Sharing Accountability and Results

How San Jose Unified School District is taking its College Readiness Indicator System (CRIS) to Scale and Transforming Leadership Culture on the Way

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CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

In July 2014, San Jose Unified School District's Superintendent, Dr. Vincent Matthews, participated in a national meeting of school system leaders from across the country. During a presentation to fellow superintendents, Matthews described how his leadership team was executing on *Opportunity 21*, an ambitious Strategic Plan for improving San Jose's public schools. He conveyed the urgency of his district's aim to close persistent achievement and opportunity gaps that were holding back low-income Hispanic and Latino students in San Jose. He laid out the key performance measures (KPMs) his team developed so that system and school leaders could use common metrics to track and support students' progress toward graduation and success in college and career. His peers in the audience nodded—they too had adopted similar equity and college readiness goals and were developing data monitoring systems.

Quiet recognition quickly turned to intense interest and enthusiasm, however, when Matthews began detailing how his team was bringing the plan off the page and the data out of the warehouse to improve public school performance in San Jose. The prior fall, San Jose Unified (SJUSD) had scaled up an initiative called OpStat (Opportunity 21 + STAT) that links every school principal with central-office leaders in routine, data-based inquiry and improvement cycles throughout the school year. Through OpStat, SJUSD was advancing its mission by building a leadership culture around core values that Matthews and his team view as essential to successful, sustainable improvement (Box 1).

In an interview after the conference, Matthews' eyes lit up as he recalled the excited responses from his peers, ranging from "very, very intrigued to immediately calling their districts that night . . . wanting the PowerPoint and then immediately sending it" to their staff.

Box 1. SJUSD Mission and Values

Mission

San José Unified School District's mission is to eliminate the opportunity gap and provide every student with the finest 21st century education.

Values

Equity, Urgency, Teamwork, Transparency,
Informed Inquiry, Accountability

In this Case Study

Though still early in its development, SJUSD's OpStat initiative offers a potentially powerful model for education leaders seeking to build a system of continuous improvement that harnesses data, balances support and accountability, and keeps a clear focus on the achievement and advancement of all students.

This case study offers school system leaders and other education stakeholders an in-depth look at San Jose's journey and system design. In the following pages, the authors trace the District's initial steps as an early adopter of college readiness standards and a piloting partner in the first phase of the College Readiness Indicator System Initiative (CRIS), sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The study then describes how OpStat emerged as a main engine of SJUSD's strategic plan, designed to drive data-informed continuous improvement throughout the system. It details organizational and operational components that were rolled out during the 2013-2014 school year, and how OpStat was revised in response to feedback over the first 18 months of implementation. The study also highlights school principals' experiences of the process, and conditions in SJUSD that supported districtwide implementation.

Box 2. Case Study Approach

To continue to build and disseminate knowledge about data use in school and system improvement, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funded researchers from the Johns Hopkins University Everyone Graduates Center and Education Northwest to develop a case study of San Jose Unified School District's journey from pilot to system-wide implementation. The study builds from and extends work completed in the first phase of the Foundation's College Readiness Indicator Systems (CRIS) initiative.[1]

The research team documented SJUSD's work over the first year and a half of OpStat implementation (fall 2013 – winter 2015). This report is based on data collected from multiple sources: real time observations of support and accountability sessions; numerous interviews with district- and school-based leaders; document review; and an online survey of all SJUSD building principals administered in December 2014. More than three-quarters of SJUSD principals responded to the survey. The research team produced three interim reports over the course of the study to provide feedback to District leaders and Foundation partners and to check for understanding of OpStat's core processes and system supports for implementation.

DISTRICT BACKGROUND

San Jose Unified School District (SJUSD) is an urban school system in the heart of northern California's Silicon Valley. With more than 33,000 students and 42 schools, SJUSD is among the state's largest and demographically diverse districts.[2] More than half (52%) of the students are

[1] https://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/college-readiness-indicator-systems-resource-series

[2] 25 elementary, two K-8, six middle, six high, five alternative

Hispanic and Latino, 25% are English Language Learners (ELL), and nearly half (45%) qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.[3]

SJUSD has been recognized as an innovative and improving school system. In 1998, SJUSD became the first district in California to signal the importance of college readiness by instituting the University of California "A-G" admissions standards as the core academic pathway all students would be expected to take to earn a regular high school diploma.[4] District leaders at the time worked to build consensus with the teachers' union, parents, and other community stakeholders to support the change. In a study published by Ed Trust-West, SJUSD's former superintendent Dr. Linda Murray recounts the effort and shares district data illustrating how the new standards increased college readiness rather than pushing more students off-track as many feared they would (Ed Trust-West, 2010).

District data reported on SJUSD's website show a near 50-point increase in the district's composite score on California's Academic Performance Index (API) between 2007 and 2012. System leaders attribute the improvement to the higher standards and to award-winning programs (e.g. two-way bi-lingual immersion, International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, STEM and environmental science, visual and performing arts) and individual school performance. SJUSD is home to 22 California Distinguished Schools and 9 National Blue Ribbon Schools.[5]

Despite these advances, district leaders remain dissatisfied with persisting inequities in students' academic opportunities and performance. In San Jose, lower-income residents are more concentrated in the central and especially northern parts of the city. Average scores among schools in these areas are markedly lower than among schools clustered in the wealthier, southern end, and gaps between white and Hispanic students are substantial, particularly in the central area **(Exhibit 1).**

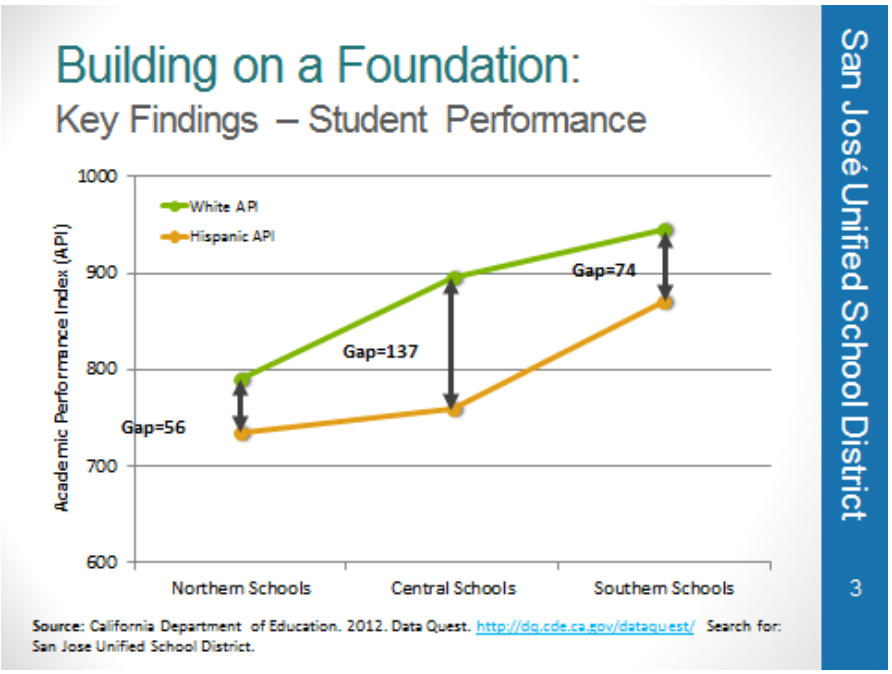


Exhibit 1

[3] 25% white, 13% Asian, 4% African American, and the remaining 6% are classified as "other."

[4] The A–G curriculum is a series of college preparatory courses that high school students must take to be eligible to enter the University of California and California State University systems. See http://collegetools.berkeley.edu/resources.php?cat_id=22 for more information.

[5] http://www.sjusd.org/community/sjusd-fast-facts/

Moreover, while increasing rigor did not appear to increase the number of students failing to master content in core subjects, it did not decrease their numbers either. Hispanic and Latino students were disproportionately represented among high school students receiving D or F grades in 2007-2008, and the overall rates were unacceptably high—more than one-third in English Language Arts and close to half in science and mathematics. Leaders also became aware that many students who were earning a C average or better in A-G courses were still not going to college; more work was needed to take model programs emerging in a few schools to create a college-going culture and support system into every school.

In response to these concerns, SJUSD's Governing Board set forth a landmark policy in 2010 that placed equity at the center of its vision for the future of the district.[6] The Board had recently hired Dr. Vincent Matthews to lead the system in a new strategic direction that prioritized closing achievement gaps and preparing all students for success in college and career. At the same time, SJUSD was invited to participate in a national college readiness initiative that would help lay important groundwork for its new approach.

COLLEGE READINESS INDICATOR SYSTEMS (CRIS)

College readiness is rapidly becoming a central goal of K-12 school systems nationwide. Postsecondary education and training are now widely recognized as prerequisites for young adults seeking economic security and opportunities for advancement in a rapidly changing and globalized labor market. In response, states and districts like SJUSD have sought to articulate what college readiness means and to design support and intervention systems that ensure all students graduate from high school prepared for their next steps.[7]

I strongly believe that we need to prepare students for life after high school. Whether it be college or going to work, they still need to have the mindsets and be prepared for that rigorous work. –SJUSD Principal

Important groundwork for understanding college readiness and guiding system development was laid by the College Readiness Indicator System Initiative (CRIS) sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. CRIS launched in 2010 as a partnership of three organizations -- the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University, and the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research -- four urban school districts (including SJUSD), and one school support network. The partners aimed to develop and study the implementation of indicators and support systems that would increase the number of students who graduate from high school ready to succeed in college.

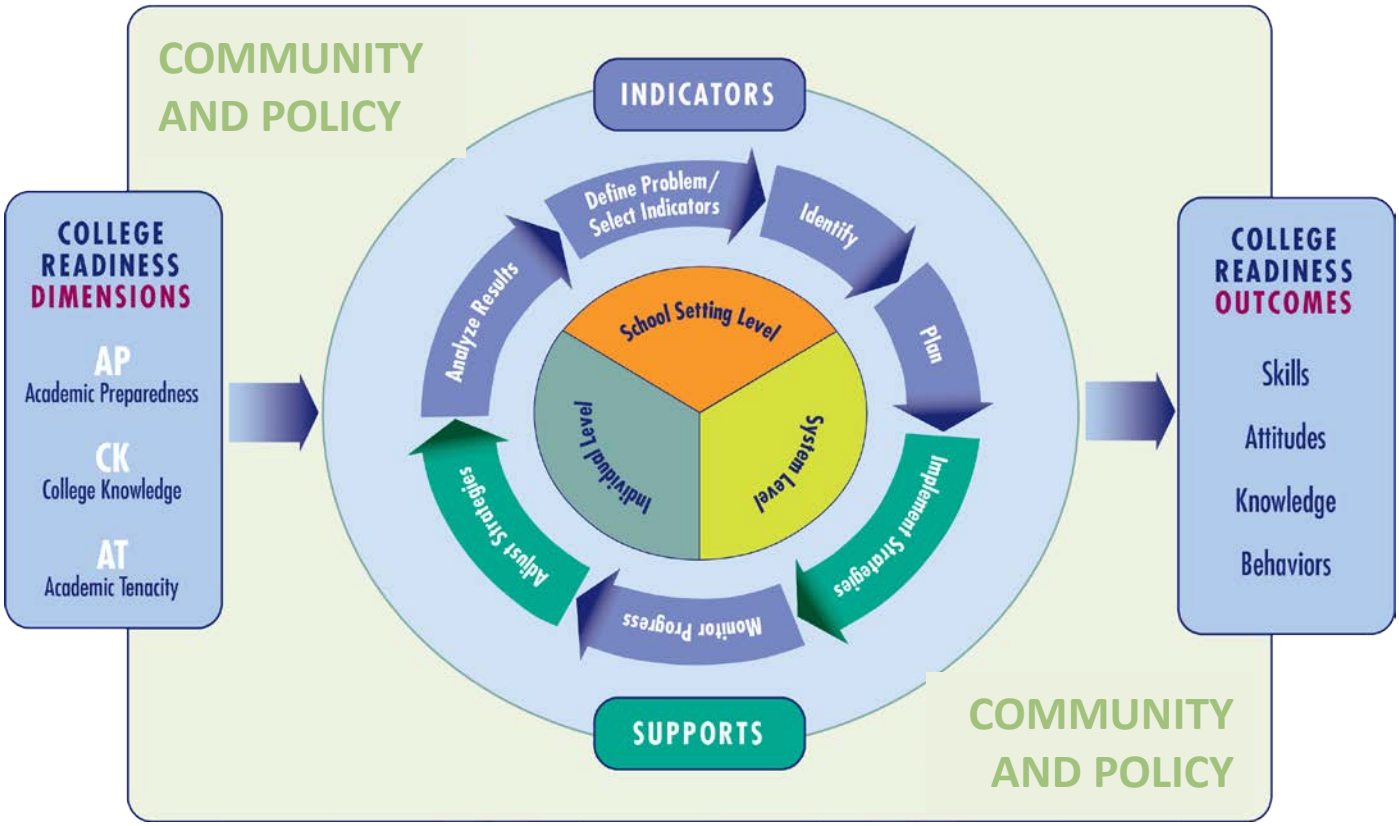
A major product of the first phase of the CRIS initiative is a comprehensive framework designed to help guide education leaders and other stakeholders in developing and implementing college

[6] http://www.sjusd.org/opportunity21/equity-policy/
[7] For more, see the College and Career Readiness and Success Center.

readiness indicator systems. Depicted in Figure 1, the framework features three foundational concepts:

- A multi-dimensional understanding of college readiness that integrates students' academic preparedness with equally important measures of tenacity and know-how.
- A tri-level approach that attends to activities, processes, and outcomes at the individual, school-setting, and system levels.
- A "cycle of inquiry" process that serves as the central mechanism for connecting indicators for each dimension and at each level with the appropriate supports.

Figure 1. The CRIS Framework



Other significant CRIS products include a menu of college readiness indicators and supports, technical guides to developing indicators and implementing system elements, and a self-assessment tool for districts interested in creating or strengthening their own systems.[8]

[8] These tools and additional information are available on the CRIS supported by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, https://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/college-readiness-indicator-systems-resource-series, and on Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform site http://annenberginstitute.org/CRIS.

Between 2010 and 2012, CRIS partners worked in each of the five pilot sites to develop measures of college readiness, integrate the indicators into district-level data and reporting infrastructures, and demonstrate how the indicators could be used to focus improvement efforts across a single feeder pattern of pilot schools.

FROM INDICATORS TO ACTION

San Jose USD's CRIS Pilot

SJUSD was a natural partner for the CRIS initiative. Not only was the District an early adopter of college readiness standards, it also had a comprehensive data warehouse that could be tapped to create and track indicators of college readiness. Credentialed employees, including every school principal, received training in an online query system and were issued a personal laptop, ensuring data access for practitioners at all levels. Negotiations with the local teachers' union around the adoption of the new standards laid groundwork for a new contract that provided options for flexible use of time for administrators and teachers to meet and plan.

During the pilot, SJUSD activated a CRIS District Team that included staff from two departments—Data, Research, and Assessment (DRA) and Curriculum and Instruction (C&I). Because indicator development was a major focus of the work during the pilot, the then Manager of SJUSD's Continuous Improvement Programs, Marcy Lauck led the team. She and DRA staff worked with the CRIS university-based partners to analyze data and develop initial indicators and survey items to help the district and pilot schools measure students' academic preparation, engagement and tenacity, and college knowledge.

The CRIS District Team deployed central office staff who met bi-weekly with school teams in the three feeder pattern pilot schools—Lowell Elementary, Hoover Middle, and Lincoln High—to support them in using the indicators to identify struggling students, design interventions, evaluate their effectiveness, and scale them out to the rest of the school. The school-based process, called *data intervention cycles*, was further supported through regular retreats that brought together the three school teams and the district team to report on their progress and share best practices. District team members also participated in CRIS network meetings to share SJUSD's work and learn from their peers in other districts.[9]

In her summary of the pilot, Lambrina Kless, who served as the Administrator of Data Integration and Reporting and the CRIS site liaison for SJUSD, describes the importance of CRIS to the development of SJUSD's Key Performance Measures (KPMs):

> *"The CRIS work, specifically, supported the district's commitment to data-driven decision making. . . and was critical to allowing us to validate our measures and to pilot systems of action based on these indicators."*

SJUSD's eleven KPMs signal system-wide priorities and vertical alignment of college readiness expectations from Pre-K through high school. They have been integrated into the district's

[9] See Kless, 2013 for a more on SJUSD's CRIS Pilot.

2012-2017 Strategic Plan, Opportunity 21, serving as a critical lens to focus improvement efforts and promote shared accountability for results **(Exhibit 2).**

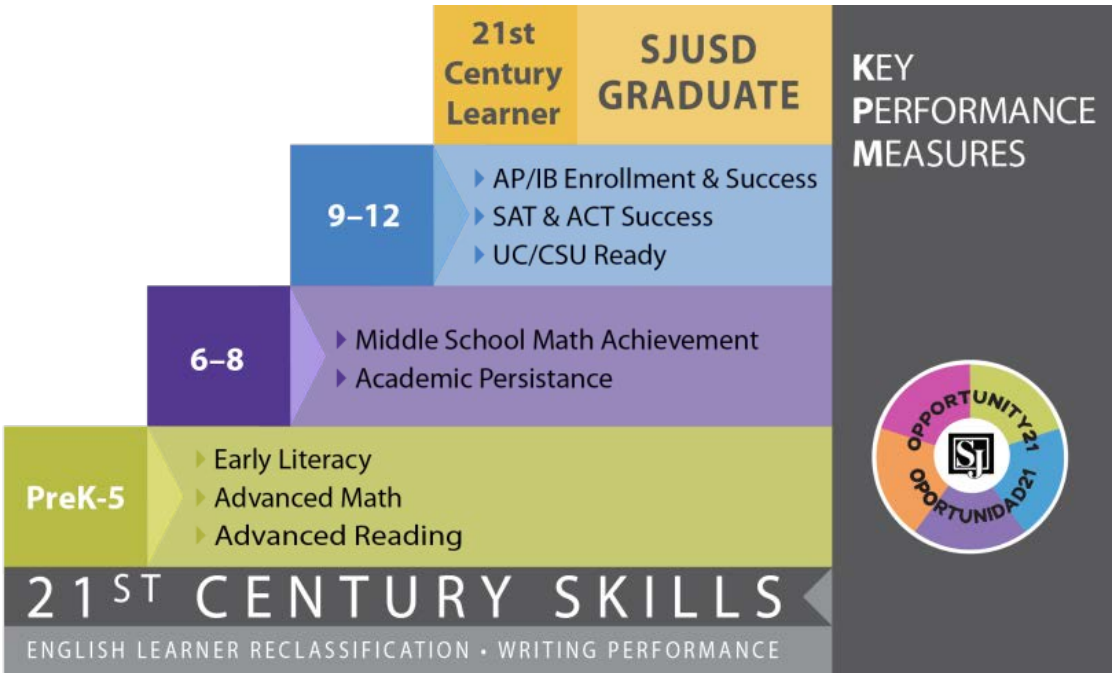


Exhibit 2

OpStat—First Steps toward Scaling SJUSD's College Readiness Indicator System

As the CRIS pilot was validating indicators and developing proof points for the feasibility of data intervention cycles, SJUSD leaders began to explore an approach called OpStat as a potential vehicle for scaling up the CRIS work.[10] Drawing from a data-driven improvement process advanced by Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland, SJUSD launched cross-functional work groups, called OpStat teams, to study selected KPMs and develop system-wide plans to improve performance.

SJUSD launched three OpStat teams in the 2012-2013 school year focused on high school students' enrollment and success in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, graduation rates and A-G course completion, and socio-emotional learning. The teams were made up of district and school staff, including DRA and C&I administrators and principals, teachers, counselors representing all school levels (elementary, middle, and high) tasked with analyzing data, identifying evidence-based intervention strategies, and sharing their findings.

The AP/IB OpStat team made the most progress, drawing from the CRIS pilot to inform its recommendations. Reflecting on the effort, a high school principal who served on the team described the positive impact in his school: "*It's going well . . . we've gone from, I believe, 7*

[10] "OpStat ('Op' for Opportunity 21 and 'Stat' for statistics and its data-driven nature) is a process whereby teams composed of both site and central office staff create replicable practices to improve student outcomes" (from www.sjusd.org/ schools/documentation/downloads/Data_ Research_Eval_Handbook.pdf).

sections of AP courses to over 22 sections of AP courses. . . overall, our culture has changed . . . the students are accepting the challenge, and they are definitely pushing themselves." The team's report now reflects district policy and guides action on AP/IB enrollment and success (a key performance metric) in all district high schools.[11]

TAKING COLLEGE READINESS TO SCALE: SYSTEM COMPONENTS

As the 2012-2013 school year came to a close, district leaders took stock and concluded that OpStat needed to go deeper and wider. While OpStat reports set forth compelling rationale and evidence-based strategies, implementation was uneven from school to school, and few schools were using student outcome data to identify needs and assess progress on SJUSD's key performance metrics. Awareness of effective strategies had to be accompanied by a systemic approach to building capacity for data use and school improvement that produced ownership, action, and accountability for change among every central office and school building leader **(Exhibit 3).**

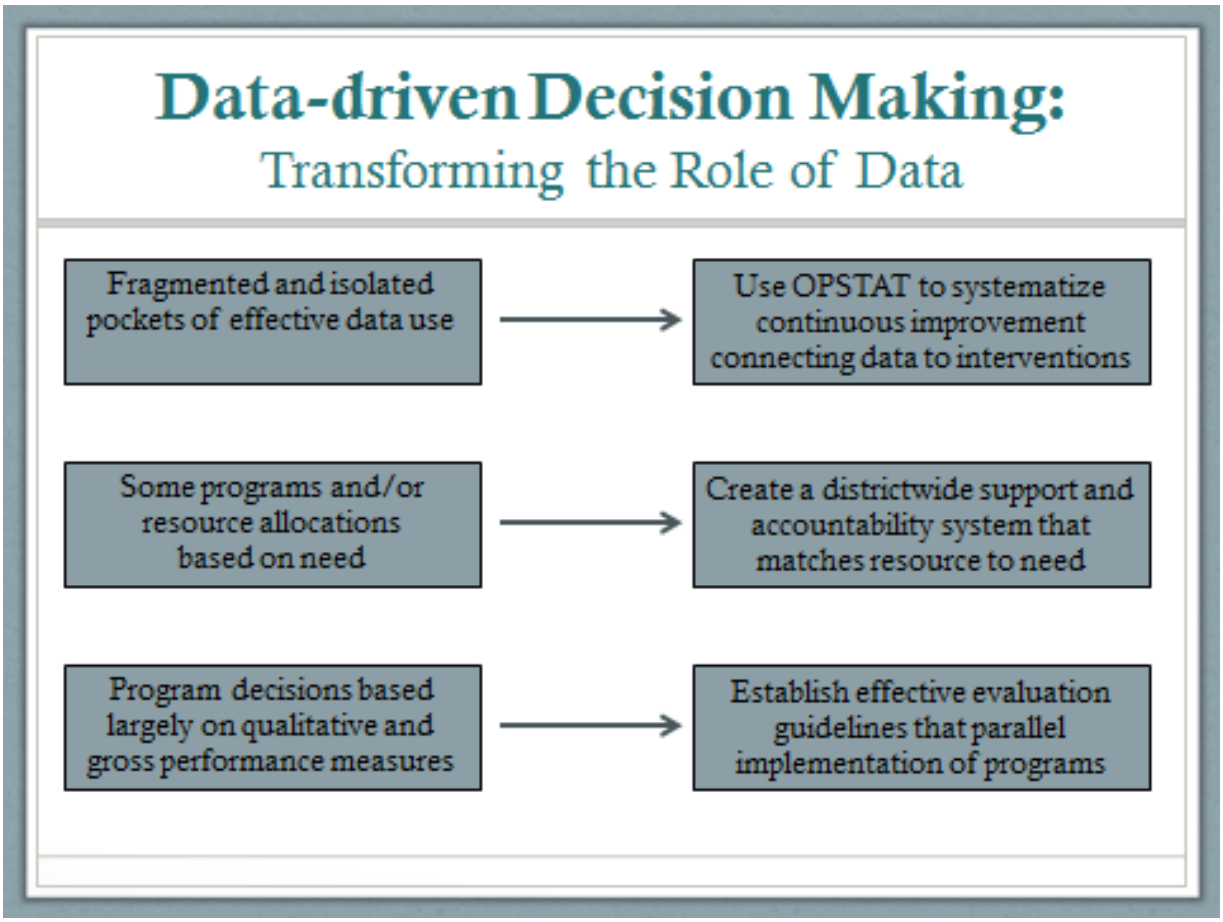


Exhibit 3

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[11]San Jose Unified School District (May 2013). *OPSTAT: Closing the Opportunity Gap by Increasing AP/IB Participation*. San Jose, CA: Author. See also other research on AP/IB completion by Education Trust http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Missing_Students.pdf

To achieve this systemic approach, SJUSD launched a new version of OpStat in fall 2013 that blends tools and collaborative inquiry processes from the CRIS pilot with the initial OpStat orientation toward scaling evidence-based reforms. The new approach called for an expanded district team to develop and refine three core system processes during the 2013-2014 school year—Support Sessions, Accountability Sessions, and On-Site Monitoring **(Exhibit 4).**

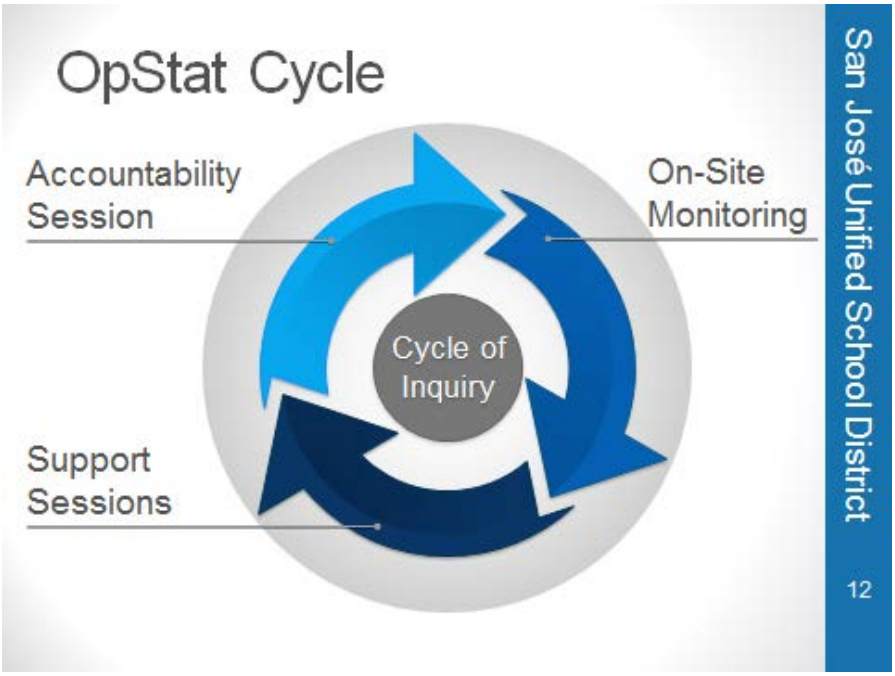


Exhibit 4

Expanded District Team

As in the CRIS pilot, the district team charged with supporting the roll-out of the new OpStat was, and remains, based in SJUSD's DRA department. The Director works closely with a Data Integration & Reporting Administrator and a Research & Evaluation Administrator to set agendas, schedule and facilitate all support and accountability sessions, train and coach district- and school-based leaders, and manage data analysis and reporting. SJUSD's Assistant Superintendent of Community Engagement and Accountability, oversees DRA and provides executive leadership to the district team.

The OpStat team also includes the C&I Directors for elementary and secondary education. While DRA "holds the process" and brings the technical expertise around data and program analysis, partnership with C&I is key as C&I dispatches curriculum and intervention coaches to the schools. Moreover, during the first year of the new OpStat, C&I directors supervised many of the principals. Without this close collaboration, OpStat would run the risk of working at cross-purposes with C&I priorities and professional support services.

> *Because a lot of what OpStat's doing overlaps with what C&I is doing, that's why we are in there. So all our arrows go in the same direction.*
> *--SJUSD Curriculum & Instruction Director*

> *We've broken down that silo. . . there's absolutely no way we could work with all 42 school sites without support from the Curriculum and Instruction department.*
> *–SJUSD* DRA Director

All three directors emphasize how their different expertise and cultures—DRA's strengths in data and systems management and C&I's in professional learning and pedagogy—complement each other to support OpStat. During the first year of implementation (2013-2014), the DRA staff and the two C&I directors met formally three times per semester but interacted around OpStat weekly. They continued their formal meetings in the second year, but were able to reduce their informal interaction to bi-weekly meetings.

Support Sessions

"The OpStat process forces you to look at the problem and then figure out a solution."
--Principal

To build principals' capacity to lead OpStat in their schools, the district OpStat team provided intensive, in-person support sessions during the first year, shifting to more online training and coaching in year two.

Support Sessions in the First Year: To launch the new approach in fall 2013, the district OpStat team convened principals and school teams monthly in two-hour support sessions at the central office. All school principals were expected to participate and some brought one or two other school-based staff. Principals and their teams were grouped in their sessions by level—elementary, middle, and high. After the first session, DRA reorganized the 25 elementary schools into three groups to achieve a more productive group size.

The first support session began by introducing a pre-determined *focus question* related to one of the district's KPMs that would guide schools' OpStat work for the year **(Exhibit 5)**.

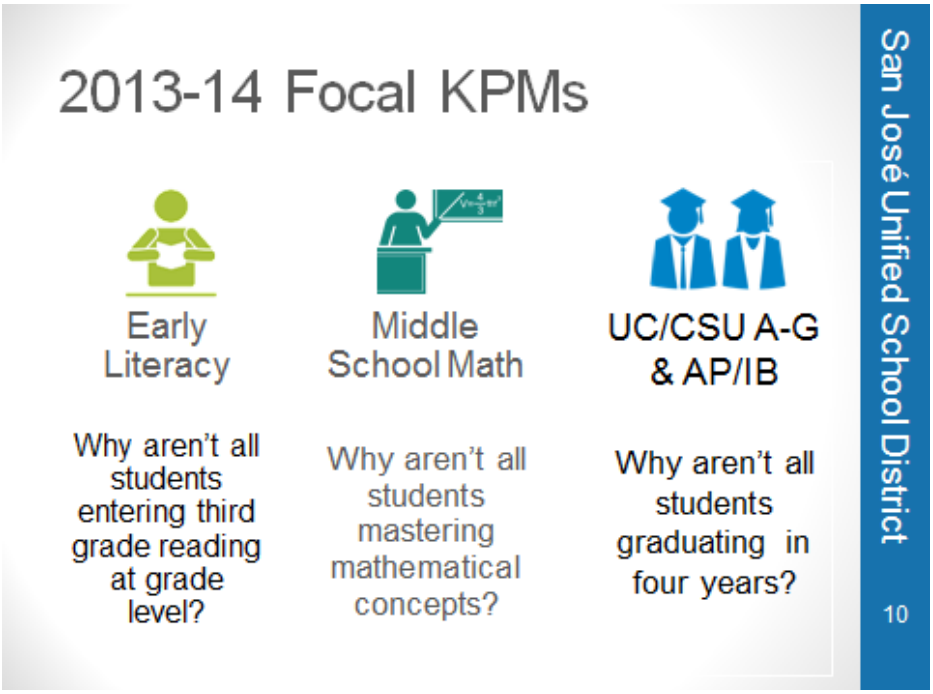


Exhibit 5

School teams then were guided through several processes to develop reasoned and actionable responses to these questions, including:

- *Root cause analysis* (RCA). An inquiry process designed to identify how and why a situation or event occurred so steps can be taken to prevent it from occurring again. Root causes are specific underlying causes that can be reasonably identified, i.e. supported by data, and are within the inquirers control to address. [12]
- *Theory of action* (TOA): A statement, or series of statements, written in an IF, THEN format that articulates a person's or group's best rationale for pursuing an improvement strategy, e.g. "If we strengthen academic supports for ninth-graders taking Algebra I, then more students will end their freshman year on-track to graduation."[13]
- *Action planning*: The process of developing a concrete plan for implementing a chosen strategy. The resulting plan lists specific actions, person(s) responsible for each action, and a timeline for completion.

In a brilliant training move, DRA and C&I staff used their own OpStat development process to model these steps for principals and their teams. See **Exhibit 6** for the district team's theory of action and logic model for OpStat roll out. The team also developed a 21-step action plan that mapped the actions, persons responsible, and by when each would be completed.

THEORY OF ACTION

OPSTAT ISSUE:	**Improving KPMs**
ROOT CAUSE:	In the past, we have not provided the data expertise and program evaluation support needed for principals to effectively use data-driven problem-solving approaches.
IF WE:	train principals in data literacy, root cause analysis, and identification and implementation of effective practices and interventions; and if we support those principals by providing data analysis and program evaluation expertise; and if we hold principals accountable to their action plans
THEN:	principals will know how to effectively identify data-driven solutions and monitor their effectiveness, resulting in them applying solutions and practices that improve student performance for all students.

[12] Vorley, G. (2008). Mini Guide to Root Cause Analysis. Surrey, UK: Quality Management & Training, Ltd.
[13] http://www.abeoschoolchange.org/blog/whats-a-theory-of-action-and-why-do-we-need-one/

Logic Model

OPSTAT LOGIC MODEL

CONTEXT & THEORY OF ACTION:

In order to close the achievement gap and provide all students with 21st century skills, principals and site teams needs to acquire data literacy skills, along with the knowledge to effectively evaluate practices or interventions. Expanding upon the work begun under the CRIS project, SJUSD plans to use the OpStat process to build this capacity and monitor site progress.

IF central office staff uses OpStat to build site capacity in:

- Data literacy
- Root cause analysis
- Identification and implementation of effective practices and interventions

AND hold principals accountable,

THEN sites will effectively apply data-driven solutions and practices to improve student performance for all students.

INPUTS:

- Training for staff to lead capacity building meetings
- Staff to lead capacity building meetings and conversations (expertise in data analysis and management, root cause, and program evaluation)
- Build internal systems and processes for managing the work
- Staff to develop data systems, tools, and reports (database and programming expertise)
- Development of planning, implementation, and monitoring templates and tools
- Principal and site team's time
- Meeting space
- KPM, leading indicator, and other data
- Central Office leadership time - leading around accountability
- C&I Leaders and Facilitators
- Build relationships with team members and principals
- Learn change management strategies

OUTPUTS/STRATEGIES:

- Regular OpStat support meetings
- Accountability meetings
- OpStat Calendar
- One on one conversations with principals
- Summative KPM and Leading Indicator reports and dashboards
- Planning, root cause, and evaluation templates
- OpStat Wiki
- Documentation of replicable OpStat process
- Prep sessions
- OpStat staff training sessions on root cause, TOA, and evaluation

SHORT-TERM/INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES:

- Principals feeling supported and engaged in Opstat process (survey by December 31 2013)
- Central Office leadership engaged in Opstat process (Face to face conversations with Supe's Council and Directors by Jan. 15th)
- Central Office leaders, principals, other site staff can (and do) easily access data, reports, and dashboards (Survey or face to face, March)
- Increased principal and site team data literacy (By summer, maybe observations in accountability session)
- High quality action and evaluation plans (review in spring using rubric)

ULTIMATE OUTCOMES:

- Effective practices and interventions identified and applied in the classroom
- District and site leaders continually use data for effective decision making (the behavior change sticks) (measure by determining what % of principals are following through with action and evaluation plans)

Exhibit 6

Principals and their teams worked through these steps over the first two support sessions and meetings in their schools in between sessions. Each school team interpreted data from its school (provided by DRA), identified root causes, and generated hypotheses unique to the school about the most viable strategies to address a focus area, and developed an action plan. With their district-issued laptops, they recorded and saved their work in real time on electronic spreadsheet templates developed by DRA. The documents eventually were migrated to a secure online workspace, enabling principals to continually access, update, and share their plans.

During and between sessions, school teams received one-to-one support from an *OpStat Lead* assigned to their school. Leads were central office staff members assigned to work with three-to-five schools each. The DRA and C&I division directors along with approximately nine other staff members from the two departments all served as OpStat Leads. The Leads coached their assigned school teams during the support sessions and followed up with principals in their buildings between sessions to track and support implementation.

> *My teachers then helped figure out what is our root cause, and every root cause is different for every school. Our root cause was that our CPAA, that's the Children's*

> *Progress Assessment, and our Lexia data, was not being effectively monitored, analyzed, and used to inform small group instruction. So that's our OpStat.* –SJUSD Principal

Winter and spring support sessions in the first year shifted to a different format. Principals and teams continued to come to the central office for two hours each month, but the sessions focused less on training and more on reviewing data and progress on their action steps, identifying needed supports and resources, and preparing for accountability sessions.

Support Sessions in the Second Year: In the second year, DRA believed that principals' skills and comfort level with the OpStat process were strong enough to "take off the training wheels" and pull back on face-to-face support sessions. DRA convened principals once in August 2014 to familiarize them with changes to the data reports and a new wiki space where they could access OpStat planning tools and store their plans. For new principals, DRA staff provided separate in-person training on the process. Beyond that, principals were expected to lead the data and root-cause analyses and initial action planning process with teachers and administrators at their school. In the August meeting, the DRA Director was clear in her charge to the principals, "We can't do this work for you…this is something you now have to do with your staff."

The OpStat Lead role was eliminated at the end of the first year; it stretched central office staff too thin, principals were not receiving consistent support, and some principals needed more support than their Lead could provide. Instead, DRA devised several approaches to providing ongoing support for year two, including:

- Online webinars that trained all principals in use and upgrades to the data system and reporting tools;
- A customer service "help desk" system--principals pose questions and request individual support by completing online order forms that trigger DRA response;
- "Office hours" offered by the DRA team for 1:1 consultation;
- Focused and targeted support during the cross-school elementary and secondary Leadership Network meetings held monthly at the central office.

The District also shifted the on-site support and check-ins from DRA to the Educational Equity division where the Director and a Master Principal assumed that role. While DRA continued to support sites as needed, these two positions allocated 1:1 time at sites to check on plan implementation and progress, measured by observable practice and student performance data.

Principals' Assessment of OpStat Support: Of the 28 SJUSD principals who responded to the feedback survey administered in December 2014, 25 (89%) said the overall support for their OpStat project was either "Good" (17) or "Excellent" (8). Principals rated highly the support they received in accessing and understanding data, action planning, assessing progress, and preparing for accountability sessions. Support for choosing and implementing interventions and improvement strategies received lower ratings.

> *"I have felt incredibly supported. I actually love the whole process."* –Principal

Accountability Sessions

The focal activity of SJUSD's new OpStat is the accountability session—an innovative, organizational routine in which principals report and receive feedback on their OpStat plans and progress in face-to-face meetings with the superintendent's cabinet. The sessions offer a regular forum for principals and district leaders to communicate about improvement priorities, plans, resource needs, and progress in every school throughout the school year.

OpStat accountability sessions demand a high level of commitment from SJUSD district and school leaders. Every quarter, Superintendent Matthews and his cabinet members each dedicate about 20 hours preparing and participating. Principals' time varies but is estimated to range between five and eight hours per quarter.

How It Works

Like support sessions, accountability sessions are organized by level—elementary, middle, and high. There is one session for high schools, one session for middle schools, and five sessions for the elementary schools to accommodate their larger number. Each session lasts two to three hours. A non-trivial DRA task is to ensure that each accountability session is scheduled in advance for a time when all cabinet members and principals are able to participate. During the summer, the DRA schedules sessions for the year. A total of 28 sessions were scheduled for 2014-2015 (seven sessions in September and then again in November, March, and June). The time is considered a fixed and high priority.

Box 3. Superintendent's Cabinet = Superintendent's Council + Division Directors	
Council includes the Superintendent, the Chief Business Officer and Assistant Superintendents for: • Community Engagement • Accountability • Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development • Human Resources • Business/Resources	Division Directors represent: • Data, Research & Assessment • Curriculum & Instruction • Student Supports

Before the Accountability Session: Several days before the session, cabinet members receive and review copies of updated school plans, leading indicator data reports, and reports from any other process evaluation data available from each school. Principals develop PowerPoint presentations with support from their OpStat Leads. These are loaded in advance onto the computer/projector system in the conference room. DRA staff adds slides to support note-taking into each PowerPoint presentation so that questions, responses, and reflections are recorded in real-time.

During the Accountability Session: At the start of each accountability session, principals from one level, district cabinet members, and several DRA staff members gather in a large conference room in the district's central office building. In the conference room, rectangular tables are arranged in a U shape (see **Exhibit 7** for visual of the room set up). An interactive whiteboard is positioned at the open part of the U so all participants can easily see the presentation slides. Cabinet members are seated on either side of the U, and each principal sits at the connecting table when giving a presentation. When they are not presenting, principals sit with their peers in rows of chairs placed directly behind the presenting principal. The DRA director facilitates the session by welcoming participants and guiding them through the protocol. She and two or three DRA staff members sit at rectangular tables positioned behind the two cabinet member tables. Two take turns recording the session on a laptop and another serves as time keeper.

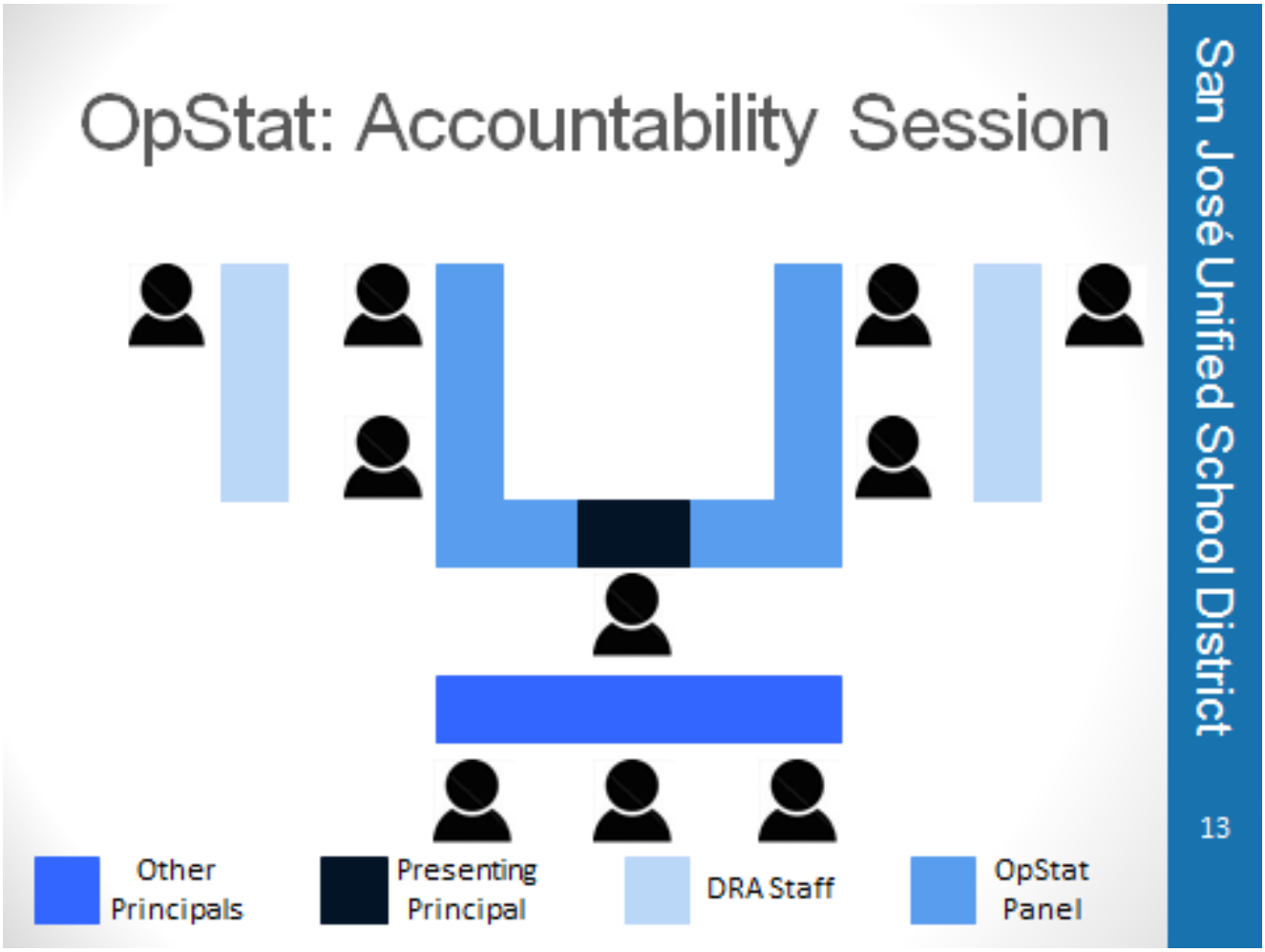


Exhibit 7

Accountability sessions consist of a series of approximately 30-minute segments during which each school's plan is presented and discussed. During each principal's 30-minute segment, the group follows a three-part protocol:

1) *Plan Presentation/Update and Panel Query*: The first part provides principals five minutes to present their improvement plans, report on implementation and outcomes, discuss how they were addressing feedback received in prior sessions, and communicate challenges and needs. The principal then remains silent while panel members take two minutes to pose questions recorded on a visible slide by the DRA staff member.
2) *Data Presentation*: A full 18 minutes is dedicated to this part of the protocol. The principal has eight minutes to present how his/her school's data support the rationale for their plan, and its implementation and impact. Panel members and the principal then engage in a question/response period for 10 minutes, again recorded on a visible slide by DRA.
3) *Panel and Principal Reflection*: The panel takes three minutes to share any additional thoughts, concerns, and ideas arising from the exchange, and the principal responds with two minutes of closing thoughts and plans for next steps.

By offering a predictable, structured meeting process, the protocol is designed to reduce participants' anxiety and create a secure space for productive, collaborative discussion.

After the Accountability Session: At the end of the formal session, principals exit the room and cabinet members remain for an additional 15-30 minutes. During this time, the Superintendent facilitates a cabinet discussion about individual school's progress, checks for understanding, and develops consensus around any immediate follow-up support needed. These discussions also provide a forum for addressing broader issues raised during the session related to human resources, professional development, data, and other system-level conditions.

Cabinet members also discuss the session process to identify strengths and challenges. Discussions following the first accountability session, for example, led cabinet members to commit to increasing their own level of preparation. Adjustments to the session format and protocol also were made (see **Exhibit 8** for the protocol used in 2014-2015).

Spring OpStat Accountability Protocol

May-June 2014

2013-2014 Guiding Questions
Elementary: Why aren't all students entering third grade reading at grade level?
Middle: Why aren't all middle school students mastering mathematical concepts?
High: Why aren't all students graduating within four years?

Accountability Session

1. **Principal Presentation: Context for Work (2 minutes)**
   Guiding Question: *What was your site's focus this year?*
   Principal shares Theory of Action and Root Cause
   Principals provides **2 sentence** summary of actions taken this year

2. **Principal Presentation: Site Outcomes (8 minutes)**
   Guiding Question: *What impact resulted from your site OpStat plan? How did OpStat impact Key Performance Measures?*
   Principal shares outcome evaluation questions and data. (4 minutes)
   Outcome Evaluation Questions
   Site Outcome Results
   Principal addresses KPM (4 minutes)
   Elementary: 2nd grade CPAA
   Middle: 8th grade math
   High: 9th and 10th grade E/LA & Math; AP/IB Enrollment

3. **Principal Presentation: Lessons Learned & Next Steps (4 minutes)**
   Guiding Question: *How did the process inform the work at your site this year? What will be different for next year?*
   Principal reflects on lessoms and revisions for upcoming school year.

4. **Panel Questions & Principal Response (12 minutes)**
   Guiding Question: *What questions arise from the presentation?*
   Principal and panel engage in discussion of site OpStat Plan and presentation.

5. **Panel: Suggestions and Final Feedback (2 minutes)**
   Guiding Question: *How can site plan be expanded, revised, or accelerated?*
   Each panel member provides one piece of warm and cool feedback to principal.

Exhibit 8

Principals' Assessment of Accountability Sessions: In interviews, some principals admitted to feeling skeptical or anxious about the sessions initially. Commenting on early accountability sessions, one principal said they "didn't feel safe" and that his colleagues were "nervous about it" because they feared something bad would happen if they didn't reach their goals. Principals' concerns were due, in part, to lack of clarity early on around what district leaders considered a "good" or "successful" OpStat plan. Principal feedback eventually led the district team to be more consistent in its assessments of the schools' plans and progress.

Principals' experience of the accountability sessions appeared to grow more positive over time, according to observations, brief post-session interviews, and survey data. In the December 2014 survey, all but one principal respondent said the sessions were valuable to the success of their OpStat projects, and two-thirds said they were "moderately valuable" or "very valuable."[14] Large majorities gave the same moderate or very valuable ratings to the opportunity to present and get feedback on their plans (64%), and to hearing their peer principals' plans and feedback (71%).

Principals also placed high value on the opportunity to interact directly with district leaders about their improvement efforts. One principal described this as "the best part" of the accountability sessions, another said he felt less isolated, more heard and understood.

"I think that's been the biggest shift is that it's face time with the Sups Council." --Principal

Superintendent Matthews' presence in every session was deemed "extremely important" by more than half of the principals who responded to the survey. Another third said it was "moderately important;" none said it was unimportant.

On-Site Monitoring

The third core component of the new OpStat is building-level support and monitoring. During the first year of the roll out, the district team placed greater emphasis on support. OpStat Leads visited schools and reported their observations to DRA, but neither principals nor schools were evaluated based on OpStat progress.

In its second year, OpStat became a formal part of principals' performance evaluation. The district team created two new positions—a Director of Equity and Leadership Development and a Master Principal. These administrators directly supervise SJUSD principals and provide building-level support and monitoring of OpStat and other initiatives. DRA and C&I directors no longer supervise principals, clarifying their roles as supporting/nudging partners in OpStat implementation.

Principals' Assessments of On-Site Monitoring: In the December 2014 survey, more than three-quarters of responding principals gave good or excellent ratings of the support they had

[14] Response categories on theses survey items were "Not at all valuable," "Slightly valuable," "Moderately valuable," and "Very valuable."

received for their OpStat projects from DRA, C&I, and to the Director of Equity and Leadership Development and Master Principal (who served as both supervisors and on-site OpStat monitors starting in the second year).

KEYS TO SUCCESS

"You need the right people, you've got to be super transparent about what you care about and where you're going as an organization, you have to develop human systems that reinforce that message, and then you just repeat it over and over and over and over again."
–SJUSD Assistant Superintendent, Community Engagement and Accountability

The first 18 months of the new OpStat produced a robust system that met SJUSD's goal of engaging all principals in a routine, data-informed, collaborative school improvement process focused on key district performance metrics. Several factors promoted this success—

Leadership and Alignment with District Priorities
Launching OpStat districtwide would not have been possible without cohesive and committed system leadership. Since he took the helm in 2010, Superintendent Matthews has invested significant time and energy in building a high-performing leadership team. Through a combination of external hires and internal promotions, his Superintendent's Council now embodies deep and diverse expertise in finance and budgeting, team-based and data-driven school improvement processes, labor relations (the Chief Business Officer is a former union president), human development, and district operations.

In regular meetings and off-site retreats Matthews draws from organizational leadership and management guides (e.g. Jim Collins' *Good to Great* and Patrick Lencioni's numerous books) to engage the team in activities designed to build trust, common vision, shared values, and communication and conflict management skills. Matthews has extended system leadership roles to division directors through the larger Superintendent's Cabinet that meets regularly and participates in the OpStat accountability sessions. In the second year of the roll out, he also personally led professional development sessions for principals on leadership and building effective teams.

From the outset, OpStat has been a high priority in SJUSD, commanding substantial amounts of time and attention from central office and school leaders and staff. It is considered a core process in the district's drive to achieve the goals laid out in its 2012-2017 Strategic Plan, *Opportunity 21.* Alignment between OpStat and SJUSD's broader goals is created by focusing OpStat's school improvement plans on the system's Key Performance Metrics (KPMs) articulated in the district plan. It is then brought to life and continuously reinforced through routine cycles of cross-level collaborative inquiry, planning, action, and shared accountability. This not only drives action but also generates a sense of shared purpose critical to initial buy-in and sustained effort.

"This is the District's path to improvement. It's not a program that's going to go away, it's what we do." SJUSD Assistant Superintendent, Community Engagement and Accountability

Staff Capacity and Collaboration

Internal promotions placed principals of CRIS pilot schools in lead positions in SJUSD's Curriculum and Instruction and Data, Research, and Assessment departments. DRA and C&I Directors' experience with college readiness indicators and implementing data-informed cycles of inquiry facilitated their own buy-in to OpStat and lent capacity to system-wide implementation. Their recent experience as principals also facilitated the cross-department and cross-level communication and collaboration essential to coordinating support and accountability sessions. Their relationships and credibility with building administrators helped secure principals' buy-in and participation.

The three-member DRA team primarily responsible for OpStat implementation also brought unique skills and training. DRA's Director and its Program Manager for Research and Evaluation had won fellowships with the *Harvard Strategic Data Project (SDP).* The two-year program provided extensive professional development in measurement and data analysis, leadership and change management, and education policy related to data-driven decision-making. The SDP fellowship also gave them access to a national network of data strategists working to improve K12 education systems across the U.S.

DRA's Administrator for Data Integration and Reporting (a new position) brought an unusual combination of engineering, computer science, web analytics, and public policy and management science. He came to SJUSD through a fellowship with *Education Pioneers*, a national program that places top graduate students in education organizations. His experience with large data sets and advanced skills as a programmer and analyst were essential to building the data and reporting infrastructure for OpStat, a big job that involves managing the integration of disparate datasets, managing new and multiple vendors, designing reports, and training users (see Box 4 on page 19).

Intentional Change Management

For OpStat to be successful, district team members understood that school principals and district leaders would have to learn to work differently with data, and with each other. The team approached the roll out with a change management approach informed by perspectives on high-performing workplaces, learning organizations, and quality management systems.[15]

Going Slow to Go Fast

During the first year, the district team chose to move forward slowly and patiently, continuously collecting data and adapting to feedback. Support sessions during the first year were viewed as development opportunities that enabled the district team to test beta versions

[15] See Blazey, 2013; Deming, 2000; Lencione, 2005; Senge, 2010.

of data tools and planning processes, and allowed principals to learn and practice new skills necessary to interpret data and create reasoned action plans.

> *They have provided us with expertise, and the time and the forum and the guidance to be able to put this [intervention] in place. They've also allowed us latitude to be able to make changes, right? They have allowed me to say midstream, "We're going to change how we do our intervention. We're going to do it this way now rather than the other." So they have given us enough flexibility to be able to do that, which is – without that, it wouldn't have been possible to roll this out.* --Principal

Accountability sessions also were approached as learning opportunities. Principals gained experience presenting their plans and data in front of their peers and responding to tough questions from district leaders. For their part, district leaders worked on becoming effective "critical friends" and on calibrating the intensity of their inquiry and comments to produce a balance of support and shared accountability. Another principal noted overall improvement in the Cabinet's approach:

> *"In the last round it was rough to see one principal grilled, so this time it was nice to see critical feedback given in a more supportive way. It's tough to watch a colleague be challenged, but not so bad when it's done in a supportive way."* --Principal

Only after building sufficient proficiency, confidence and trust in the system during the first year did the district team "take off the training wheels." In year two, they placed more responsibility on principals for planning and introducing performance and accountability measures, such as linking principal evaluations to the quality of OpStat plans, implementation, and results.

Productive Conflict

Encouraged by Matthews' leadership training to "speak their truth," Cabinet members were permitted to openly disagree with each other and with principals during the accountability sessions so long as it was respectful and productive. This choice led a few principals to experience Cabinet feedback as inconsistent and confusing. Their feedback prompted the Cabinet to take more care in their debriefings following the accountability sessions so that principals received clearer expectations and guidance. The Cabinet remained committed to transparent, authentic discussions, however, to surface multiple ideas and perspectives in service of deeper understanding and effective improvement.

It was also evident that the OpStat process prompted some "productive conflict" at the school level as well. One principal, for example, described leading his team through a root cause analysis process that opened up an intense discussion about why Latino students in their school were not achieving at high levels in math:

> *As a group, we got through probably – I think it was three levels [of the "five whys."] And then at that point there was a very big split in the room. It was this huge group discussion. Is it that the teachers don't have the content knowledge to be able to teach the higher-level math? Or is it the pedagogy? They know the math, but they don't know how to teach it to students. And it was fascinating, because. . . it creates just kind of some dissonance in the system that makes you realize this is an area that we need to look at.*

Reflection

The district team also built time for routine reflection and feedback into the schedule via:

- Support session debrief meetings: Following each support session, DRA staff and OpStat Leads meet to discuss and plan follow-up for individual schools. They also reflect on the support process. These reflections led to adjustments in school table groupings during support sessions, OpStat Lead assignments, and session format.
- Accountability session debrief meetings: As described earlier, cabinet members discuss and plan follow-up for the presenting schools, following each accountability session.
- Weekly district team meetings: DRA OpStat staff, often joined by C&I directors, meet weekly to plan, troubleshoot, process feedback, and make necessary adjustments. These are dynamic meetings in which team members challenge and push each other, though they also are mindful of retaining goodwill and trust by using respectful phrasing, e.g. "let's shift" or "let's try it differently" or "let's consider . . . "
- Closing session: DRA scheduled an OpStat closing session with principals during summer 2014 to solicit feedback and ideas for improving on the 2013-2014 OpStat and to map the process for the coming year.

District team members consider reflection time essential to achieving the desired balance of creative initiative, open communication, guidance/support, and accountability in the OpStat system.

Schools as Valued Customers: DRA's Service Approach

We wanted to replace the "here's your data, it's bad, now go and fix it and we'll check back in at the end of the year" approach with one that would build capacity for sustainable improvement in every school. --SJUSD DRA Director

A major contributing factor to the solid launch has been the "facilitating leader" role SJUSD's Data, Research, and Assessment Division played in developing and maintaining OpStat. DRA's leadership and management of OpStat is a significant departure from past practice. Prior to OpStat, DRA focused primarily on testing and compliance reporting, common priorities of central office research and assessment departments in most public school systems. DRA's new role is oriented toward customer service, responding to the needs of school- and district-based leaders for data and information to guide planning, progress monitoring, and decision-making.

DRA's service approach is evident in the close attention the team paid to codifying and refining analysis and planning templates, meeting protocols, data reports, and training and support activities. DRA's iterative approach to developing these tools and processes during the first year ensured that each round of support and accountability improved on the prior one which, in turn, built trust in the system among participants. It also modeled for principals and central office leaders that mistakes are inevitable and essential parts of organizational learning and can fuel continuous improvement when embraced as such.

> *One of the things that we discovered was that we were really good at trying things, and we are really good at thinking of ideas, but we don't know if they work. And we never track them appropriately with the appropriate data. So number one, we've gotten a lot of help around that.* --Principal

DRA's OpStat role also builds central office and building administrators' capacity to use data without expecting them to become statisticians or software developers. "Principals aren't data analysts and we shouldn't be treating them as data analysts" is a DRA mantra. The principals-as-customers approach assumes that technical expertise and support for data reporting and interpretation must be a built-in design feature, available to principals through initial training and continuously on an as-needed basis.

> *Well, in our OpStat sessions, they have shown us how to do data. I also had another person who also does some data, come out to my site, and she spent like three hours on looking at CPAA and Lexia reports and data and showing me how to pull things. So I've had a lot.*
> --Principal

DRA's ongoing, open exchange with principals around their school's data not only builds capacity and encourages data use, but also reveals where there is a lack of data to address principals' questions. This, in effect, creates an important feedback loop for DRA by generating discussion of what data would be needed to support or disprove principals' hypotheses, rather than letting the data that is currently available drive the questions.

Box 4. OpStat Data Reports and Technical Support: Shared Ownership and Supported Access

In addition to managing the OpStat process, DRA's core team assumes primary responsibility for producing standard and customized data reports for principals and district team members to ensure the process is grounded in real-time information about school and student progress. During the first year, the team developed "leading indicator" reports on a tight timeline following the first support session in October. The reports were designed to be responsive to school plans and from input from the C&I and DRA directors. At the high school level, for example, most principals focused their plans on ninth- and tenth-grade mathematics, so DRA developed reports that displayed distributions of students' grades in Algebra and Geometry for all high schools. Leading indicator reports for middle and elementary schools focused on CPAA data. C&I eventually requested that data from the Lexia adaptive learning program also be reported for all schools to track and link usage to student outcomes.

DRA's initial report development was slowed by the lack of a functioning data warehouse. *"Our big challenge was that our original data warehouse vendor went out of business this past March, and so we had to come up with a new data warehouse vendor. Looking back at the old warehouse . . . it was not user friendly . . .you couldn't trust the data*" recalled SJUSD's Data Integration and Reporting Administrator. To prepare the first round of OpStat reports in fall 2013, staff had to access data in varying formats across multiple datasets (e.g. student information, national/state/local assessments, adaptive learning programs); reports for each school took about two hours to create and consisted of fixed Excel files. While principals appreciated the reports, they also questioned the validity of the aggregate data displays (especially when trends were not favorable) and struggled to see how they served as a guide for action.

As the new data warehouse came on line, DRA was able to streamline the process and strengthen the reporting system. Staff worked closely with the new warehouse vendor to integrate disparate datasets and develop a reporting program that would automatically generate and update standard reports, and be responsive to queries for customized reports. By spring 2014, DRA was able to produce new leading indicator reports with hyperlinks, enabling principals and other users to directly access lists of students represented by the summary numbers. This feature made the reports both more believable and actionable for principals: "*The original report we did for I think our second accountability meeting did not have that [hyperlink] functionality . . .now we've introduced that I don't think I've heard a single principal come back and say "I don't believe this data."* --SJUSD Data Integration and Reporting Administrator

DRA also provided training and ongoing support to school and district staffs in accessing, interpreting, and displaying information. Many principals needed basic instruction in using computer-based Excel spreadsheets and navigating online portals to their school's data and reports. This continues to be an area of focus and skill development for principals. With recent expansion of DRA, the department is better able to support principals in this area. DRA and other district staff also required training in the IBM-Cognos application to query and generate reports from the new warehouse.

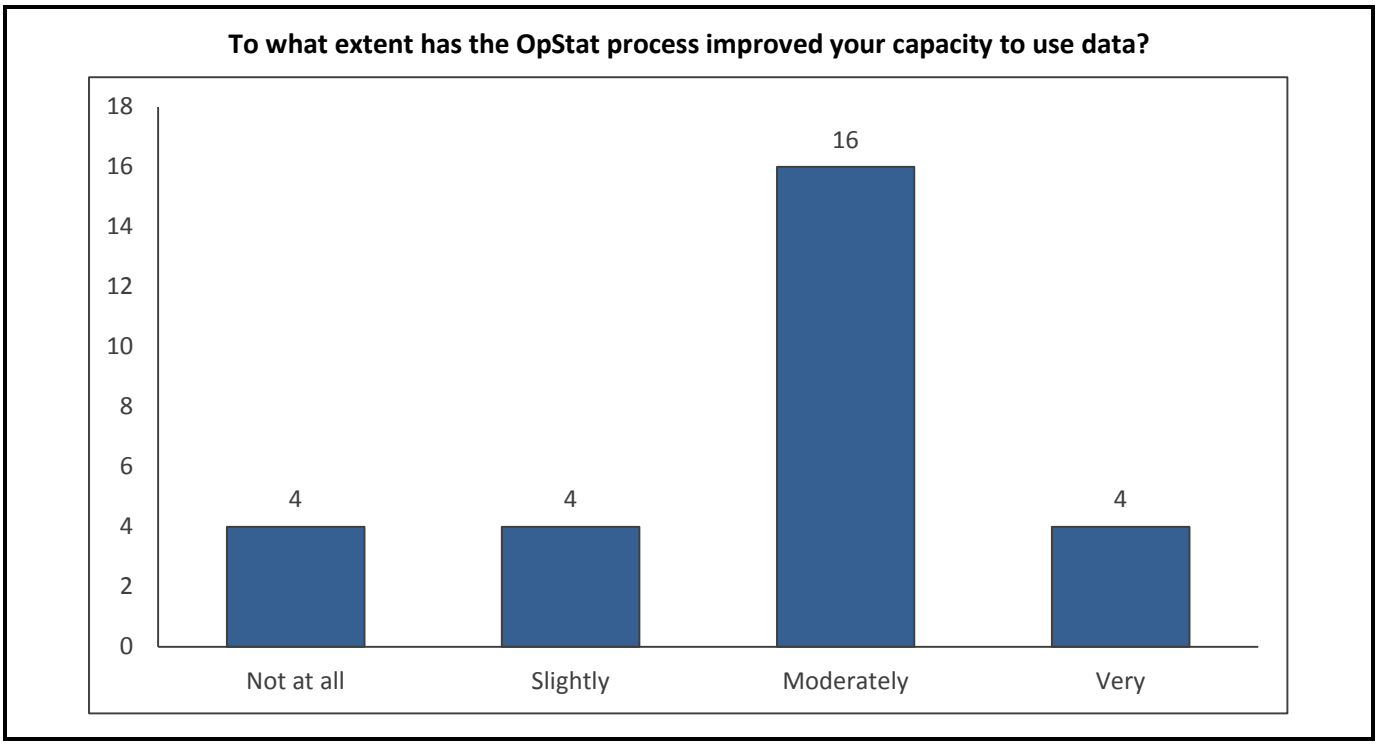
OUTCOMES: A PROMISING PATH

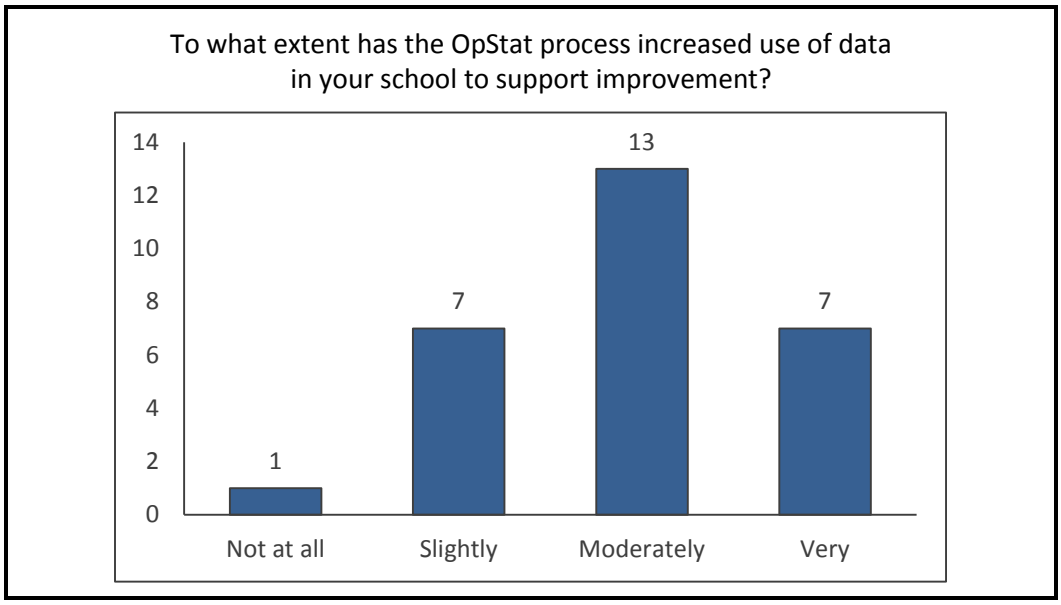
'It has been rewarding to be able to say, "I have looked at this problem at this depth and been able to come up with a solution or an approach that is – that works for my school, that is tailored for my students, that is not a canned program that comes down from the state that I have to implement." That has been very empowering to be able to say that as a principal.'
--Principal

Early signs indicate that SJUSD has embarked on a promising path to system-wide improvement. Observations and initial feedback from principals via interviews and survey responses suggest that OpStat has had a largely positive impact on leadership capacity. Impact on school practice and student outcomes is more mixed.

Changes in Leadership Capacity
Participating in OpStat has developed principals' capacity to use data, to focus, and to try new approaches in their schools.

Data Use
Through their survey responses, the large majority of principals (over 70%) reported that the OpStat process improved their personal capacity to use data and increased the use of data in their schools to support improvement.





One veteran principal admitted that data had been a weak area for her and that the OpStat process had strengthened her interest and skills. "Pulling the data and knowing what to do with it and helping your staff to see how this data is really going to help you" was the central way OpStat had enhanced her leadership approach.

The same principal also described how OpStat helped her learn from a principal whom she had been assigned to mentor:

> *I'm meeting with a principal that I'm mentoring, and she's really smart, too. I'm mentoring her because she's new to the district. But we're actually – her school and my school are very similar. We're going to spend a couple hours – because she's a data whiz. And so I'm a curriculum girl. And so she's going to make me go a little deeper in my data and I'm going to make her go a little bit deeper in what to look for when she's doing walkthroughs.*

Asked whether the reciprocal support would have happened without OpStat, she said: "No . . . I mean I would have helped her with curriculum. That's my job to help her. But I don't think the data piece – I don't think I personally would have delved into data like I do now without this forum. Absolutely not. "

Another principal appreciated the central role of data in OpStat because it brought collective attention to equity for Latino students:

> *I think one of the things that has become even more clear with the OpStat process is the inequity with bilingual programs. So as we look at our data . . . there's not the level of programs, the number of programs for Spanish reading that there are for English. Everybody knows it. Like I'm not saying it because they haven't recognized it, but I think it's shining even a bigger light on the fact that for our bilingual programs, there's something else that needs to happen for them.*

Focus and Alignment

Learning to focus and tackle a single challenge was a common theme of principals' OpStat experiences. One described OpStat as "a very critical but very, very controlled [process], almost a case study for us to see how we can reach our needier students." Another said that "the process is very helpful in keeping a school focused on improvement." Principals' appreciated the discipline of the OpStat process because it encouraged them to focus on an important, but manageable effort.

> *The meetings were helpful for me because it did help me look at areas that I knew were weak in my school. And developing not like a school plan . . . a big huge plan, but something very specific – something we could accomplish.*

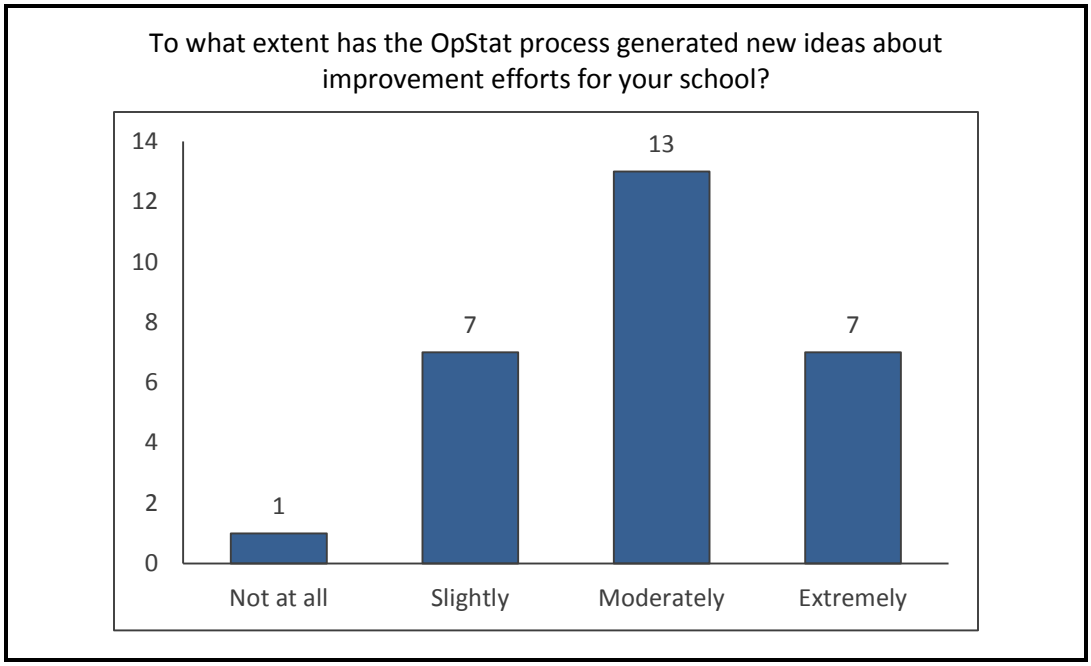
A general concern about OpStat was that it would be just "another thing" from the central office, layered on top of all the other demands on principals' time and bandwidth. Based on experience, some wondered how long it would be around and how much to invest: "When OpStat was presented to us, and I will say I was a little jaded. I wasn't sure what this was going to be. I didn't understand exactly how we were going to use it, were we just playing with it?"

The district team was aware of this danger and encouraged principals and school teams to align their OpStat projects with other ongoing improvement efforts so long as they maintained focus on the pre-chosen KPM for their level. Several principals said they were able to relate their OpStat to a part of their state-mandated Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). The OpStat process added value by creating a more specific plan for that part of their larger effort:

> *So our focus . . . was already generated and we've been working on aspects of it. The [OpStat] process just kind of helped put it into a specific plan and with timelines and follow-up. So I think that was very helpful in getting that solidified and written down . . . it just kind of helped us focus where we're at . . . what we're looking to get to, and then kind of generated a clearer pathway to get there.*

In interviews, district team members asserted their commitment to streamlining multiple school-based initiatives and reporting burdens to keep schools and central office focused on improvement, not compliance. Drawing on his background in finance and resource management, SJUSD's Assistant Superintendent over DRA is working to align a dizzying array of federal and state funding streams and accountability requirements under the umbrella of the district's strategic plan, Opportunity 21. His aim is to "consolidate all of the language in those plans to make it consistent with the strategic plan…so that there's complete alignment between what we're saying we're going to do in the [strategic] plan and what we report to the federal government and state government about what we're going to do in these other areas. At the school level . . . this is a huge win . . . they (principals) get frustrated because they're trying to serve five different masters."

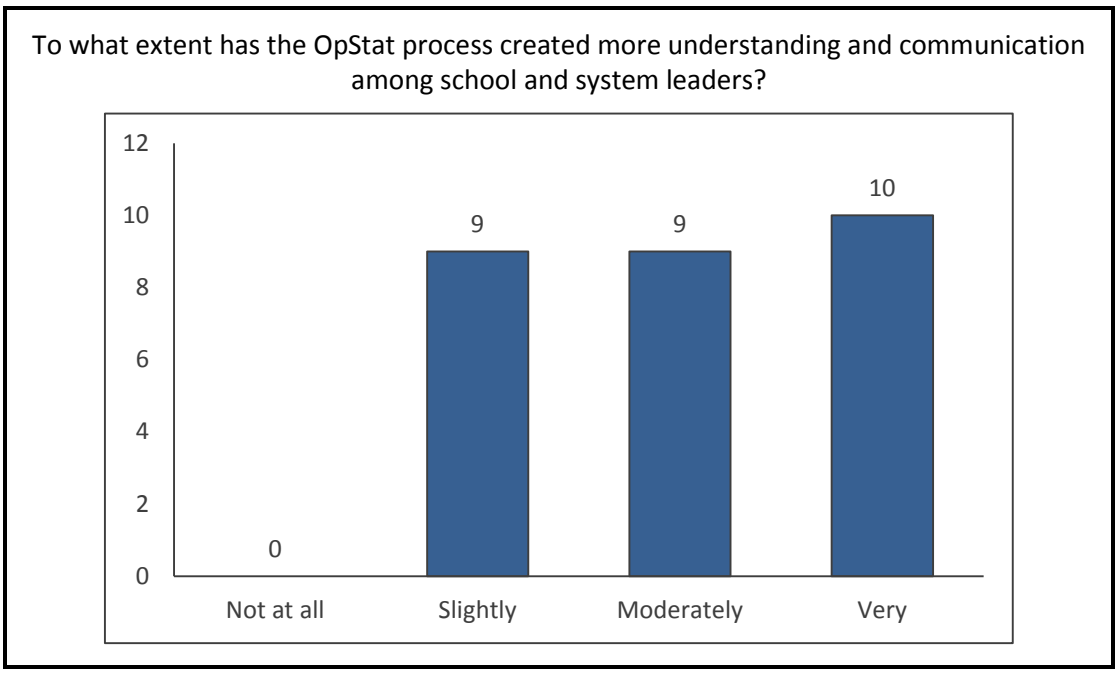
Support for Learning and Trying Something New
A large majority of principals agreed that the OpStat process generated new ideas about improving their schools.



OpStat support and accountability sessions were an important source of new ideas and peer inquiry and support for principals: "I have enjoyed listening to my colleagues' plans and learning from them" said one; "We could hear each other's plans and think, 'that was a great idea,' or if not, you know, we could talk about it. And we could support each other . . . that was really good" said another. One principal who had expressed initial skepticism and annoyance at the "extra meetings" came to appreciate the opportunity to share problems and test ideas with leaders of like schools:

> *It [OpStat] gave me a venue to be able to meet with the other middle school principals and talk and problem solve, and hear from them, which was nice, because I don't always get to do that. I was complaining . . . but at the end, I'm like, oh, this was really helpful for me.*

The OpStat process also created more understanding and communication among school and system leaders for a majority of principals.

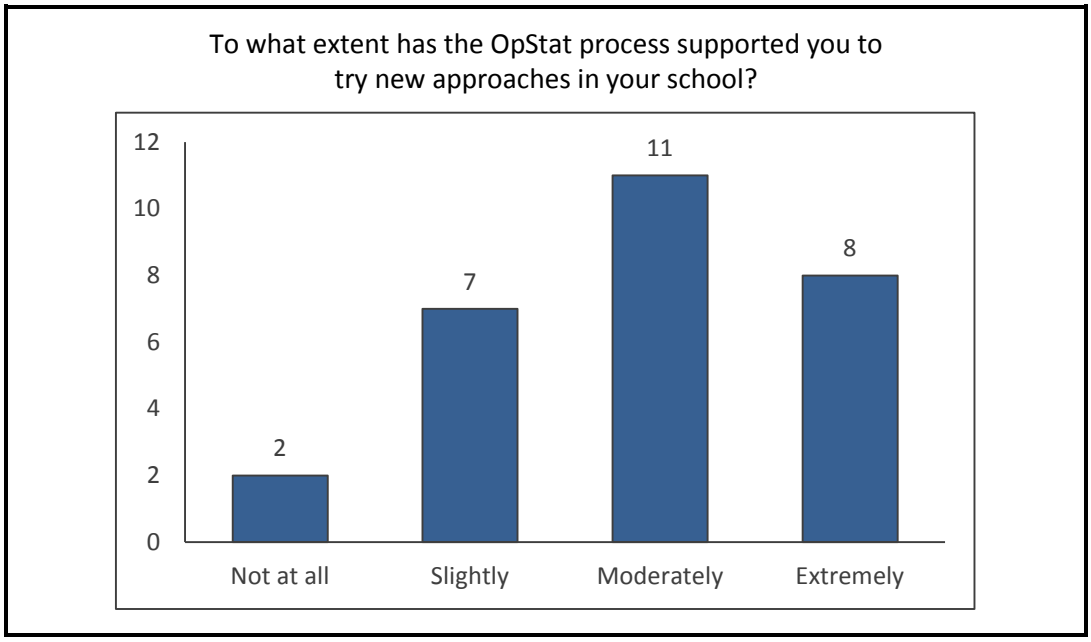


In addition to feeling heard and less isolated, several principals mentioned in interviews that communicating routinely with the entire superintendent's cabinet gave them an unprecedented opportunity to make the case for additional resources for their schools:

> *We need some resources at [principal's school] and we, we've never had them. And I was able to bring up this piece through the OpStat session. And [cabinet member] was there, who, he's a fiscal guy, and [cabinet member] was there, who's [Asst. Sup over DRA]. And so there's some key players who, at this point, may not have ever been to [principal's school] and not really realized what we can and can't do because of our size.*
>
> *I want central office to know what we're doing on site and so that they have a better understanding of what we are doing here as far as the school and hopefully the resources that we're requesting . . . they see the need that we have and the direction that we're going with those requests.*

Both of these principals indicated that the central office had been responsive to their requests.

A majority of principals also felt the OpStat process supported them personally in trying out new approaches and learning from mistakes.



In the opening accountability session of OpStat's second year, several principals described shifts in their approach that demonstrated individual growth and increased capacity to lead a change process in their schools. In one case, a principal who had displayed reluctance to challenge his staff in the first year presented a very different OpStat plan for year 2 that expected more professional accountability from administrators and teachers in his school. Pleasantly surprised, Dr. Matthews asked how the plan differed from last year and what made the change. The principal responded: "The big change is we're looking at adult behaviors instead of student behaviors."

In a second case, a principal who had been critical of her staff during the first year softened her approach in year 2. When asked by Dr. Matthews what had been the biggest data point or aha that made her change her course, she said: "My biggest 'aha' moment from last year was for me. Last year I was blaming them (teachers) for not being engaging, the classes were boring." She reflected that by taking a less judgmental stance, she was able to give teachers space to talk about their challenges with students without immediately shutting down their discussion with accusations that they were blaming the students. Through deeper listening, she is learning to shape the conversation so adults in her building are engaged in analyzing root causes in terms of something actionable, i.e. on "what are kids struggling with, how do we know, what can we do . . . ."

Box 5. Has OpStat Changed Instructional Practice or Student Outcomes?

A majority (60%) of principals indicated that OpStat had helped teachers differentiate instruction in their schools.

More than half said it had facilitated teacher preparation and lesson planning, and supported the adoption of innovative approaches to instruction in their schools.

More than two-thirds of principal respondents reported that the OpStat process had improved student academic performance in their school to a moderate or very large degree.

Elementary schools posted a 22 percentage point gain in early literacy scores in 2013-2014, with the proportion of second-graders at or above grade level increasing from 61% in early fall to 83% by the end of the school year

A principal reported in an OpStat accountability session that teachers on his middle school's sixth-grade math team aligned their grading policy, added behavior interventions, and used their common planning time to identify and support students. These actions more than doubled the number of students entering seventh grade prepared for advanced mathematics, increasing the number of seventh-grade sections of advanced mathematics from three to eight.

See **Exhibit 9** for SJUSD's first year results summary.

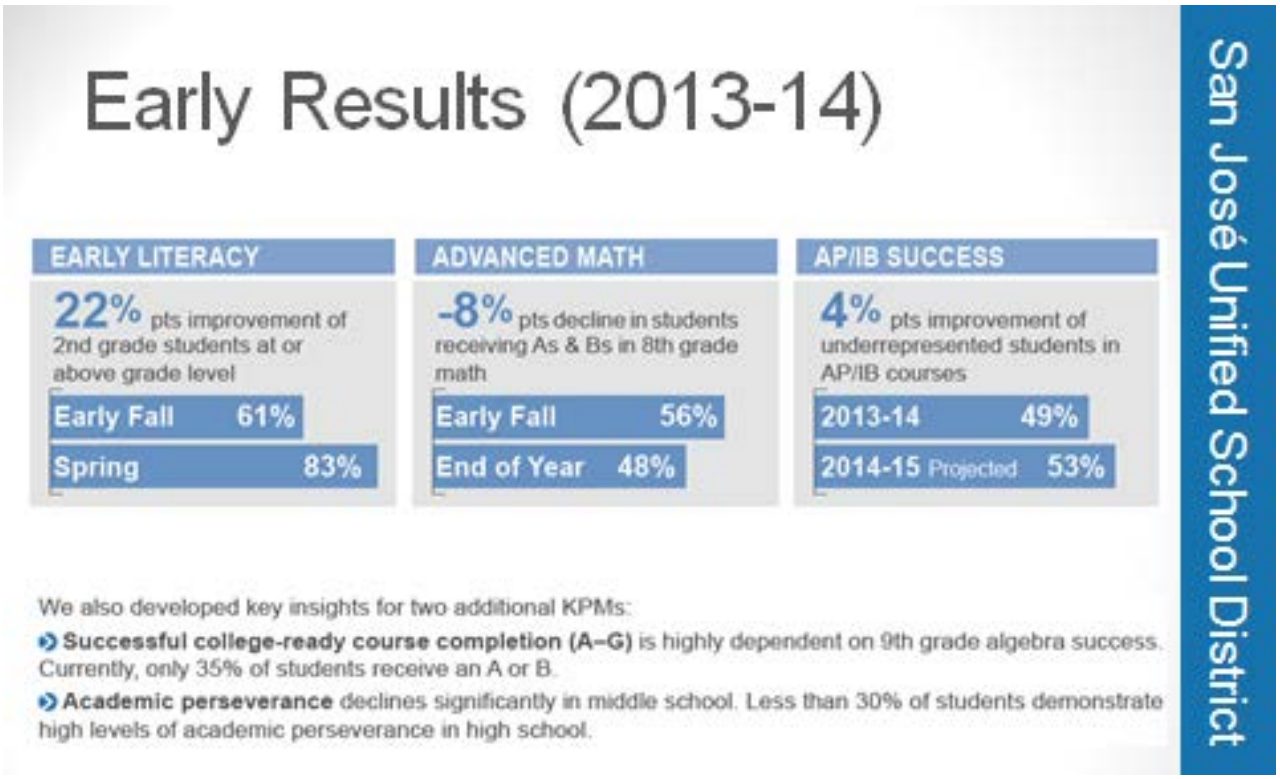


Exhibit 9

CONSIDERATIONS

While still too early to know what impact OpStat will have on student learning, it is reasonable for education leaders to consider how SJUSD's initiative can inform improvement efforts in other school systems. The following observations and insights from this study may help guide districts interested in developing a similar approach.

Foundational work. SJUSD laid college readiness groundwork prior to OpStat. Well before OpStat, the District had aligned high school graduation requirements with University of California entrance requirements, thereby setting college readiness as the goal for all students. The school board established policy that made equity a central concern, creating urgency around closing achievement gaps. The District launched a compelling strategic plan with buy-in from multiple stakeholders. Through the CRIS pilot, District leaders developed key performance metrics aligned with the strategic plan and tested supported cycles of inquiry and improvement in a small number of schools. These actions created favorable conditions for OpStat implementation.

Central office culture and capacity. While the focus of OpStat is on transforming schools to improve student learning, the initiative's success rests on important shifts in the central office. Senior leadership operates as a team and is consistently engaged in school-level improvement efforts. OpStat has become a process shared and owned across departments and divisions; directors and staff routinely communicate and collaborate. The Data, Research, and Assessment department makes serving principals' needs for data and technical assistance one of its highest priorities. Leaders also have been intentional about training, promoting, and recruiting new staff to build capacity for data-informed continuous improvement.

Walking the talk and learning together. District team members responsible for planning and rolling out OpStat were intentional about using the same data-informed inquiry and improvement process that they expected schools to learn and adopt. The entire first year, and into the second, the team tested processes and protocols, sought and reflected on feedback from principals and senior leadership, and adapted accordingly. The choice to be transparent about their own learning helped team members model the process and foster a culture of honesty, creativity, and productive discomfort.

Protocols, routines, and data matter. The technical details of developing and scaling OpStat are far from trivial. Districts considering a similar course will be well served to carefully think through how the process will be introduced to principals; a short pilot with a small number of school may be needed. Thought must also be given to how principals and school teams will be trained, how they will access data, what data they need and how it should be displayed, and how, when, and where they will interact with senior leadership around their OpStat work. Support and accountability sessions are ideally scheduled a year in advance, and protecting the time requires disciplined commitment and re-commitment to the routine on everyone's part.

Would district size make a difference? To implement an approach like OpStat, the 52 medium size districts (between 30,000 to 35,000 students) across the country like SJUSD may have several advantages. They are small enough for central office and school staff to know each other well and have enough physical proximity to facilitate ongoing communication and collaboration. They are also more likely to be able execute the number of support and accountability sessions necessary to involve all schools. A large district might productively follow a modified OpStat approach that divides the district into moderate-sized regions, devolving leadership and resources to each region.

Medium size districts also are more likely than smaller ones to have resources (especially staff time) to dedicate to developing and managing the process. Small districts could consider coordinating with nearby districts to form a networked improvement community, or engage community members to serve with district leaders as critical friends and resources to the improvement process.

CONCLUSION

I think, what we're trying to do [with OpStat] and what I would suggest to everyone is to treat each school as its own answer, that needs to find its own answer, that each one has its own culture and personality. –SJUSD Principal

This case study documents how SJUSD rolled out OpStat—a collaborative, systemic process that engages school and district leaders in continuous, data-informed school improvement and holds them mutually accountable for improving student outcomes. Launched in 2013, OpStat has become an established and rewarding approach that shows no signs of going away.

As OpStat enters its third year, the District team continues to refine and improve the process. DRA is enhancing data reporting capability, for example, to ensure that schools have the customized feedback they need on their improvement efforts. The team also is rolling out a new key performance metric—Academic Perseverance. Middle school principals have formed a working group to plan and self-monitor integration of the new metric into their formal OpStat cycle.

SJUSD's effort to date is a remarkable demonstration of how a school system can take a leadership culture of mutual support and accountability to scale by harnessing the powers of skillful collaboration, data and communications technology, and wise commitment to supporting each school in finding its "own answer." The District's journey can be instructive for any school system—large, medium, or small—interested in adopting college readiness metrics and data-informed inquiry cycles to drive school improvement.

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