



Background

The release of the 2019 CA School Dashboard data resulted in four school districts becoming eligible for Systemic Instructional Review (SIR) Support from CCEE, among them is Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD). LEAs meet the criteria established by Section 52072 and pursuant to subdivision (g) of Section 52064.5 (CA School Dashboard) whereby three or more pupil groups identified pursuant to Section 52052 did not make progress based on the CA School Dashboard. For SCUSD, these student groups include students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster youth. The following executive summary provides an overview of the SIR purpose and process, data collection and overall findings of the SCUSD SIR, and recommended action steps that will be used by CCEE to advise and assist the district.

SIR Purpose and Background

The purpose of a SIR is to identify strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities (SWOT) in the implementation of instructional initiatives and practices of an LEA through a series of data collection activities. The SIR culminates in recommended action steps that are designed to assist districts in creating coherence throughout the system by supporting a strong focus on instruction, developing collaborative cultures, enhancing deeper learning, and establishing accountability throughout the system. These recommended actions are intended to serve the district as a roadmap to systemic instructional improvement.

The LEA's first step, post the SIR, is to prioritize the SIR action steps from the report including the development of a plan for stakeholder communication.

Recommendations/action steps are interconnected so they can be collectively leveraged to provide opportunity for the district to engage in cycles of continuous improvement, and inform the CCEE in the progress-monitoring role as evidence to verify completion. CCEE has a continuum of resources to assist and advise the district in this process to identify more specific supports needed to implement the SIR actions to improve student outcomes. Activities driven by the SIR should ideally align other district and site level plans around priorities, actions, and progress-monitoring data indicators. As defined in EDC §52072, CCEE's role is to determine the capacity of the school district to implement the recommendations (identified as action steps within the SIR) and therefore will monitor and communicate the progress of the district on the implementation of SIR actions and recommendations specifically the district, COE, State Superintendent of Public Instruction and State Board of Education twice a year (fall and spring).



Data Collection

Data are collected through focus group interviews, individual interviews, observations of all aspects of the instructional program, artifact reviews, and data analysis. Stakeholders at multiple levels (students, families, teachers, school site staff and administration, governance members, and district office leadership) are involved throughout the data collection process.

The SIR activities resumed in early summer 2020, knowing that flexibility would be needed as SCUSD began the year with distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The activities completed through December 2020 include empathy and individual stakeholder interviews with district staff and labor partners, as well as 18 focus groups from various stakeholders, including teaching and instructional support staff, students, families, principals, and community committees and partners (e.g., Black Parallel School Board, City of Sacramento). CCEE staff reviewed all documents submitted by SCUSD to support instructional efforts (e.g., LCAP, LCP, professional learning, assessment, and curriculum plans).

Summary of Findings

SCUSD serves approximately 42,000 students across 75 school sites spanning 70 square miles inclusive of both rural and urban settings. The diversity of Sacramento, one of the nation's most ethnically and linguistically diverse cities (Sheeler, 2019; Stodghill & Bower, 2002), is reflected in the district's demographics. Latinx students make up 40 percent of the student population, Asian and Pacific Islander students 19 percent, African American students 15 percent, and white students 17 percent. More than 51 languages are spoken by students and families in the district, and 31 percent of students are English learners (California Department of Education). SCUSD serves some of the lowest income neighborhoods in Sacramento County, and more than 71 percent of students are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Superintendent Jorge Aguilar, hired in 2017, inherited a district known for central office management challenges and adversarial labor-management relations. This has created an unstable foundation upon which the district has faced increasing personnel costs and structural budget deficits. Declining enrollment coupled with rising special education, operational, health, and pension costs have contributed to the ongoing structural budget issues and deficit spending.

There is a long history of contentious relationships between the Sacramento City Teachers Association (SCTA) and SCUSD, which signals the need to nurture strong, collaborative, and productive relationships between management and labor. It is clear that this contentious relationship has contributed to lack of clarity of what is expected both at the central office and school level. Of particular urgency is the need to come to agreement on the implementation of assessment and professional development. According to researchers there are districts and labor partners that have been successful in strengthening labor-management relationships to do this work differently, and often in ways that fundamentally break with tradition. "[Districts and labor partners] are rethinking shared policy making processes such as collective bargaining

Summary of Findings (Continued)

and meet-and-confer settings, as vehicles to address more traditional issues, such as wages and benefits. They often begin with a shared commitment in principle that places improved student learning and closing achievement gaps as an explicit priority for their work together. More often than not, these commitments reaffirm fairness in the workplace and develop the professional foundation for teaching and teacher leadership, as well" (Eckert, J. (Ed.). 2011).

In addition to developing and strengthening the foundation for teaching and learning in the district, there is also a need to restructure the district leadership to increase collaboration and more clearly define roles, responsibilities, and performance expectations within and across departments. Internal conversations with cabinet, instructional assistant superintendents, and key directors could examine the current structure and make needed changes that will better align with district goals and integrate the theory of action and improvement science principles as a starting point. Key goals for restructuring the district team is to reduce fragmentation, increase coherence and strategic support to schools, and develop two-way communication strategies to better gauge impact, results, and effectiveness for improving student outcomes.

Continuous improvement has been defined as the district's ongoing commitment to every schools' quality improvement efforts that are evidence-based. For this to occur, continuous improvement must be integrated into the daily work of individuals, contextualized within the system, and be iterative (Park et al., 2013). This will require SCUSD to take necessary steps to decide and communicate how this will look and how will they know it is working through performance indicators.

In spite of the challenges that need to be addressed by SCUSD, there should be optimism for the trajectory of the district. There are positive highlights to build from that were supported by data, which provide opportunities to scale for systemic change. The following is a summary of strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities to the district:

Strengths

- The current work of the district is grounded in equity, access, and social justice.
- Increased A-G completion rates and 12th grade graduation rates for African American and students with disabilities.
- There is an increase in FAFSA application participation and submission.
- The district is working to standardize courses of study at the high school level.
- The district has developed a mid-year review process for the SPSA (School Plan for Student Achievement) to improve how it is used to monitor progress toward meeting goals.
- MTSS multi-year plan is in place and has been embraced by stakeholders.
- The district has undertaken SEL work over several years and has been recognized for their work in this area.

Weaknesses

- The instability of staffing, unclear expectation for roles, responsibilities, and accountability of leadership, uncertainty of budget and labor relations have resulted in silos within and across departments, increased tension, frustration, and morale issues.
- There is a lack of clarity among district office, departmental staff, principals, and teachers of what the exact district priorities are and what strategies are in place to accomplish priorities and execute the vision and mission of the district.
- There is a lack of coherent, efficient, and equitable district office service and support to schools.
- There is a lack of uniformity in how data is used, decisions are made, and central office departments are accountable to support the vision and mission of the district.
- Coherent, ongoing communication within and across departments and to schools is confusing and inconsistent.
- There is a lack of collective accountability for teaching and learning goals as well as priorities that would result in improved student outcomes.
- The lack of consistent implementation of common assessments across the district impacts how student progress is monitored and measured.
- The absence of an English learner (EL) master plan contributes to the lack of understanding, accountability, and implementation of integrated and designated ELD.
- The lack of a proactive process for identifying homeless youth may contribute to low identification numbers in the district.
- Collective accountability, ownership, and commitment to improving instruction, service, and support for students with disabilities continues to be a significant inequity in the district.
- There are limited and uneven districtwide opportunities to provide new and sustained professional learning linked to district goals, actions, and strategies.

Threats

- Siloed central office departments have led to limited collaboration within and among district and site leaders, lack of clear communication, expectations, and messaging of goals and outcomes.
- Ongoing labor relations between the district and SCTA, in areas such as how best to implement professional development and local assessments, hinder the progress of district goals and limits the capacity to change and improve student outcomes.
- Lack of accessible user-friendly data is a threat to developing data literacy and data-based decision-making.
- Changes in leadership and past district priorities have resulted in a range of ongoing school programs and resources that may be misaligned with current priorities. This misalignment may be contributing to the lack of progress for students with disabilities, EL students, African American students, students experiencing homelessness, foster youth, and others.

Threats

- Communication structures and processes are siloed and severely limit innovation, collaboration, and collective efficacy in supporting schools, site administrators, and teachers.
- The current district organizational structures do not support the urgent need to provide equitable robust instruction and educational experiences for all students and may lead to continued inequities.
- A decentralized system without clear expectations, accountability, and communication has resulted in less effective support for school leaders and inequitable educational programs/opportunities for students.

Opportunities

- The vision of equity and continuous improvement provides the opportunity to create coherent understanding and implementation strategies across the district to better support the whole child/student needs.
- There is an opportunity to capitalize on the SPSA processes to develop school goals and the implementation of continuous improvement expectations linked to leading and lagging measures to monitor progress.
- The district's implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides the opportunity to create and articulate an instructional vision, framework, priorities, and goals.
- There is an opportunity to streamline district priorities and strategies that results in a more systematic way to manage district time and resources.
- There is an opportunity with new personnel hires at cabinet level—chief academic officer, chief business officer, and the assistant superintendent for special education—to clarify the work and build trusting relationships across the entire district.

Recommendations/Actions

The SIR actions found next are organized by the 12 SIR Instructional Components. One of the first steps for the district will be to review the SIR actions found below to identify and align priority actions. Although provided as discrete actions, many of the actions are complementary, cascade to other actions, and can be prioritized to leverage a group of actions. In addition to CCEE's role in progress monitoring of the implementation of SIR actions, and based on the interest of the district, CCEE can continue to advise and assist the district. CCEE would then work with the district, in partnership with the county office of education, to prioritize actions and as appropriate assist with identifying supports for the district.

1. Culture, Coherence, and the Planning Process

- **1A)** Develop a roadmap that includes well-articulated priorities and strategies to implement the district's vision, mission, and goals.
- **1B)** Considering the budget reductions conduct an analysis of the current central office organizational structure, including all positions, to determine how to reallocate and repurpose existing resources and positions to better provide comprehensive, coordinated, and differentiated services and support to schools.
- **1C)** Examine the central office departments and restructure to establish a culture grounded in meeting performance outcomes, integration of work streams, and regular routines that result in increased collaboration, and focus on common priorities that ensure consistent communication.
- **1D)** Create intentional communication structures across all departments to ensure clarity of message, priorities, and expectations.
- **1E)** Form a cross functional team of central office and site leadership to examine and problem solve the fragmented and uneven support (e.g., SSC), models (e.g., Inclusive Schools), and school entrance requirements that create barriers to access, equity, and social justice goals.
- **1F)** Form a representative group of principals, instructional assistant superintendents (IASs), and other key central office leaders to identify ways that principals' voices can become an integral and consistent part of planning (e.g., professional learning, priorities, etc.) problem-solving, and communicating with central office leadership and each other.
- **1G)** Review hiring practices for general and special educators, paraprofessionals, and other support staff employed by the district. Analyze the current practices, especially related to teachers, within the context of the current partnership with Sacramento State University that places approximately 135 student teachers per year in the district.
- **1H)** Given the district goal of equity, access, and social justice, clarify roles and responsibilities of the central office and schools in planning and engaging in activities that deepen the commitment to ensure all students attain educational success.
- **1I)** Develop and implement strategies to intentionally focus on celebrating student diversity and success using a variety of school/district awareness campaigns as a mechanism for raising awareness of accomplishments, such as increased graduation rate.
- **1J)** Continue the work of SPSA development and monitoring and MTSS implementation that will provide an instructional framework within which instruction and support for academic, behavioral, and social-emotional well-being is differentiated and data-driven.
- **1K)** Ensure that explicit expectations and communication about roles and responsibilities of the central office (e.g., IAS, Assistant Supt. of Curriculum/Instruction, CAO, etc.) are clear, understood and supported through coaching.
- **1L)** Use the position of the chief of communications to engage central office staff in strategic communications planning processes to help drive internal alignment and support for teaching and learning goals and benchmarks across the district. Focus on identifying indicators and results-based accountability measures to organize the district teams' work to have the greatest impact on students and schools.

2. Curriculum, Learning, and Support

- **2A)** Create a central office organizational structure that aligns with the district's theory of action and results in explicit expectations and accountability for the delivery of curriculum, instruction, and support to schools.
- **2B)** Conduct a curriculum audit to identify and ensure all schools and students (e.g., students with disabilities, EL, homeless and foster youth) have standard-aligned curriculum materials and supports that are stimulating, rigorous, and accelerate grade-level content and language development.
- **2C)** Research and train school sites where student equity data reflects the highest priority and provide school leaders the opportunity to strengthen their ability to mobilize others, model inquiry and reflection, and data-based decision-making.

3. Instructional Practice and Strategies

- **3A)** Clarify the instructional vision so that strategies, tools, practices, and clear communication of expectations and implementation timelines are aligned.
- **3B)** Analyze current and past priorities to ensure alignment with the current theory of action.
- **3C)** Expect that all principals are responsible for overseeing special education in their buildings and that IASs support and hold principals accountable for this responsibility. Ensure that supportive accountability is provided for all staff.
- **3D)** Develop and implement a walk-through tool to systematically monitor and support instruction and interventions in general education classes, RSP classes, and Special Day Classes (SDC). Use these data to ensure there is equitable access to good first teaching and differentiated intervention is provided for both general and special education students.
- **3E)** Establish and implement a clear and defined vision for the value of inclusivity from the boardroom to the classroom. Ensure students with disabilities have equitable access to the same instruction and support as general education students (e.g., UDL, MTSS) to ensure success in the least restrictive environment.
- **3F)** Delineate expectations for the provision of linguistically appropriate and culturally competent instruction aligned with core standards that are differentiated for students with reading and math performance levels significantly below those of their classroom peers.
- **3G)** Develop and implement a plan that ensures ELs across all levels of language proficiency levels can access, fully engage with, and achieve rigorous grade-level academic content standards and English language proficiency goals.

4. Social-Emotional and Behavioral Health and Development

- **4A)** Use the CA Dashboard expectations for SEL local performance measures to increase SEL implementation aligned with the Academic Integration Framework.
- **4B)** Provide the central office team with ongoing professional learning to better understand the Academic Integration Framework, develop strategies for use by school teams, and establish implementation benchmarks and accountability timelines for implementation.

4. Social-Emotional and Behavioral Health and Development (Continued)

- **4C)** Integrate current departments/units (e.g. SEL SHHS, Curriculum and Instruction) into ones that better align services and support to schools to better integrate strategies and sustain social-emotional well-being and mental health of students and staff.
- **4D)** Ensure that there is a continuum of social-emotional, behavioral and mental health supports/resources in SCUSD and the process for accessing it is clear so that all schools and families, including homeless and foster youth, know how to access them.

5. Assessment and Accountability

- **5A)** Establish a suite of custom accountability reports available to all school and district staff that align with district goals and benchmarks for teaching and learning.
- **5B)** Clarify the progress monitoring and accountability expectations for school teams and the purpose, role, and function of the multiple dashboards and platforms are in producing aligned data.
- **5C)** Research the LCAP development timelines of other districts and consider how SCUSD timelines should be revised for increased input and feedback from LCAP PAC.
- **5D)** Organize a series of meetings with CCEE, CORE, and SCOE to ensure coherence, collaboration, and integration of support and technical assistance.
- **5E)** Engage principals in cycles of inquiry and implementation science separate from SPSA completion to develop skill, understanding, confidence, and trust.
- **5F)** Examine the current documented procedures and support structures across homeless and foster youth divisions to ensure there is a consistent and multi-tiered system of support designed, implemented, communicated and monitored at the district level and across sites that provides intensified instruction, services, and support for these students.
- **5G)** Create a systemic approach for identifying and supporting homeless youth. Ensure that a systemic and proactive system that provides academic, behavioral, and social-emotional health is established at all schools sites and monitored at the central office.
- **5H)** Based on the findings and eventual ruling of the arbitration over the implementation of the MOU titled, "Monitoring of Student Progress", the district and SCTA will need to continue efforts to develop agreements on the use of formative assessments to improve student achievement.

6. Student and Family Engagement

- **6A)** Reexamine the hiring practices to ensure there is a representative group of teachers who are multilingual. The current contract timeline for in-district transfer is a barrier to timely hiring of high-demand personnel.
- **6B)** Continue searching for and hiring a highly qualified Director of Multilingual; consider conducting a national search for this position.
- **6C)** Continue to develop a clear communication and meeting plan for parents that includes processes and procedures to ensure that translation and interpreter services are provided in parent languages and in a user-friendly, timely manner.

6. Student and Family Engagement (Continued)

- **6D)** Continue to implement student engagement strategies to increase student voice, choice, and agency at schools and across the district.
- **6E)** Re-evaluate and enhance practices for communicating and sharing EL reclassification information (the process and the data for reclassification rates).

7. School-based Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs)

- **7A)** Establish ILTs at every school site and develop written expectations for ILTs' roles, responsibilities, and team membership. Work toward coherence and clarity around the coordination, communication, and cross function of school site committees and ILTs.
- **7B)** Once ILTs are established, provide on-going site-based professional development and coaching on instruction, assessment, and data-driven decision-making.
- **7C)** Ensure that school leader professional learning aligns with the work of ILTs and builds school capacity for sustaining data-based decision-making.
- **7D)** Clarify the instructional vision, strategy, priorities, and desired outcomes. Engage the school-based committees to build a common language, common understanding of the instructional vision and their critical role in supporting the attainment of the vision.

8. Administrative Coaching and Leadership

District Leadership:

- **8A)** Develop aligned, systemic processes, both qualitative and quantitative, that measure how, what, and how well district and school leaders are functioning in their current roles.
- **8B)** Expect all IASs to demonstrate consistent use of qualitative and quantitative school-based data to assess the rate of growth for academic, behavioral, and social-emotional learning across student groups and differentiate levels of support.
- **8C)** Continue to build the skill and capacity of IAS to systematically support the implementation of UDL practices and MTSS framework designed to accelerate improved student outcomes.
- **8D)** Develop a consistent principal coaching model for use by IASs and implement a support calendar that expects and provides for observing instruction in both general and special education settings and providing strengths-based and actionable feedback to site leaders.
- **8E)** Develop and implement user-friendly tools, expectations, timelines, and strategies to support site administrators' consistent use of quantitative and qualitative data to assess rates of growth for academic, behavioral, and social-emotional learning for all students.
- **8F)** Continue to work toward cultivating a growth mindset across district leadership that manifests a trusting and safe environment in which personnel feels comfortable taking risks, sharing innovative practices, and actively contributing to results-based decision-making (e.g., within SPSA process).

8. Administrative Coaching and Leadership (Continued)

Site Leadership

- **8A2)** Provide site administrators with professional learning and coaching opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills to fulfill their roles and responsibilities as instructional leaders.
- **8B2)** Deliver consistent leadership coaching and mentoring for principals that provides them the opportunity to reflect, monitor, adjust, and increase the effectiveness of their roles in strengthening instructional practices to meet the needs of diverse learners (e.g., gifted, homeless and foster youth, students with disabilities, and those at risk for failure).
- **8C2)** Create the expectation and support that allows administrators to clearly demonstrate a balance of their time between building management and instructional leadership priorities.

9. Professional Learning and Coaching

- **9A)** Develop a written, comprehensive multi-year professional learning and coaching plan based on best practices for improving effective instruction for veteran and new principals, teachers, and staff (classified and certificated) and have clear expectations for implementation and monitoring.
- **9B)** Develop a written multi-year plan for engaging parents and other stakeholders in learning that are aligned to the district's strategies (e.g., LCPA, SPSA) for improving academic, behavioral, and social-emotional learning.
- **9C)** Develop and/or enhance the system to gather input and act upon the feedback on the delivery of professional learning and coaching to ensure the needs of consumers are met.
- **9D)** Analyze the current instructional specialist positions and reallocate and/or repurpose their roles and responsibilities to better provide comprehensive, coordinated, and differentiated services and support to schools.

10. Data Management and Use and Student Information Systems

- **10A)** Given the current data platform, provide uniform processes whereby consumers have user-friendly and real-time data at their disposal. Increase the skill, capacity, and expertise of the current personnel needed to reach data governance priorities.
- **10B)** Review and prioritize the activities of the data department within the office of Continuous Improvement and Accountability so they are more aligned with district and schools' data needs to provide real-time data across multiple measures delivered in a universal and user-friendly way.
- **10C)** Develop a well-articulated/operationalized set of expectations and routines for data use and accountability for those who support school leaders.
- **10D)** Develop or refine protocols for data reporting and establishing quality-assurance mechanisms focused on reliable data in order to establish a culture of intentional and regular use that supports data-driven decision-making and efficacy to improve teaching and learning.
- **10E)** Disaggregate data in meaningful ways to identify disparities in opportunity and outcomes as central to the district mission of equity, access, and racial justice.

10. Data Management and Use and Student Information Systems (Continued)

- **10F)** Provide time for central office staff and principals to increase their knowledge and skills on creating a culture of data to monitor continuous improvement at the school and classroom levels to increase accountability for teaching and learning goals.
- **10G)** Ensure that, once collected, data are be used, analyzed, and acted upon leading to a continuous cycle of collection, organization, and synthesis to support informed decision-making across the district.
- **10H)** Establish a data culture of customer service that results in responsiveness to data requests in a timely manner.
- **10I)** Enable data systems to report on students' progress after graduation, including postsecondary access and completion, formal apprenticeships, military participation, and remediation rates in order to create feedback loops for the district.

11. District and Leadership Capacity

- **11A)** Establish a customer service oriented central office organization with clear roles and responsibilities for personnel, departments, and service and support to schools including how decisions are made and communicated.
- **11B)** Identify and establish the key strategies and practices for providing effective and continuously improving teaching and learning (e.g., UDL, MTSS), the process and structures for coaching and supporting principals and school teams and monitoring implementation of district goals.
- **11C)** Develop explicit accountability systems to monitor the implementation of LCAP and SPSA goals and service and support to schools with transparent communication of the return on investment of efforts.
- **11D)** Revisit the Council of the Great City Schools 2017 report (Administration and Operation of Special Education) and the current office of special education organizational structure for the purpose of staffing the central office at the level commensurate to support a district the size of SCUSD.
- **11E)** Continue to negotiate the expectations for the principal evaluation tool and coach and support principals to improve the instructional core.
- **11F)** Develop, for each central office department, a strategic workflow including metrics and benchmarks to be verified with data and aligned with district goals and accountability expectations.
- **11G)** Develop a calendar to engage in continuous improvement and cycles of inquiry to assess district and school leadership culture, coherence, and professional learning that informs two-way communication with the superintendent to ensure district benchmarks and goals are met.
- **11H)** Establish a process for the cabinet to model and engage in ongoing dialogue and review of data around key performance indicators and benchmarks aligned with district goals in order to increase the skills, knowledge, and leadership capacity of the cabinet.

12. Governance Support with Instruction

- **12A)** Improve the process for how the district departments provide clear and timely data analysis of trends, patterns, root cause analyses, and solutions for improving teaching and learning to the board of education.
- **12B)** Provide clarity around district strategies and benchmarks for improving teaching and learning, so they are clearly understood, implemented, supported, and monitored by central office staff and school teams, and shared with the board.
- **12C)** Develop proactive two-way district communication and engagement strategies to anticipate issues, provide consistent messaging, and answer important questions for multiple audiences through the Chief Information Office.
- **12D)** When new governing board members join the SCUSD board, work sessions should be held to ensure roles, expectations, and priorities are articulated specifically as it relates to instructional vision, strategy, practices, and monitoring of student achievement. These should then occur regularly (e.g., 3 times per year) and provide a deeper study into various topics of district need and interest and involve appropriate staff.
- **12E)** Establish a review process (e.g., two times per year) on the progress on SIR actions and ensure the discussion and opportunities for Board input and that actions are added to the Board calendar of topics.
- **12F)** Work collectively with the district leadership to continue efforts to strengthen trust and develop a shared commitment, in principle, with labor partners that places improved student learning and closing achievement gaps as an explicit priority and develops the professional foundation for teaching and teacher leadership.

To access the full Sacramento City Unified School District SIR Report along with the actions listed by themes, [click here](#).

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