realizing that objective.

The model's advantages

The Partnership's unique approach engenders some key advantages.

Access to philanthropy. Independently operated, the Partnership is able to attract more funding from philanthropists who may not otherwise want to partner with the district. Using private funds, the Partnership enhances district supports and services to address the gaps in meeting student needs.

Flexibility to respond quickly. With certain autonomies and organizationally smaller than the district, the Partnership is nimbler and more agile in delivering services for students in a way that best fits their needs.

Influence to effect system change. The Partnership sees itself as working side by side with L.A. Unified, giving it a perspective on how policies and practices can and should change for the district as a whole. Because the Partnership works within the district's constraints, its recommendations have greater influence with the district. Yet the Partnership model can be implemented without changing all of L.A. Unified's systems at once.

The model's challenges

Though the benefits of the Partnership model generally outweigh the challenges, the Partnership's unique in-district status leads to some limitations.

Red tape. Since Partnership schools remain district schools, they are generally subject to the same state and district rules and regulations governing district schools. Though the Partnership has an MOU with the district outlining areas of general flexibilities from district policies, it must still sometimes negotiate waivers from specific district policies and practices. Moreover, unlike charter schools, the Partnership's schools live within the district's oversight apparatus, which is notoriously subject to shifts in structure, personnel, and policy.

Relationships. The Partnership must constantly navigate its relationships with both schools and L.A. Unified. Given its flexibilities at the school level, the Partnership has autonomy to work directly with school leaders and staff to implement its model. At the same time, because Partnership schools remain district schools, and the Partnership is not a school operator outside of the district in the way that charter management organizations are, it must work within the operational constraints of the district system. As with most large urban districts, changing schools' and district leaders' behaviors and actions can be difficult due to organizational complexities and the sheer size of L.A. Unified. Thus, most Partnership staff must develop and maintain relationships across the entire district, from schools to local districts to the central office.

Sustainability. The Partnership relies on two critical external resources: philanthropic funding and the district's willingness to partner. Losing either could spell trouble for the Partnership model. As of this writing, the Partnership has solid funding support relative to most nonprofits, and the district values its partnership. L.A. Unified Superintendent King says that "the district is in a much better place with the Partnership having learned how to be intentional, have clear communications, and set expectations for each school site. You can't have enough hands on deck; it is a positive thing to have a thought partner with shared goals, and I would encourage more of the Partnership model." But the Partnership's value to the district can shift with changes in leadership, whether in the superintendent's office or school board or changes in district strategy. Even with ample philanthropic funding, the Partnership model falters without district buy-in.

A path worth exploring

Civic leaders eager to address chronic low performance in schools are well-advised to explore the Partnership model. Most large urban districts continue to grapple with school improvement and ensuring that all students have access to a high-quality education.[49] Though high-quality charters have demonstrated strong outcomes, especially with high-need students in urban districts,[50] charters enroll only 3.1 million of about 50 million K–12 students in the U.S., of whom 14.5 million are younger than 18 and living in poverty.[51] The Partnership model acknowledges both the ways in which external agents like charters have effected change within districts, and the reality that in most communities, most high-need students continue to attend traditional district schools. Though working within district schools and alongside the district gives rise to both advantages and challenges, the Partnership model has yielded better outcomes for students in some of Los Angeles' highest-need schools (see "The Partnership's Impact," page 43), suggesting that the benefits outweigh the challenges.

According to its mission, all of the Partnership's work is focused on transforming schools and revolutionizing school systems to empower all students with a high-quality education. Is the Partnership succeeding in fulfilling its mission?

School transformation

The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools commissioned Public Impact to analyze available data of schools in its network to better understand how effective it has been in improving student outcomes over time.

Impact on academic achievement

Public Impact's analysis of academic data suggests that as the Partnership has refined it focus on key levers (leaders, teachers, and parent and community engagement) and honed its supports for schools, the Partnership model has positively affected student achievement and other outcomes, including graduation rates and eligibility for matriculation at California's state universities and colleges.

To examine student achievement in Partnership schools, Public Impact looked at how each school's "percentile rank" has changed during its time in the Partnership. A school's percentile rank indicates where it falls among all schools statewide serving the same grades in a given subject. For example, a school with a percentile rank of 30 in math is higher than only 30 percent of the state's schools; 70 percent of schools have higher math performance. A *change* in a school's percentile rank indicates whether it is gaining or losing ground relative to other schools, and how much ground it is gaining or losing. Thus, in California, which has about 10,000 public schools, each percentile rank includes about 100 schools. Moving up one rank means moving ahead of 100 schools, moving up five ranks means surpassing 500 schools, and so on.

By this analysis, 95 percent of Partnership schools have improved their statewide percentile rank in English Language Arts (ELA), and nearly 90 percent of schools have improved their ranking in math. In other words, the overwhelming majority of Partnership schools have moved ahead of other California schools in student achievement between the time they joined the Partnership and 2017, the last year for which student assessment results are available.
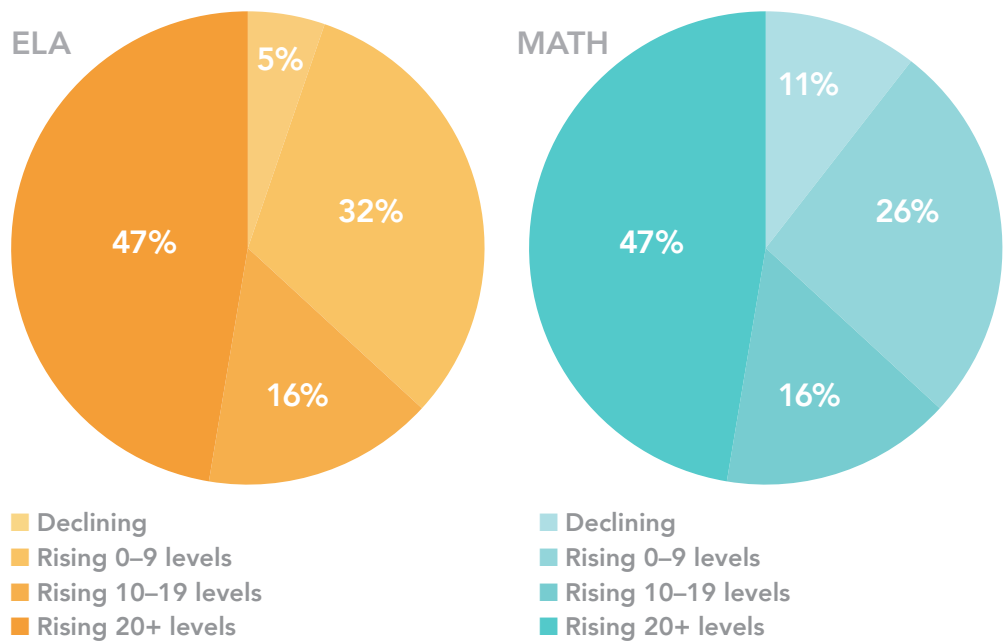
The gains for many schools have been steady and substantial. In both ELA and in math, 63 percent of Partnership schools improved their ranking by 10 percentile points or more (that is, moved ahead of 1,000 schools). For nearly half of the Partnership schools, the gains are even more impressive. In both ELA and math, 47 percent of

schools improved by 20 or more percentile rankings (or moved ahead of 2,000 or more schools) (see Figure 7).

High schools have demonstrated particularly strong performance. All of the current Partnership high schools have made double-digit gains in statewide percentile ranking since joining the Partnership. Two of the highest-climbing schools—Math, Science, Technology Magnet Academy at Roosevelt High School and Mendez High School—have improved by more than 60 percentile rankings in math since becoming Partnership schools. Roosevelt Magnet High School has improved by 69 percentile rankings and is in the top 20 percent of schools in the state for math. Mendez High School has improved by 64 percentile ranks in math since joining the Partnership network, including a gain of 20 percentile ranks from 2015–16 to 2016–17.

Other Partnership schools have also shown dramatic performance gains. For example, 99th Street Elementary School has climbed by nearly 40 percentile rankings in both ELA and math since becoming a Partnership school. 20th Street Elementary School, which became a Partnership school in 2016, climbed 22 percentile ranks in ELA and 34 ranks in math in just one year. Hollenbeck Middle School, which was one of the lowest-performing schools in the state when it joined the Partnership network, performed better in 2016–17 than 50 percent of schools statewide in math and 40 percent of schools in ELA.

Figure 7. Statewide percentile ranking improvement or decline for Partnership schools

ELA

- 5%
- 32%
- 47%
- 16%

■ Declining
■ Rising 0–9 levels
■ Rising 10–19 levels
■ Rising 20+ levels

MATH

- 11%
- 26%
- 47%
- 16%

■ Declining
■ Rising 0–9 levels
■ Rising 10–19 levels
■ Rising 20+ levels

As shown in Figures 8 and 9, relative to other schools statewide, Partnership schools performed about as well as other schools statewide in the first few years after becoming a Partnership school. But over a longer term, the average Partnership school makes much more substantial gains compared to other statewide schools serving the same grades. The improvement in student performance is particularly marked in Partnership high schools. The typical Partnership high school moved up 34 percentile ranks in math, and 25 in reading, from its first year in the Partnership network to 2017. Overall, Partnership schools averaged an increase of 19 percentile ranks in math and 18 in ELA.

Figure 8. Median changes in statewide percentile ranking for Partnership schools in math
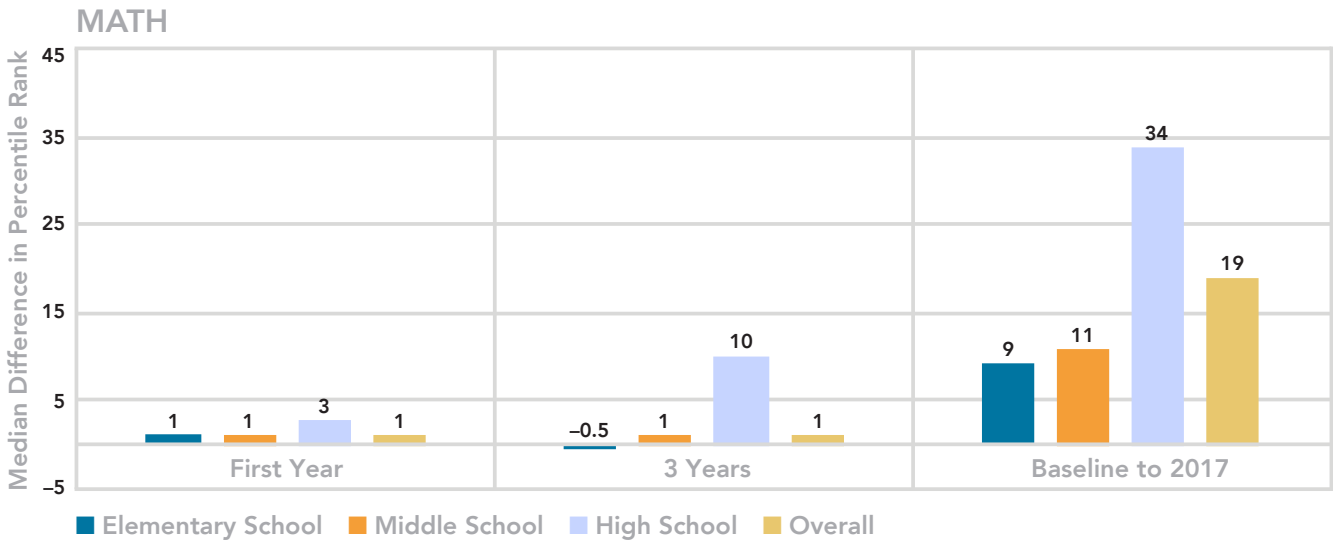

MATH

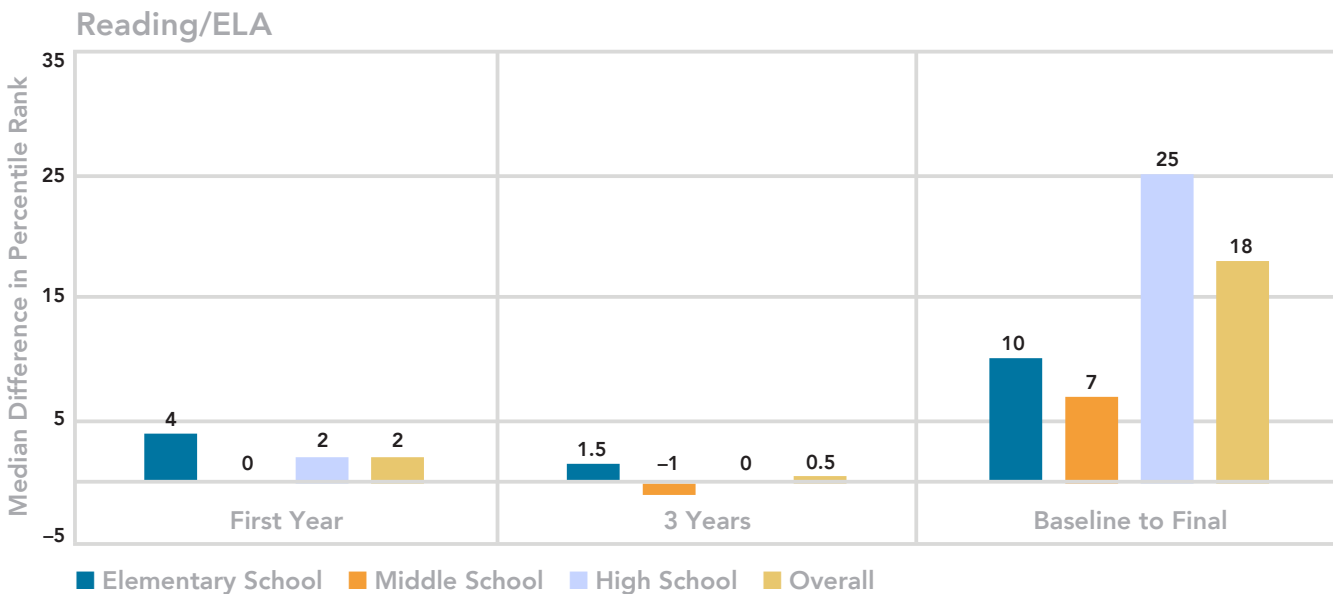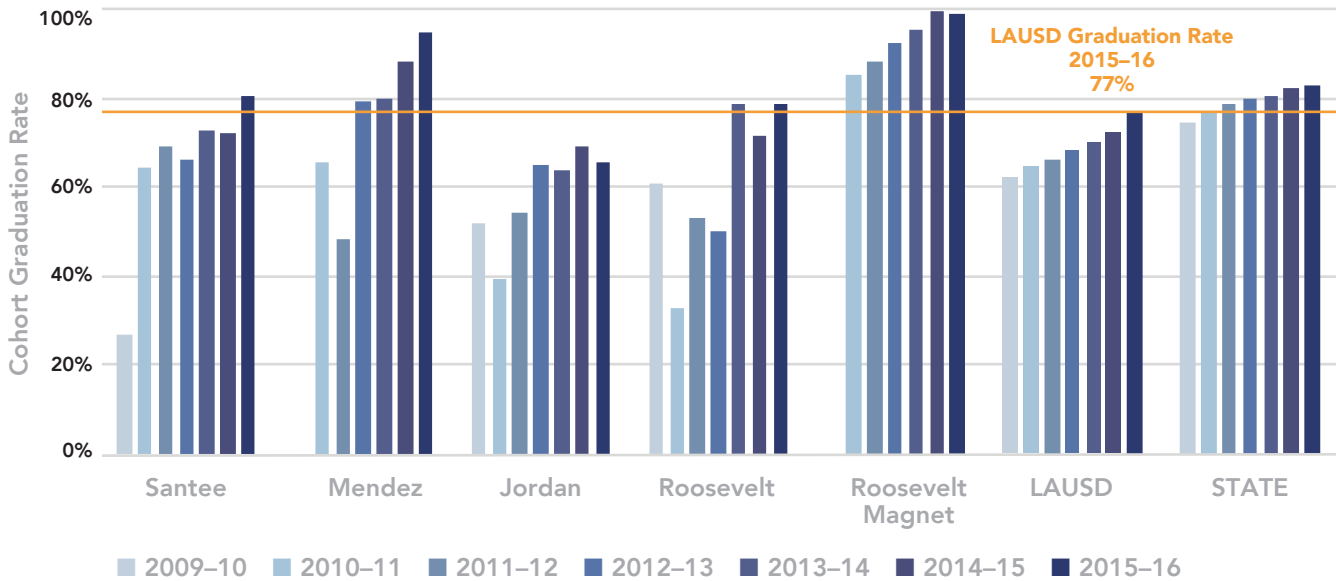**Figure 9. Median changes in statewide percentile ranking for Partnership schools in reading/ELA**

Reading/ELA

Figure 10. Four-year cohort graduation rates at Partnership schools, 2010–11 to 2015–16

LAUSD Graduation Rate
2015–16
77%

Legend: 2009–10, 2010–11, 2011–12, 2012–13, 2013–14, 2014–15, 2015–16

Schools: Santee, Mendez, Jordan, Roosevelt, Roosevelt Magnet, LAUSD, STATE

Y-axis: Cohort Graduation Rate (0% to 100%)

The Partnership's impact is particularly pronounced in high school graduation rates. Partnership high schools are demonstrating strong and sustained upward trends in four-year cohort graduation rates, with most Partnership high schools increasing graduation rates at a more rapid pace than L.A. Unified. Students at four of the five Partnership high schools matched or exceeded the graduation rates of their district peers in 2015–16 (the last year of available data as of this writing) as indicated by the orange line in Figure 10, and two schools exceeded the higher statewide average.

Partnership high schools overall are generally making progress in increasing college readiness as measured by course eligibility standards for California state colleges and universities. To be eligible for admission to the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU), students must complete the A–G College Entrance Requirements, a sequence of high school courses, with a grade of C or better. Three of the five Partnership high schools demonstrate an upward trend over the past three years, with the Roosevelt Magnet High School leading in the percentage of students passing A–G courses with a C or better (see Figure 11, page 47).

Partnership high schools are also making gains in college acceptance rates. Since the Partnership began tracking college acceptances in 2015, all high schools in its network have increased their percentages of seniors accepted to four-year colleges. Nearly half of seniors at four schools and three-quarters at one were accepted into a four-year college in 2017 (see Figure 12, page 47).

Figure 11. UC/CSU eligible cohort rate: Students completing UC/CSU A–G courses with a C or better

Legend: 2013–14, 2014–15, 2015–16

School	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16
Jordan	20%	24%	17%
Mendez	38%	35%	50%
Roosevelt	27%	29%	28%
Roosevelt Magnet	47%	69%	67%
Santee	23%	26%	35%
Overall	29%	30%	34%
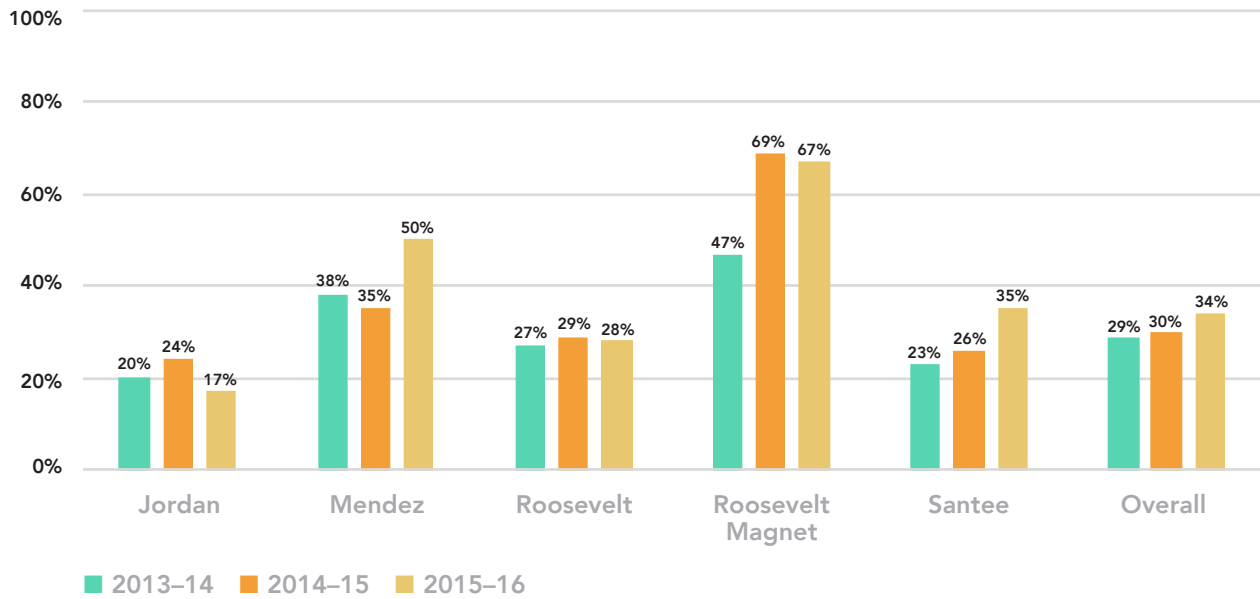
Figure 12. Percentages of high school seniors accepted to four-year colleges in 2015–2017

Legend: 2015, 2016, 2017

School	2015	2016	2017
Jordan	27%	16%	31%
Mendez	36%	40%	48%
Roosevelt	28%	33%	45%
Roosevelt Magnet	56%	81%	75%
Santee	33%	37%	45%
All Partnership High Schools	32%	37%	47%
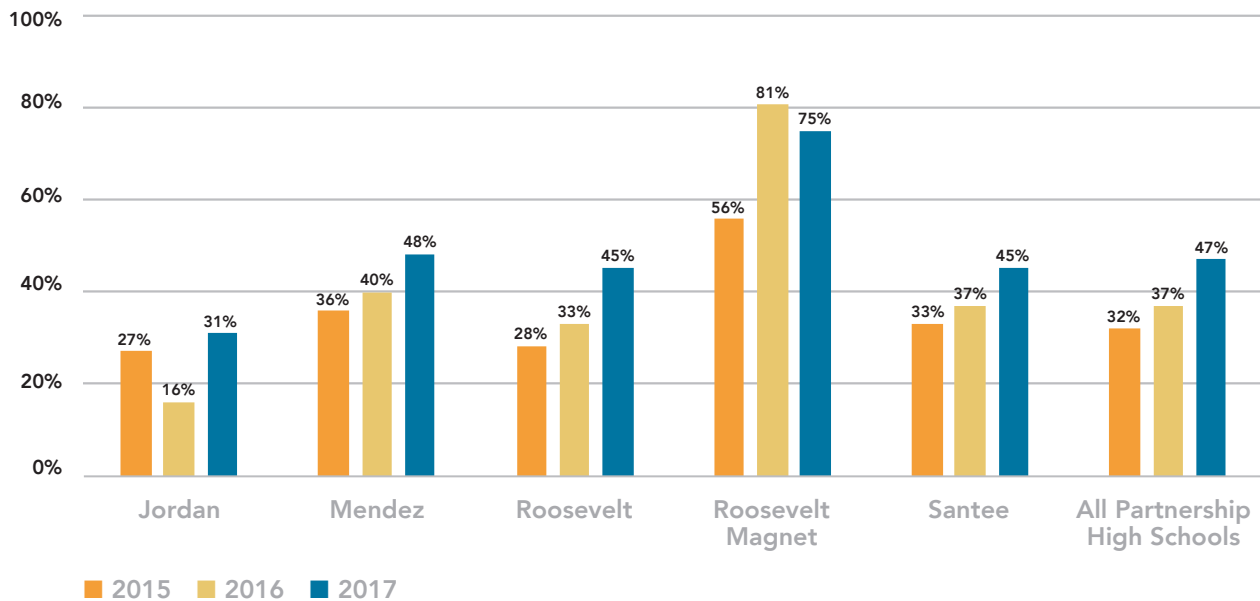
Source for figures above: The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools

Over the long term, the average Partnership schools make more substantial gains in student performance relative to other schools statewide.

Other improvement indicators

Nonacademic indicators also suggest the Partnership is having impact. Declines in truancy[52] and suspension rates at Partnership schools suggest that they are experiencing improvements in school culture.

Generally, truancy rates in Partnership schools overall declined between the 2011–12 and 2014–15 school years. Truancy in L.A. Unified schools also declined by about 25 percent over this period, but the trend was more pronounced for Partnership schools, which had a decline in truancy rates of more than 50 percent (see Figure 13, page 49). In each of the communities served by Partnership schools—Boyle Heights, South L.A. and Watts—truancy rates declined by 20 to 25 percentage points, reflecting the notable decline in truancy in Partnership schools overall (see Figure 14, page 49).

Suspension rates in Partnership schools overall have declined since the 2011–12 school year, mirroring suspension rate declines in L.A. Unified and statewide. Suspension rates declined steadily at Partnership high schools and significantly at Partnership middle schools, though both middle and elementary schools had a small upturn in rates from 2013–14 to 2014–15 (see Figure 15, page 50). In each of the communities served by Partnership schools, suspension rates declined though less significantly in Boyle Heights (see Figure 16, page 50).

Figure 13. Truancy rates at Partnership schools between 2011–12 and 2014–15, by school level

Legend: ■ 2011–12 ■ 2012–13 ■ 2013–14 ■ 2014–15
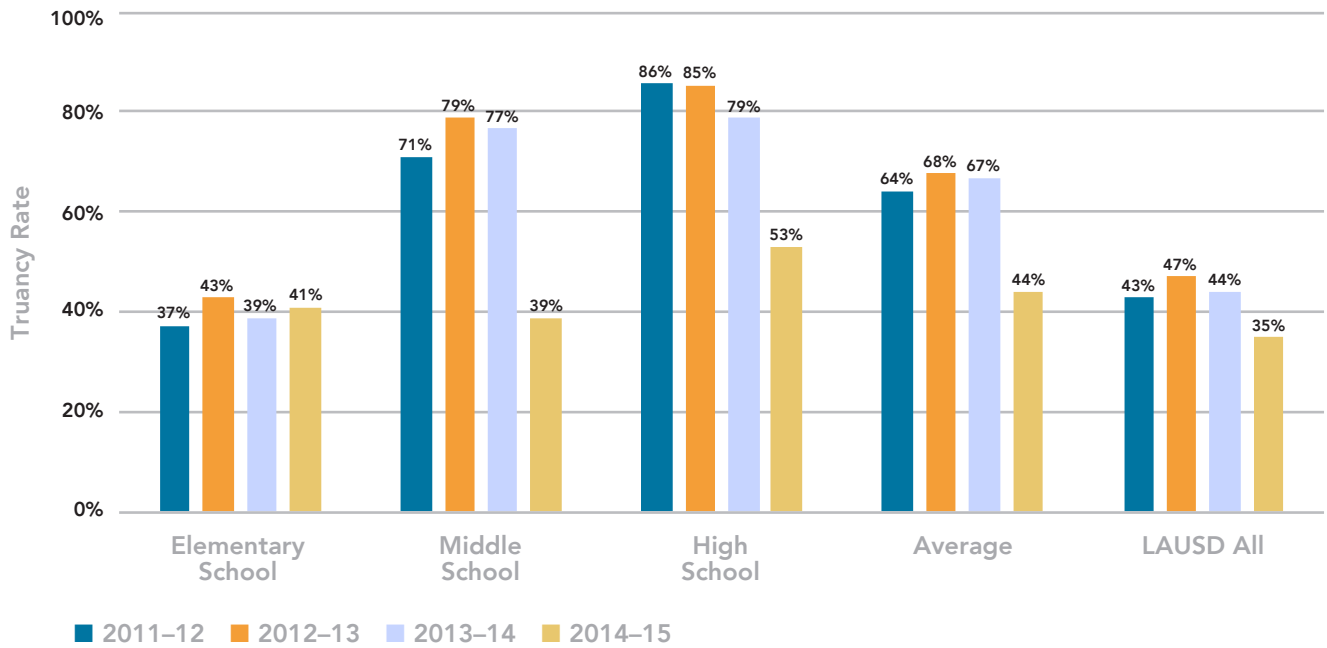
Figure 14. Truancy rates at Partnership schools between 2011–12 and 2014–15, by community

Legend: ■ 2011–12 ■ 2012–13 ■ 2013–14 ■ 2014–15
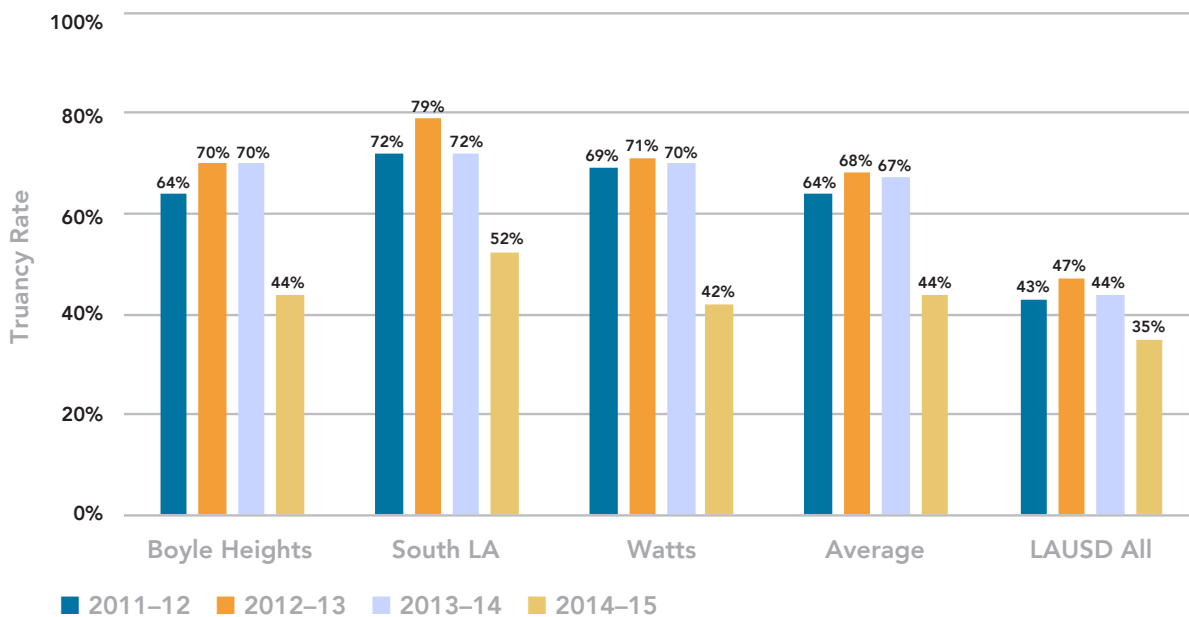
Source: California Department of Education, Office of Accountability, Dataquest; retrieved from http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/.
Note: Analysis excludes newer Partnership schools: Grape, 20th and 107th St.
Note from CDE: Truancy rate formula takes number of truants divided by cumulative enrollment and multiplies by 100.

Figure 15. Suspension rates by school level, 2011–12 to 2014–15

Suspension Rate

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School	LAUSD	State
2011–12	1.9	10	4.6	2.7	5.7
2012–13	1.8	7	2.8	1.7	5.1
2013–14	1	3.3	2.4	1.3	4.4
2014–15	1.9	4.6	1.9	0.9	3.8

■ 2011–12   ■ 2012–13   ■ 2013–14   ■ 2014–15
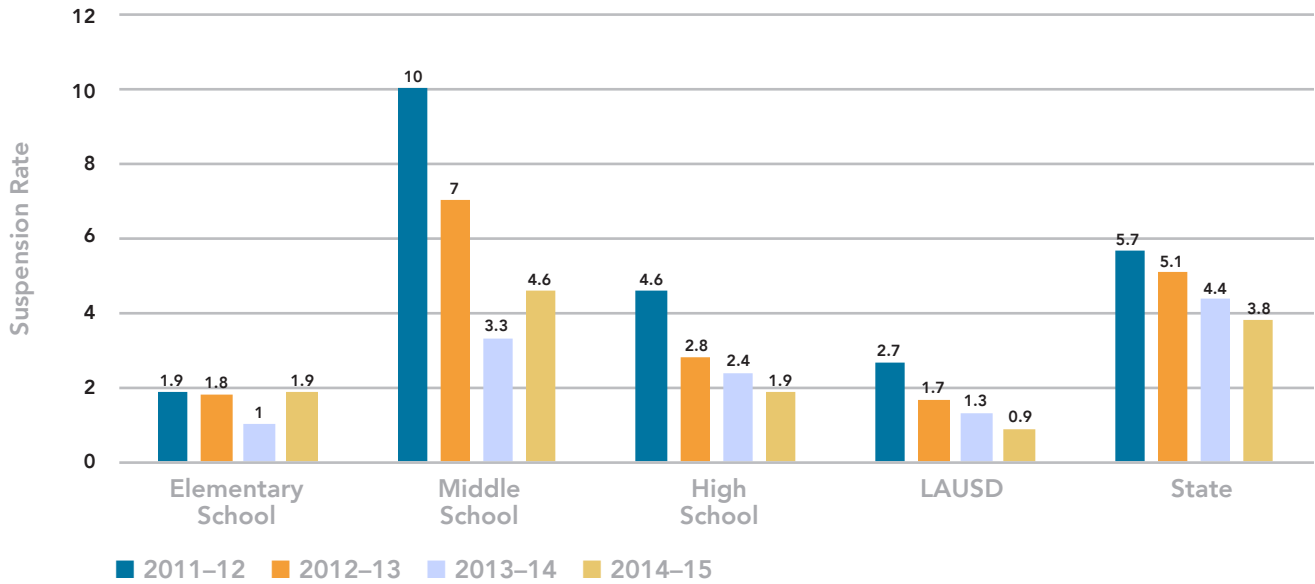
Figure 16. Suspension rates by community, 2011–12 to 2014–15

Suspension Rate

	Boyle Heights	South LA	Watts	LAUSD	State
2011–12	2.2	4.3	11.8	2.7	5.7
2012–13	1.6	2.1	8.8	1.7	5.1
2013–14	1.7	1.1	4.5	1.3	4.4
2014–15	1.4	1.3	6.2	0.9	3.8

■ 2011–12   ■ 2012–13   ■ 2013–14   ■ 2014–15
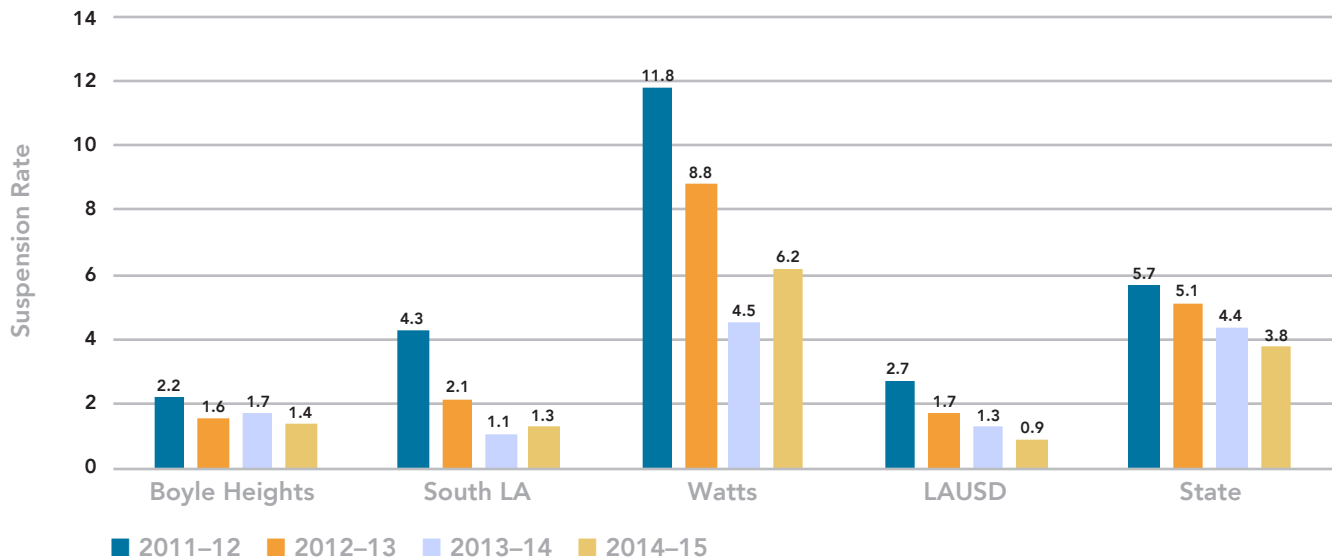
Source for figures above: California Department of Education, Office of Accountability, Dataquest. Available: http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/.

Note: Analysis excludes newer Partnership schools: Grape, 20th and 107 St.

Note from CDE: Suspension rate formula takes number of suspensions divided by cumulative enrollment and multiplies by 100.

Revolutionizing school systems

The Partnership's system change work is focused on two goals: removing barriers and scaling up success. But it is grounded in the Partnership's work with schools. "To have transformational change in schools, we have to achieve systemic change," says Chase Stafford, the Partnership's director of policy and planning. By working in high-need schools, the Partnership experiences first-hand the systemic barriers they face and works to effect and catalyze systemic change to the benefit of all high-need schools, not just schools in the Partnership network. Since its establishment, the Partnership has undertaken key efforts toward these goals.

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Removing barriers

The Partnership's experience in schools has clearly exposed that some state and district policies and practices disproportionately affect high-need schools in low-resource communities. Most of the Partnership's successes in system change have focused on addressing inequities that arise when a lack of resources results in students in low-resource schools having fewer teacher supports or less learning time.

Reductions in teaching staff. Beginning in 2008, significant state budget deficits drove reductions in education funding that triggered waves of layoffs of school staff across California. By 2010, L.A. Unified had laid off nearly 5,000 employees, including teachers, administrators, counselors, and support staff.[53] Low-resource schools were acutely affected. Because of a state law requiring layoffs by seniority, high-need, low-resource schools—which typically employ a higher proportion of junior teachers compared with wealthier schools—lost more teachers than other schools with more senior staff. Working with the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California,

Public Counsel, and a private law firm, Kirkland & Ellis, LLP, the Partnership led a class-action lawsuit, *Reed v. State of California*,[54] arguing that the district's application of the state law resulted in disproportionate harm to high-need students, violating their fundamental right under the state constitution to equal access to a quality education. (See "Legal action," page 35.)

The litigation resulted in a 2014 settlement providing $25 million annually for three years to 37 historically low-performing middle and high schools with high teacher turnover. Intended to help them attract and retain teachers, these funds provide each school with additional staff, including an additional assistant principal, counselor, special education coordinator, and several mentor teachers. The funds also support the delivery of 40 hours of specialized training to teachers at all 37 schools. To address retention and other staffing challenges, school principals received an incentives package to remain at the schools, teachers who completed the specialized training were fully exempt from seniority-based layoffs, and staff openings now receive priority for early hiring.[55]

In anticipation of the settlement's expiration in June 2017, the Partnership led advocacy efforts to influence the district to extend the "Reed program" supports. Consequently, the district school board and superintendent agreed to renew the Reed program through June 2018, and annually thereafter on a year-to-year basis.

As the district continues to wrestle with budget reductions and layoffs,[56] the continuation of the Reed program ensures professional development supports that help address another district policy detrimental to low-resource schools. Because of protections for tenured teachers, the district assigns tenured teachers who have lost their positions in one school to other district schools with openings. While many schools are challenged by such mandatory assignments, low-resource schools have less capacity to address problems that arise when teachers are not qualified for the positions to which they are assigned. Along with the Reed supports, the Partnership's ability to work with the district has helped mitigate the potentially devastating effects of mandatory assignments on its schools. The Partnership continues to seek a long-term solution to this issue, including addressing the root causes of mandatory assignments so that all district schools have access to the best teachers for open positions.

Reduced learning time. In 2014, the Partnership helped develop a class-action lawsuit against the state of California for its failure to address practices and policies that resulted in reduced learning time at seven schools, a violation of the state constitution's equal protection guarantee to a quality education. (See "Legal action," page 35.) In *Cruz v. State of California*,[57] filed by the ACLU and Public Counsel, the student plaintiffs alleged that schools that were unable to provide a full day of meaningful instruction, often because a lack of adequate course offerings resulted in "fake classes"

or "service periods," infringed on their right to equal educational opportunity. Often during these "fake classes," students simply made photocopies, ran errands, or performed other administrative tasks. Other causes of lost instructional time cited in the lawsuit included high teacher turnover and use of substitutes that resulted in staffing instabilities; consequences of violence on school grounds that resulted in trauma that was untreated due to a lack of mental health services; and delayed course scheduling that resulted in a high number of class transfer requests or improper class placements. The lawsuit argued that all of these practices resulted in lost learning time for students, and ultimately prevented equal access to a quality education.

The 2015 lawsuit settlement required the district to stop the use of "fake classes" and ensure that all students started school with a proper schedule. The lawsuit also led to state legislation prohibiting these practices and creating accountability measures, including tracking schools in the statewide student information system when students are assigned to fake classes, to ensure that all California schools implemented the new law faithfully.[58] On the basis of the settlement findings, the Partnership successfully secured additional staff resources and flexibilities to retain effective temporary teachers for the Partnership school that participated in the lawsuit, to ensure that all students would receive full days of instruction.

Scaling up successes

A number of programs piloted in Partnership schools have expanded beyond the Partnership network, stirring optimism in Partnership school leaders and teachers that the district will change. "The Partnership leads the way in thinking outside the box," says Leo Gonzalez, principal at Stevenson Middle School.

Parent College. Greenfield Unified School District and charter operators LA's Promise, Magnolia Public Schools, and PUC Charter Network have adopted Parent College, the Partnership's signature initiative for increasing parent engagement in student achievement (see "Engaged and empowered parents and communities," page 26). L.A. Unified plans to expand Parent College to other schools beginning in 2017–18.

Universal gifted testing. Since 2009, the Partnership has tested all students in the second grade for gifted services, recognizing that when the district relies on parents and school staff to nominate students for assessment, students of color tend not to be identified. The Partnership's practice of testing all students yielded a tenfold increase in the number of students identified for gifted services in Partnership schools, which are largely minority-majority schools. In 2011, L.A. Unified extended gifted testing to all students in the second grade.

School report cards. Grounded in the belief that making school performance data publicly available would help hold all schools equally accountable for student outcomes, the Partnership began developing an online school report card in 2008 intended to provide families with easy access to performance data on all the schools in the Partnership network. L.A. Unified began using school report cards district-wide in 2009.

MyData. In 2008, the Partnership began developing an online system for teachers in its schools that would allow them immediate access to student data — including state test scores, student grades, UC/USC A-G coursework, midyear assessments, attendance, discipline referrals, and suspensions — so they could see in real time the student performance data that would help them plan and focus their instruction on the specific learning needs of individual students. By the 2010–11 school year, the Partnership had helped the district launch a district-wide data portal, the MyData system, giving teachers in all district schools access to student data online.

Blended learning/credit recovery program for high school students. Beginning in 2008, the Partnership began developing APEX, an online credit recovery program to provide personalized learning for high school students, to help them complete courses required for graduation and reduce the risk of dropping out. The program helped increase the Partnership's graduation rate (see "The Partnership's Impact," page 43) and in 2015, L.A. Unified implemented the program district-wide.

After working in schools and with the district for 10 years, the Partnership has acquired wisdom and insights about transforming district schools and achieving systemic change.

Formula for success. The Partnership provides strategic support and advocacy for schools so that the leaders, teachers, and parents within can create and sustain lasting change for their schools themselves. This formula includes:

- *Focus on the critical levers for sustainable and scalable change: teachers, leaders, and parent and community engagement.* These are the most important influences on student outcomes. Without a strong focus on building their capacity to effect change in schools, other interventions will not live up to their promise.
- *Differentiate supports according to school needs.* A one-size-fits-all approach that does not recognize and build on the particular assets or address the specific resource challenges of a school will not achieve meaningful and sustainable change.
- *Forge a true collaborative partnership with the district.* The Partnership's approach stands apart from that of charter operators, who break off from the district to forge their own path. But it also contrasts with more traditional district partnerships, in which outside organizations provide support while the district runs the show. The Partnership assumes real authority in its schools. But by working within the district, it sets the stage for leveraging district resources to effect systemic changes with much greater potential impact.

Philanthropy can be leveraged effectively. School turnaround efforts have spent significant public and private funds, often with little to show for the investment. A recent evaluation of $831 billion in federal funds directed to school improvement found the investment had no significant impact on student achievement in math or reading, high school graduation, or college enrollment.[59] That philanthropy collectively invests about $2 billion annually on K–12 education on top of $600 billion in total public funds further suggests that the education system can absorb a great deal of money but with little impact.[60] In contrast to many school improvement initiatives, however, the Partnership has experienced favorable returns on investment. At a cost of approximately $650 per student,[61] the Partnership's experience in its first ten years working in schools demonstrates that effective school management for a select group of the highest-need schools can result in meaningful success, even in the toughest circumstances, including funding reductions. However, with limited resources, expenditures must be

efficient. By focusing on key change levers and leveraging district and community resources to enhance existing assets, the Partnership has successfully used philanthropic funds to add to, rather than duplicate or replace, district resources.

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Leverage community resources. The value of engaging community resources to improve student outcomes cannot be overstated. With finite public and private resources, neither the Partnership nor the district can provide all the supports that schools with a majority high-need student population need to improve student outcomes. Limited resources matched against great needs that extend past classroom walls requires partners outside school buildings. Organizations like the Partnership can help connect high-need schools to community partners and facilitate relationship-building to maximize the limited resources available to high-need schools. However, community partners must be engaged strategically to maintain a focus on goals and results over time. The Partnership models how external partners, itself included, can work with schools to make improving student outcomes a community endeavor.

Start small and scale up with focus. The Partnership initially took on 10 schools at once. Recognizing that the huge start-up was a "threat to early results," the Partnership's founding leaders advise other school management organizations to scale up gradually. In line with decades of research about successful turnarounds,[62] they also caution against trying to address every school challenge and improvement issue. As previously discussed, strategic support focused on the critical levers for school transformation—teachers, leaders, and parents—can produce sustainable and scalable change.

Build strong and deep relationships across the district. District partners allied around common goals and interests have helped the Partnership weather district leadership and organizational changes, and helped facilitate faster changes for schools than legal action may have produced, with little loss of political capital. The

Partnership recognizes two factors critical to developing a strong relationship with the district. First, relationship-building is predicated on having deep knowledge of the district and its capacities, to understand what is working versus what needs to change, how change can occur, and who in the district can help realize change. Second, given the bureaucracy inherent to any large urban district, relationships at multiple levels within the district are essential. Historically, the Partnership's leadership has had close political connections to city and district leaders. Working to address operational changes has further helped the Partnership cultivate deep relationships with staff up and down the district's administrative structure.

> **We are uniquely suited to influence the district because we are the district."**—*Joan Sullivan, Partnership chief executive officer*

More significantly, the Partnership's position relative to the district—working within the district as an outside organization—gives rise to a unique situation in which the Partnership's success is tied to the district's success. "We are uniquely suited to influence the district because we *are* the district," Partnership CEO Joan Sullivan says.

As the Partnership forges ahead into its second decade, its immediate goals include having every child in its network of schools read at grade level and doubling proficiency rates in ELA and math, and increasing the number of Partnership seniors accepted into four-year colleges. To do so the Partnership will further refine its model while remaining focused on the three key levers of leaders, teachers, and parent and community engagement.

The Partnership plans to continue working with the district to address the policies and practices that impede student success system-wide. The Partnership's starting point is championing the most equitable policies that will help close the ELA achievement gap for the 50 highest-need district schools, and elevating systemic inequities and pushing the district to implement policies that result in high-need schools getting what they need to succeed. As discussed, the Partnership has staked out its positions on unified enrollment and equitable funding, as documented in a pair of publicly available briefs released in early 2017 (see "Advocacy," page 34) and will continue working with the district and other education stakeholders to move to an equitable solution on these issues.

The Partnership will pursue these policy changes with a new L.A. Unified school board. The 2017 local elections shifted the board's composition,[63] and though the full impact of the leadership change remains to be seen, the Partnership's success to date with low-performing schools increases its potential to play an enhanced role as thought partner to the district and its new leadership on school transformation and systemic change.

As of this writing, the Partnership's primary benefactors, Richard and Melanie Lundquist, are committed to making another large gift to support the Partnership's mission. With philanthropic support looking strong, the Partnership is also committed to achieving long-term sustainability in its work so that schools and students can continue to benefit long into the future. Sustainability is also important for another reason: extending the approach beyond Los Angeles. The Partnership model potentially has great relevance for cities nationwide seeking new approaches to transforming schools and addressing systemic inequities (see "The Partnership Model: A Unique Approach to School Turnaround," page 37). Some cities will be able to tap philanthropic resources just like the Partnership has. For cities without Los Angeles-size giving, what the Partnership learns about sustainability in the coming years will illuminate how they can follow the Partnership model as well.

Notes

1. Los Angeles Unified Schools District. (2017, August). *Fingertip facts, 2017–18.* Retrieved from https://achieve.lausd.net/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=41232&dataid=57579&File-Name=NewlyUpdatedFingertip%20Facts2017-18_English.pdf

2. In 2016–17, 633,621 students were enrolled in 1,302 K–12 LAUSD schools, including over 900 traditional district schools and 228 public charter schools. General fund expenses were $7.46B in 217-18. California Department of Education, Office of Accountability: Dataquest. (n.d.). Enrollment 2016–17. Retrieved from http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/; Los Angeles Unified Schools District. (2016). *Fingertip facts, 2017–18.* Retrieved from https://achieve.lausd.net/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=41232&dataid=57579&-FileName=NewlyUpdatedFingertip%20Facts2017-18_English.pdf

3 California Department of Education, Office of Accountability: Dataquest. (n.d.). Enrollment 2016–17. Retrieved from http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/ Herein, we use "low-income" and "economically disadvantaged" interchangeably to refer to students the CDE defines as "socioeconomically disadvantaged students," that is, students who are (1) eligible for the Free and Reduced-Price Meal (FRPM) program (also known as the National School Lunch Program), or have a direct certification for FRPMs, or (2) are migrant, homeless, or foster youth, or (3) where neither of the parents were a high school graduate. California Department of Education. (n.d.). *School accountability report card: Data element definitions and sources.* Retrieved from http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/sa/documents/definitions16.doc

4. California Department of Education, Office of Accountability: Dataquest. (n.d.). Enrollment 2016–17. Retrieved from http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/

5. California Department of Education, Office of Accountability: Dataquest. (n.d.). Enrollment 2016–17.

6. In 2017 end-of year state assessments, only 40 percent of students overall met or exceeded standards in English language arts (ELA); 60 percent failed to meet the state's ELA standards. California Department of Education. (n.d.). *Smarter Balanced Assessment test results.* Retrieved from http://caaspp.cde.ca.gov/sb2017/default

7. In 2017 end-of year state assessments, only 30 percent of students overall met or exceeded standards in math; 70 percent failed to meet the state's math standards. California Department of Education. (n.d.). *Smarter Balanced Assessment test results.* Retrieved from http://caaspp.cde.ca.gov/sb2017/default

8. Only 4 percent of ELLs met or exceeded standards in ELA and 5 percent in math on 2016 end-of-year state assessments. California Department of Education. (n.d.). *Smarter Balanced Assessment test results.* Retrieved from http://caaspp.cde.ca.gov/sb2017/default

9. Among economically disadvantaged students, 34 percent met or exceeded standards in ELA and 24 percent in math. California Department of Education. (n.d.). *Smarter Balanced Assessment test results.* Retrieved from http://caaspp.cde.ca.gov/sb2017/default

10. Boghossian, N. (2006, June 21). LAUSD's graduation rate: 44%. *Los Angeles Daily News.* Retrieved from https://www.alipac.us/f12/lausds-graduation-rate-44%25-29265/

11. Llanos, C. (2010, December 7). LAUSD dropout rate is on the rise. *Los Angeles Daily News.* Retrieved from http://www.dailynews.com/20101207/lausd-dropout-rate-is-on-the-rise

12. This reporting is based on Public Impact's analysis of student and school data for schools in the Partnership network. "Significant" improvement is defined here as improvement in statewide percentile ranking in state performance by 10 or more levels, based on Public Impact's analysis of student and school data for schools in the Partnership network.

13. Based on Public Impact's analysis of graduation rates at schools in the Partnership network. See CDE Department of Accountability, Dataquest, Graduation Rates, retrieved from http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/

14. The Partnership has worked with 25 schools since its establishment, but some of these schools have closed or were consolidated. The Partnership has worked continuously with all schools in its network.

15. LAUSD Office of Communications. (2017, September 26). LAUSD Innovation Division partner receives $50 million donation.

16. Mayor Villaraigosa's campaign platform focused on improving schools to raise student achievement. See Gewertz, C. (2005, May 25). Incoming L.A. mayor stumped for oversight of education system. *Education Week.* Retrieved from http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/05/25/38la.h24.html; In January 2007, Villaraigosa released *The Schoolhouse: A Framework to Give Every Child in L.AUSD an Excellent Education,* which laid out his vision for great schools and his plan to give every student in LAUSD access to a great education. Hefland, D., & Rubin, J. (2007, January 18). Mayor posts his strategy for school. *Los Angeles Times.* Retrieved from http://articles.latimes.com/2007/jan/18/local/me-mayor18

17. Boghossian, N. (2006, June 21). LAUSD's graduation rate: 44%. *Los Angeles Daily News.* Retrieved from https://www.alipac.us/f12/lausds-graduation-rate-44%25-29265/; Llanos, C. (2010, December 7). LAUSD dropout rate is on the rise. *Los Angeles Daily News.* Retrieved from http://www.dailynews.com/20101207/lausd-dropout-rate-is-on-the-rise

18. Villaraigosa, A. (2007). *The Schoolhouse: A Framework to Give Every Child in LAUSD an Excellent Education.* Retrieved from http://www.latinas.org/atf/cf/%7B556081AD-4C65-463C-B792-1965C38C6EA9%7D/TheSchoolhouse.pdf

19. As described herein, the Partnership's early strategy largely pursued the Schoolhouse framework. Though the Partnership model evolved to focus primarily on empowered leadership, effective teaching, and parent and community engagement, the Partnership examined small-school strategies, for example, by reconfiguring Roosevelt High School into seven small schools in 2010. In 2013, Roosevelt was reconstituted into a single comprehensive school. See Roosevelt High School. (n.d.) History. Retrieved from http://rooseveltlausd.org/

20. Brenes, M. (2014, April 22.) New education funds in Los Angeles Unified must target highest-need schools. *EdSource.* Retrieved from https://edsource.org/2014/new-education-funds-in-los-angeles-unified-must-target-highest-needs-schools/63528

21. Advancement Project. (n.d.). Student need index: An equity aggregate student need index for LCFF in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Retrieved from http://advancementprojectca.org/what-we-do/educational-equity/local-control-funding-formula-lcff/lausd-context/student-need-index/

22. Advancement Project. (n.d.). Student need index: An equity aggregate student need index for LCFF in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Retrieved from http://advancementprojectca.org/what-we-do/educational-equity/local-control-funding-formula-lcff/lausd-context/student-need-index/.

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