

ESSENTIAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS

funding full implementation

The EPCs work, when fully implemented, and they are the best tool for exiting sanctions. But they do have a price tag.

We almost didn't write this article. With scarce dollars getting scarcer, what's the point of pointing out where more of them should go? We proceeded because juxtaposed with the State of Fiscal Emergency and the proposed second-time suspension of Proposition 98 is the decision to place 97 California Program Improvement school districts into further sanctions under No Child Left Behind.

For at least 89 of the districts, the proposed intervention involves the Essential Program Components of the Academic Program Survey. Although State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell has advocated that these interventions be contingent upon funding being made available through the legislative process, this appears paradoxical in the face of overall cuts. The apparent cognitive disconnect between the price tag attached to the EPCs and the proposed cuts is remarkable enough to reinforce our belief that if there is one cosmic constant, it must be irony.

The EPCs work. They are certainly the best tool we have at this time for moving the schools of these districts forward. Most schools that became state-monitored for failing to exit the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program have exited sanctions, thanks to the EPCs.

Each failing school was assigned a School Assistance and Intervention Team, fielded from CDE-approved agencies and firms. Each SAIT assessed its school and wrote, then monitored, its EPC-based improvement plan.

Their research base explains the EPCs' success. They provide laser focus on mathematics and English language arts. Their implementation ensures what is termed "Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum" by Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (Marzano, 2003). McREL's research distills 35 years of U.S. school reform initiatives into the top 11 factors hav-

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ing the highest impact on improved student outcomes, measured by standardized tests. Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum is the highest of these high-impact factors.

Other groups, such as KeyData Systems of Lake Elsinore, under contract with the Riverside County Office of Education, have identified additional research studies supporting the EPCs.

However, EPC implementation requires fiscal support beyond a school's traditional allocation. Providing state-approved, standards-based program materials (EPC No. 1) and training (EPC No. 3 and No. 4) can be expensive enough, although the Instructional Materials Fund and reimbursements under SB 472 and AB 430 can offset some of these costs.

EPC No. 6 requires academic coaching for teachers to ensure that they are implementing the programs with quality, fidelity, intensity and consistency — termed QFIC by McREL (Waters and Cameron, 2006). Joyce and Showers (1980) found that without coaching, teacher implementation after training was only about 5 percent, but with coaching, 75-90 percent. Even with reimbursement, spending \$900 per teacher for training, plus subs or stipends, is arguably a poor investment if no implementation is likely. Additional FTEs are needed for English language arts and mathematics coaches.

The greatest cost, however, under the EPCs (No. 2 and No. 8 for high schools) is in FTEs for additional time and support for students who do not perform at grade level. With smaller class sizes and double periods required by the programs, additional staff are needed to deliver the replacement ELA curriculums at the secondary level, and sometimes even at elementary, for students who are termed "Intensive" in the California Content Frameworks. These students are more than two years below grade level in ELA. For high school mathematics, Intensive students are those lacking seventh grade skills, and they need an extra support class to fill in these gaps.

At the secondary level, additional staffing is also needed to provide more time and support to students termed "Strategic" in the frameworks — those who are below grade level, but not so far behind that they need a

replacement or Intensive curriculum. Under EPC No. 2, they are assigned a core class, but attend a "pre-teach" period before the regular class to enable success in the day's lesson.

Needs vary by school enrollment and numbers of Strategic and Intensive students. In our experience as a SAIT provider, most secondary schools implementing the EPCs require three to six additional FTEs beyond a district's traditional staffing allocation. As a rule, high schools, with larger and more complex master schedules, need more than middle schools.

Although many schools that successfully exited sanctions were able to reallocate some site funds for the work, SAIT funding at \$150 per student, and the required district dollar-match, has been key to their ability to do so.

Some schools — notably, most that have not exited sanctions — have tried the approach of partially implementing the EPCs; for example, providing the Intensive curriculum for only a few neediest students, or attempting to serve Strategic and Intensive students without adding additional sections to the master schedule.

The consistent failure of the partial approach is largely explained by the research of Douglas Reeves (2007), who found that only when implementation reaches 90 percent does a school begin to see improved student outcomes. Reeves' findings also underscore the importance of QFIC and the need for academic coaching.

What about equity?

Two issues become quickly apparent; the first being California's fiscal crisis. Scarce fiscal resources are not new. The required dollar-match for SAIT schools to support the EPCs has not been easy in some districts. Now the problem is about to become more critical everywhere.

A second significant issue is the philosophical conundrum that the EPCs create. Departing from traditional staffing allocation formulas represents a gargantuan paradigm shift. How can districts justify treating different schools differently, especially in funding, when fairness has always been defined as equity?

Districts react to this dilemma in different ways, with widely varying student out-

comes. Any high school principal or VP who has done the task will attest that an explanation of the nuances of master scheduling, contrasting the calculations of traditional- and EPC-master scheduling, can scarcely be captured in one short article (see box on page 11 for sample calculations). However, to illustrate the varying results that can occur, we invite you to visit a couple of hypothetical high schools, each a composite of schools we have known.



Steeped In Tradition High School

Steeped In Tradition High School is attempting to implement the EPCs. Although Steeped maintained a respectable and slowly rising API for a few years, proficiency rates on the California Standards Tests have begun to decline, and the school has since fallen into Program Improvement under NCLB due to flattened CAHSEE pass rates. Student dropout rates are edging upward. Comments in the teachers' lounge attribute these developments to a change in demographics, lowered student motivation and lack of parent involvement.

The principal is very concerned about STHS's performance, and is also highly attuned to the parent community. Some of the most vocal and active parents are those whose children are in the numerous AP classes — which often have very small enrollments — and a number of very specialized electives.

To begin implementation of EPC No. 7, one staff meeting a month has been designated for collaborative meetings of course-alike teachers. Last week, the principal asked

all teams to discuss their D-F lists. One team dissolved after only 20 minutes.

A small cadre of teachers in this team voiced the opinion that better strategies, such as the use of graphic organizers and cooperative learning, would engage more students. Most of the team dissented, advocating “proven” methods, consisting mainly of teacher lecture and use of end-of-selection questions in the text. “This has always worked for me,” one argued, the others nodding. “These kids just don’t try.”

The principal and curriculum VP have been trying to work a couple of Read 180 classes into the fall master schedule as required by EPCs No. 1 and 2. The district has provided one class set of materials, but there is a possibility another set might be ordered.

The English department chair has surveyed the department. No one wants to teach this kind of class. They agree to leave the staffing blank, knowing that two retirements will create openings, and they can more easily assign this to a new teacher. Given the salary schedule of the district and its location,

many openings are staffed just as school starts, probably precluding a new teacher’s summer training in Read 180. Sometimes classes are begun with long-term subs. Perhaps this year they’ll be fortunate enough to hire a fully credentialed, experienced English teacher. They agree that this is about the best that can be done for now.

Read 180 is really supposed to be taught in a 90-minute block. Since there is no easy way to split a period, and double blocking will really throw a wrench into the master schedule, they agree to keep Read 180 at 57 minutes and hope for the best.

Benchmarks provide initial data set

The district office staff is struggling with Steeped’s issues as well. Although STHS has never used the placement assessments in the core adoptions, the benchmarks for ninth graders and eighth graders from the feeders provide an initial data set, which suggests that around two-thirds of the fall freshmen and sophomores may be Strategic or Intensive learners.

For the first time, Cabinet discusses “shadow classes” for students who need more support in core, and the need for double-blocked Intensive interventions for the most needy students. The implications for the fall master schedule are significant if the EPCs are going to be implemented, because more FTEs will clearly be needed. Everyone turns expectantly to the assistant superintendent of business.

The CBO has steered the district through very rough fiscal waters, and the notion that Steeped suddenly needs more staff feels to her like a crazy lightning bolt out of the blue. Keeping the district solvent has required a high degree of fiscal skill, an ability to plan for worst-case scenarios, and a healthy skepticism for what principals claim they need for staffing in any given year.

Occasionally, in late October, the odd additional FTE has been approved for sites where class sizes unexpectedly burgeoned. Ironically, however, the principals tend to complain about the disruption of the instructional program when they finally get the extra staff they said they wanted.

But the biggest issue is fairness. How can the district justify giving Steeped FTEs above their allocation, without doing it for the other schools? In the end, everyone agrees: “This is how we’ve always done things here, and it’s always worked for us.”

After the meeting, the director calls the principal to explore a reduction in fall AP offerings — or possibly moving some of them to a zero period or seventh period. Also, some electives are taught by teachers whose credentials could allow them to teach Algebra I or English, which could be converted to additional sections for Strategic and Intensive students. This still won’t free up enough FTEs, but it’s a start.

“No can do,” is the principal’s response, imagining the parent phone calls and staff objections. Almost every AP class, and most electives, are supported by extremely vocal proponents among both parents and staff, not to mention students. The teachers’ union president teaches only AP. It’s simply out of the question.

In the fall, STHS proceeds with partial EPC implementation. Achievement patterns continue to decline. Most students needing



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tutoring, offered after school, don't stay. "The EPCs don't work" is the widespread complaint.

New Paradigms High School

New Paradigms High School mirrors STHS in many ways. However, at New Paradigms, core ELA and mathematics placement tests were used in May to assess ninth graders and feeders' eighth graders for fall scheduling. Students scoring more than two years below grade level in ELA then took the Read 180 placement test. Those who demonstrated mathematics skills below seventh grade took the diagnostic from the new Intensive mathematics adoption.

Based on these assessments, Intensive and Strategic students now have double-blocked classes in ELA and/or math. Shifting to a pre-teach block has not been easy for many teachers. The 23 Strategic-level students need a daily preview of vocabulary and key concepts before being joined by grade-level classmates during the second hour for the core lesson in classes that total 36 students.

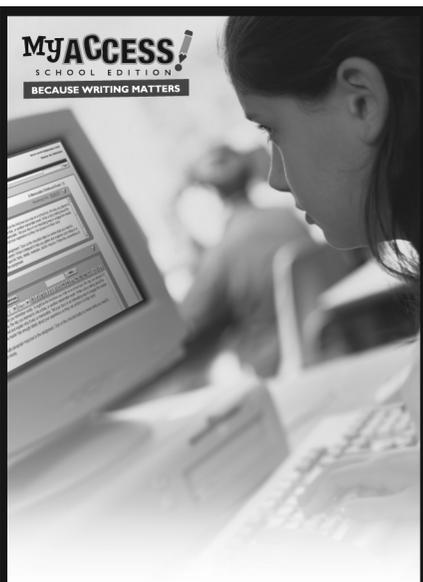
The mathematics and ELA coaches work tirelessly with teams on strategies to engage students, using data from the embedded assessments to determine needs. The administrative team, not department chairs, now assigns staff, and the most experienced teachers no longer automatically have AP and upper class students, with first-year teachers staffing most classes for ninth- and tenth-graders, as in the past.

The district CBO once had little knowledge — or interest — in anything related to EPCs. All that belonged to the Ed. Services side of the house. This changed once the seriousness of potential secondary sanctions for the school and district caused the superintendent's cabinet to unite as a team to examine what New Paradigms needed.

Human resources imposed a "first dibs" rule for NPHS, providing first priority for hiring available mathematics and ELA teachers when openings occurred.

The assistant superintendent of business, widely known as one of the state's most savvy CBOs, contracted a firm to conduct a Fiscal Reallocation Inquiry, which "found" over a million dollars in unused categoricals — legally consolidated and reallocated. This

Sample Comparison of Sections Needed Traditional staffing vs. EPC staffing Ninth-tenth grade English language arts		
Total Enrollment: 2,800 Grade 9: 867 Grade 10: 745		Grade 11: 612 Grade 12: 576 District staffing allocation: 33:1
Traditional Master Scheduling English, Grades 9-10	EPC Master Scheduling ELA, Grades 9-10	
1,612 students @ 33:1 = 49 sections	1). Intensive intervention (replacement curriculum, e.g. REACH) for students more than two years below grade level 50 ninth graders 50 tenth graders @ 25:1 @ two periods = 8 sections 2). Strategic core support ("pre-teach class") for students up to two years below grade level 200 ninth graders <u>175 tenth graders</u> 375 total @ 25:1 = 15 sections 3). Core sections for Strategic students and Benchmark (grade level) students 817 ninth graders <u>695 tenth graders</u> 1,512 total @ 33:1 = 46 sections Grand total, ninth and tenth grade ELA 46 + 15 + 8 = 69 sections	
69 EPC sections - <u>49</u> traditional sections 20 additional sections (four FTEs) needed for EPC master schedule for ELA Schools can expect similar differences in traditional vs. EPC scheduling for math		
<p>We have repeatedly been asked how it is possible that a school needs additional FTEs to implement the EPCs when the number of students remains constant. Mathematically, when Strategic students are placed in a second "pre-teach" block to support their achievement in core, and Intensive students are double-blocked at maximum class sizes of 25, roughly five additional sections are needed (1 FTE) for each group of 125 non-Benchmark (non-grade level) students.</p> <p>Overall potential impact can be estimated from the STAR scores by adding the number of non-proficient students in math and ELA in the school's current ninth grade, and for the eighth-graders from the feeders. However, exact counts and placements can only be determined using a spring assessment system as described. Sometimes, certain electives can temporarily be eliminated and appropriately credentialed staff reassigned to teach these sections, but in our experience a combination of that approach plus additional district dollars are needed to cover the needed FTEs.</p>		



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allowed the funding of an astonishing 7.4 FTEs above the school's allocation, covering the academic coaches and enough additional sections in the master schedule for Strategic and Intensive learners.

At New Paradigms, electives have been reduced and small AP classes have been discontinued, offered online or moved to a zero period. Helping the school community deal with the perceived loss of the "traditional high school" master schedule, the principal provides continued assurance that the changes are not permanent.

Indeed, after only one semester of fully implementing Read 180, an entire section was collapsed as students exited to ninth- or tenth-grade ELA core-plus-support, with their progress closely monitored. They are taking first-semester English during second semester, will take second-semester English during the summer, and will be on track with their grade-level English class (with a pre-teach support block) in September.

EPCs work, but they have a price tag

Each school that has successfully exited sanctions tells a compelling story. The EPCs work, but they have a price tag. As the 97 districts enter a second level of district Program Improvement, the need to differentiate support based on specific schools' needs will be more essential than ever. Failed efforts demonstrate that partial implementation, merely checking off boxes in a plan, is not a viable alternative if improved student outcomes are the true desired result.

The final funding determination for California schools, including Prop 98's fate, will have a decisive impact on what happens in these districts, regardless of their tier of intervention. Beyond that, the degree of willingness on the part of educators, from classroom to district office, to depart from past practice — fiscal, human resources and instructional — for high-level implementation will ultimately determine the level of improved achievement these schools experience by using the power of the EPCs.

Fortunately or unfortunately, it's not rocket science. As a teacher leader recently observed, "We all want something exotic and easy. In reality, it's simple, but hard." ■

References and resources

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