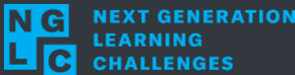




Learners at the Center in Lindsay, California

California's Lindsay Unified School District

Spring 2023





Lindsay Unified School District

Fast Facts

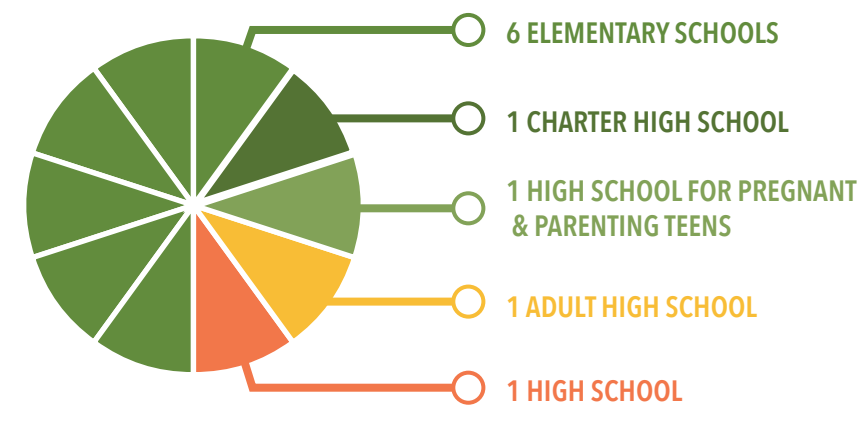
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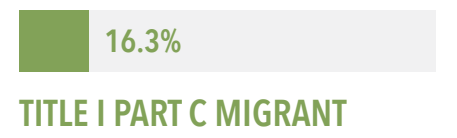
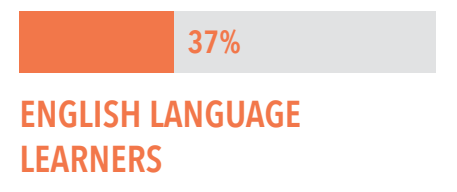




LINDSAY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
LINDSAY, CA



10 SCHOOLS
3,997 TOTAL STUDENTS





“ Back in 2007, we were working insanely hard. Hard work was not an issue, but we weren’t really doing what we promised we would do. We were graduating kids who couldn’t read. We had really good instruction that wasn’t making a difference. The learners [were] working, doing whatever we asked, and they were getting disappointed. And [district leaders] said, **‘We’re not gonna keep doing the same thing and expect a different result. We’re gonna do something different.’**”

— Cinnamon Scheufele, Executive Director for Curriculum and Instruction, Lindsay USD

Lindsay Unified School District (LUSD) is located in California’s rural Central Valley, in a community surrounded by orange groves and olive trees. Geographically isolated, Lindsay has a population of approximately 13,000. English and Spanish are spoken in most LUSD households, and more than half of LUSD’s 4,000 learners enter kindergarten as English language learners. Nearly all district learners qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

In 2022 the district was recognized for the safety of its schools based on data from the [California Healthy Kids Survey](#). Learners at Lindsay High School, for example, reported the lowest rate of bullying among all high schools in the state. Today, school and district leaders also note with pride a 97 percent graduation rate and the fact that 75 percent of those graduates attend college, attaining degrees at levels comparable to graduates from California’s best-known schools and most affluent communities. As Lindsay Education Foundation development director Barry Sommer reports, “We’re recognized for being a competency-based, personalized learning district that really puts learners first. We have

about 300 visitors a year who come to see what’s going on and employ the consulting arm of Lindsay, Lindsay Leads, to help them as they transform their systems.”

Fifteen years ago, when the district’s transformation began, LUSD schools were in a very different place. Educators and leaders who have worked in the district for many years can recall a time when, in Barry’s words, “Lindsay was known as the laughing stock of Tulare County.” He cites both a “tremendously high” rate of turnover among staff and a low graduation rate as evidence of poor performance at the time, and Superintendent Tom Rooney often tells the story of Lindsay High valedictorians who were placed in non-credit, remedial English courses at the universities they attended. Cinnamon Scheufele, executive director for curriculum and instruction, remembers Lindsay in those days as “very rough, with quite a bit of gang activity.” Says Barry, “We were embarrassed and hurt and very challenged, because all of our efforts, all our initiatives, failed measurably.”



Find out more about the LUSD Strategic Design.





Veteran educators all point to 2007 as the watershed year for Lindsay, the year that the [LUSD Strategic Design](#) was created and adopted by the Lindsay Unified School Board. As Barry describes, this innovative and comprehensive framework for the “Ideal Learning Experience” was created by the entire Lindsay community with support and inspiration from people he refers to as “education futurists and visionaries” like Beatrice McGarvey and Chuck Schwahn. For over a year, the district hosted community forums, soliciting input from a wide variety of stakeholders around shared values and visions for learning.

According to Cinnamon, parents proved to be key partners in the development of the strategic design adopted in 2007. One reason families were supportive, she says, is that “they knew what we were doing wasn’t working.” Deeper than that, however, were the trusting relationships between parents and LUSD educators. For example, Cinnamon recounts how a Lindsay parent once said that their school ranked third—behind only God and their priest—in trustworthiness. “We did not have tons of pushback. We had a lot of bumps and bruises just because this work is really hard to do and there’s a ton to figure out, but parent support was a strong point for us.”

In keeping with the shared understanding that Lindsay needed, as Barry describes, “to totally revise the delivery of public education,”

the LUSD Strategic Design is an ambitious and all-encompassing document. Not only does it express the community’s values and practices around curriculum, instruction, and assessment, it redefines success to include a wide range of Lifelong Learning Standards. The framework also employs an entirely new vocabulary to communicate the new vision and new roles for both young people and adults: learner rather than student, learning facilitator in place of teacher, and learning community instead of school.

Fifteen years after its adoption, the Strategic Design still guides the ongoing transformation of the learner experience in Lindsay schools. For example, the LUSD Student/Parent Handbook for the 2022-2023 academic year opens with a letter from Tom, in his role as the district’s superintendent, about the importance of the Strategic Design in supporting the district’s mission, which is “Empowering and Motivating for Today and Tomorrow.” In particular, he focuses on two pillars of the transformation work since 2007: the district-wide adoption of the learner-centered Performance-Based System (PBS) and the cultivation of Lifelong Learning Standards—what learners “need to know, understand, and be like in order to thrive.”

Learners from Team Empower develop leadership skills by facilitating site visits for the hundreds of visitors who come to learn about Lindsay’s learner-centered Performance-Based System.



01 Learner-Centered Learning for Life

Today, LUSD's approach has evolved to emphasize both the competency-based PBS model and the whole-person definition of success articulated in the Lifelong Learning Standards. However, the district's initial focus was on academics and the elements of the Learning Sphere essential to academic success. Developing competencies like those associated with personal wellbeing, interpersonal relationships, civic engagement, and cultural awareness emerged as priorities over time.

Lindsay's Performance-Based System.

To address the significant challenges learners were experiencing with respect to academic achievement, LUSD developed PBS, which Tom describes as "an innovative, learner-centered approach to education." The purpose of the system, he explains, "is to personalize learning to meet learners' academic needs, learning styles, and interests. Learners work at their performance level and advance through the learning only when they have demonstrated proficiency in the required knowledge or skills."

In practical terms, this means that learners are not automatically assigned content according to the traditional age-based grade levels. Instead, they progress based on evidence of proficiency through performance levels, frequently with variation from subject to subject. For example, a learner might be working on level four content in language arts and at level six in math.



Listen to three learners talk about how Lindsay High School supports them to become self-directed, lifelong learners.

Leveraging technology to overcome the constraints of time and place that traditional schooling imposes, the PBS approach offers learners flexibility in where they learn, at what pace, and how they demonstrate mastery of content and skills. The district's learning management system (LMS), Empower, also provides learners with access to curriculum 24/7. As Cinnamon points out, learners' ability to "dig into content online" helped redefine the roles of learners and learning facilitators in LUSD schools, a change that came as a surprise to some educators.

"There's more than one way to learn this content, and it doesn't have to come straight from the adults," she says. "It was hard for some to get over the fact that adults were not at the center of everything." Brett Grimm, who teaches at Lindsay High School, describes how he defines the role of learning facilitator in

social studies: “I teach U.S. History and there’s some concepts that are too brand new for me to ask kids to go off and learn by themselves. But the philosophy, the shift, is that learners need to do the doing. It’s my job to facilitate scenarios or activities where they have to grapple with ideas and talk with each other and figure things out.”

In addition, Barry notes, the tech-enabled PBS model supports transparency for learners and their families. “We don’t need report cards as a sole source of information anymore,” he says, “when you can pull up a piece of technology and see not only where your learners are in terms of content level, but what they’ve mastered, what comes next, what assessments they need to demonstrate their skills, what their interests and passions are. All of that is totally transparent.”

Moreover, Barry explains, Lindsay learners do not fail or repeat grades or courses as in

traditional models. Learners who have not yet demonstrated proficiency in the standards for a particular content level are supported to do so in targeted ways. For example, he says, if you were a learner who was “not yet ready to go on to level seven math and needed to meet three standards to move on, maybe you’ll do that Thursday night for the rest of the semester. Or maybe you’ll do that in a two-week bootcamp if you need instruction. You don’t have to repeat the whole year. You just repeat the places you have holes in your learning. We know where those holes are and you know where those holes are because Empower is very clearly showing you.”

Scott Wood, a learning facilitator of math and engineering at Lindsay High School, describes how PBS provides learners with voice and choice. As a learner, he says, “You have your own playlist in our delivery system where all your [learning] targets are embedded, including activities. So you can pull out an

activity, see what to do with it, and submit it to Empower to be graded.” At times, he says, “Learners decide they don’t need an LF [learning facilitator] to teach them. They can go take an entire course by themselves. We adapt to learner needs as much as possible.”

In addition to choice around where or when to access the curriculum, PBS offers learners flexibility in assessment of learning targets. According to Scott, traditional tests do play a key role in assessing math proficiency, and they also help prepare learners for the expectations of college coursework. However, he says, “Kids have a voice in a lot of things that we do in the PBS system. They have multiple ways to show evidence of their learning, which is awesome. Learners don’t pass a target just by taking a test.” Scott cites examples from his classes, such as one-on-one conversations and classroom observations of competency, math applications like IXL, and in-class gallery walks, along with more

traditional worksheets and activities. “There’s a thousand ways that you can show that you know what you’re doing,” he asserts, “not just taking a test.”

According to LUSD’s leaders, Lindsay’s transformation to the learner-centered, performance-based PBS model required the district and community to address some immediate infrastructure challenges. For example, Cinnamon recalls one major hurdle: access to technology in learners’ homes. “The kids didn’t have computers, and even if they did, they didn’t have wifi. That’s how the community wifi project was born.” As a result of that community-wide initiative, she reports that all district learners now have free internet at home, an asset that proved vital during the COVID-19 pandemic. “Everything was already online. It was hard, but it would have been much harder if our learners didn’t already have internet.”





“A big mistake that we made in Lindsay was that, first thing out of the gate, we did not make the Lifelong Learning Standards the most important thing. If we have academic competence in learners, that’s great. If they have agency or empowerment, that’s great. If they’re going to the best colleges or having opportunities to advance in life, that’s all great. But I’m also really invested in what kind of human beings they’re becoming. I want people who are caring, compassionate human beings. I want people who are self directed, who are culturally aware. When you look at some of the challenges we face in our world, I want people who are economic producers and recognize their role as responsible global citizens. And that’s what the Lifelong Learning Standards embrace.”

— Tom Rooney, Superintendent, Lindsay Unified School District

Lifelong Learning Standards

According to Tom, since the implementation of PBS across the district, academic achievement has improved significantly. In 2007 only 21 percent of Lindsay graduates matriculated at a four-year college or university. That rate has more than doubled. Proficiency in English language arts and mathematics is now close to the state-wide average and above that average for low-income students.

LUSD leaders and educators take satisfaction in the results of the initial focus on academics. Nevertheless, many, like Cinnamon, express a wish that the Lifelong Learning Standards had played a more central role in the district’s transformation from the beginning. “People ask us all the time, ‘What would you do differently?’ In retrospect, we would have put the Lifelong Learning Standards front and center sooner.”

Brett, the social studies learning facilitator, expresses a perspective shared by many of his colleagues: “We did develop the Lifelong Learning Standards, but I don’t think anyone fully understood how powerful they were. We know that social-emotional development is just as powerful or essential to building the academic piece. Hindsight’s 20/20, right? But at that time, our house was burning down in the sense that our kids were failing. And so academics was a huge focus—bringing the rigor up. That was our focus at the time.”

In describing the process Lindsay used to create the Lifelong Learning Standards, Barry notes that stakeholder engagement was of paramount importance. “A lot of people don’t use the community for that input,” he observes. “There’s often not a learner sitting in that group. They have a team of administrators or teachers. They’re using other districts’ good work to frame that portrait of a graduate. That’s really different from asking the parents what they want for their kids.”

The seven spheres that make up the standards, he says, reflect the community’s answers to questions like, “What do you want learners to look like, be like, and embrace when they graduate?” According to Barry, the voice of the community was clear: “We want them to be the kind of people who will marry our children and be our neighbors.” Beyond academic gains and academic foundations, they told us, “We want to grow people who are wonderful people, who you want to live next to or welcome into your family.”



Listen to Tom Rooney explain why Lifelong Learning Standards matter for all learners.



“ We were looking for how to make sure that the gift we give to the world, our graduate, is not just academically sound, but also a really good person— caring, compassionate, civic minded, culturally aware. What would we want for our own children? We would want that. We’ve all heard of athletes who won’t take coaching. They don’t go very far. We’ve heard of really smart, really accomplished teens that don’t have friends because they don’t play well with others. I have two boys. I don’t want them to be jerks. I want them to be great. I want them to be really good, thoughtful people.

— Cinnamon Scheufele, Executive Director for Curriculum and Instruction, Lindsay Unified School District, and parent of two Lindsay High graduates



02 Living the Lifelong Learning Standards

Although Empower, the district LMS, enables learners to exercise voice and choice in their learning, LUSD educators do not claim that merely offering such options is sufficient. Rather, they believe that fostering the true ownership and self-direction expressed in the Learning Sphere of the Lifelong Learning Standards requires active and ongoing cultivation of skills like goal setting and habits of mind like perseverance over multiple years. As Cinnamon points out, “It Isn’t something you can do once a month and expect it to make any bit of difference.”

For that reason, the standards are embedded throughout the curriculum starting in the earliest grades. According to Barry, “Every one of these spheres has a very clear set of developmental curriculum, rubrics, and assessments, just like you would for science and math and language arts and and history,

that carry from kindergarten all the way through 12th grade. From 5-year-olds to 18-year-olds, [learners] can all recite their current SMART goals and talk about lifelong learning goals. That’s part of their vocabulary, part of how they think.”

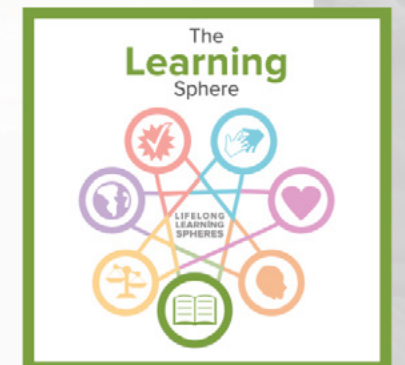
As a coach working with the district’s elementary-level learning facilitators, PBS curriculum and instruction specialist Joel Martinez Dominguez actively promotes the Lifelong Learning Standards as the core of the learner experience. “Math is extremely important. Reading is extremely important. But if they have these skills for lifelong learning, they’re going to be able to go out into the world and make a bigger impact. They’re going to learn because they’re going to have the growth mindset. Because they have skills like persevering, if any obstacle gets in front of them, they’re going to have the tools to overcome those obstacles.”

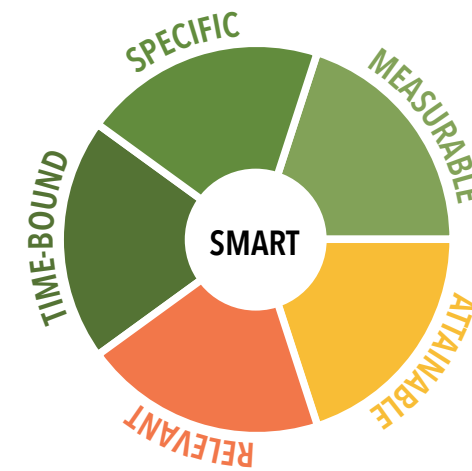
LINDSAY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT'S **LEARNING SPHERE OF LIVING**



A SELF-DIRECTED, LIFELONG LEARNER, WHO:

- Possesses core knowledge on which to build future learning
- Sets and carries out personal learning goals
- Acquires, analyzes, organizes, and evaluates information from a variety of sources
- Perseveres in difficult situations
- Demonstrates the habits of continuous improvement
- Self-assesses progress, evaluates actions, and adjusts as needed
- Engages in tasks even when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent
- Views situations outside the boundaries of standard conventions





“Learners have so much agency when they are little,” Joel observes, “and when they come to a traditional education system, we strip away the agency we’d like them to have.” Instead of enforcing rules based on tradition or adult convenience, Joel encourages learning facilitators at the elementary level to “foster, not diminish, learner agency” by offering options—like how to demonstrate proficiency—that align to learners’ SMART goals, interests, and strengths.

The elementary grades, he says, should also be a time for learners to cultivate the mindsets for lifelong learning by thinking about the world outside of the classroom. “We’re working with the idea that, especially for our Lifelong Learning Standards, they can show their proficiency at home, in a sport, playing a musical instrument, or in a community outside the education system, like their church. Learning is not just here in the education system; it’s everywhere because that’s part of lifelong learning.”

According to Joel, these learner mindsets are supported by experiential learning experiences. “We’re doing a lot of project-based learning now,” he says, “allowing them to have the teaching through little exposures. And our goal is at the end they’re going to create a project where there’s a bigger community impact.”

Kindergarten Sight Words My Short Term SMART Goal
I will be able to read and write ___ words by

September	October	November	December	January
Finished red & Orange words	Finish yellow words by Halloween			
February	March	April	May	

so I will practice my words by

- cut and paste
- trace and rainbow writing
- practicing at home

My Long Term SMART Goal
I will be able to read and write level D words by (circle month).

September	October	November	December/January	February	March	April	May
Level A	Level A	Level B	Level B	Level C	Level C	Level D	Level D
Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____
Read: _____	Read: _____	Read: _____	Read: _____	Read: _____	Read: _____	Read: _____	Read: _____
Write: _____	Write: _____	Write: _____	Write: _____	Write: _____	Write: _____	Write: _____	Write: _____

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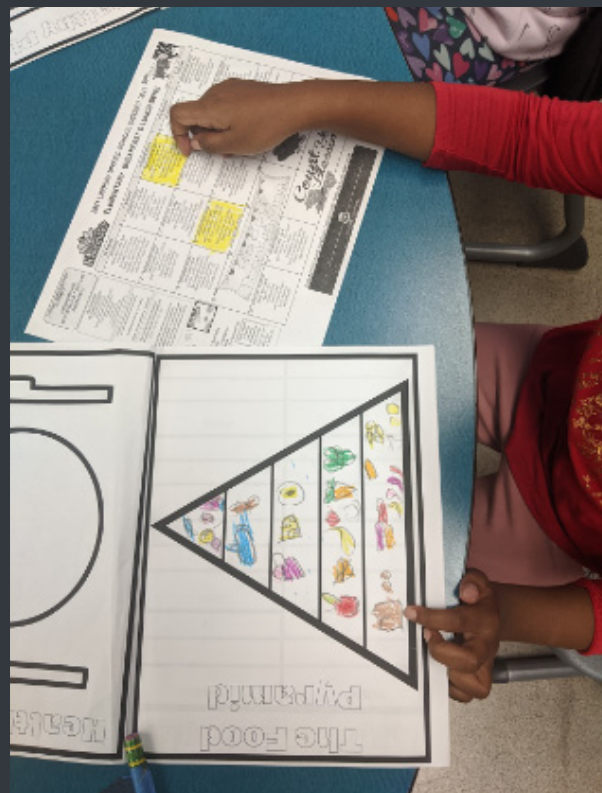
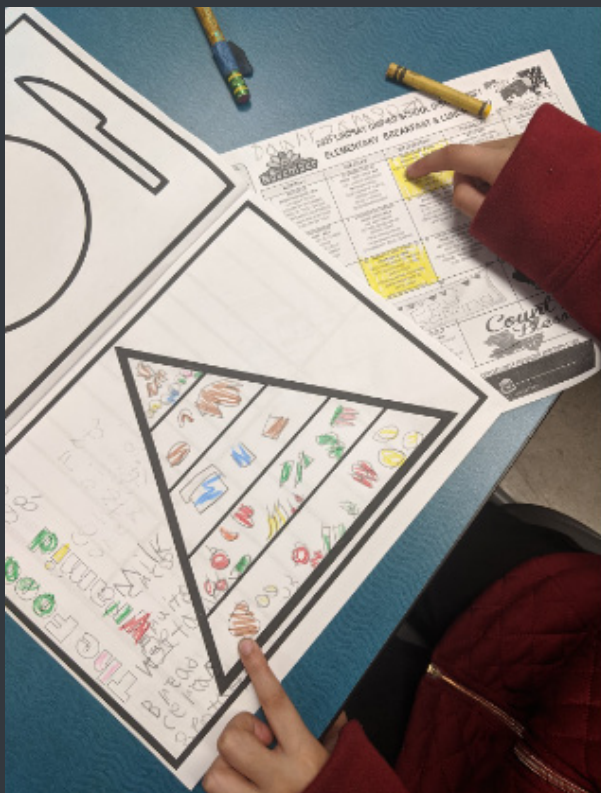
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September	October	November	December/January	February	March	April	May
Level A	Level A	Level B	Level B	Level C	Level C	Level D	Level D
Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____	Date: _____
Read: _____	Read: _____	Read: _____	Read: _____	Read: _____	Read: _____	Read: _____	Read: _____
Write: _____	Write: _____	Write: _____	Write: _____	Write: _____	Write: _____	Write: _____	Write: _____

Learners as young as those in kindergarten set personalized short- and long-term goals like these for literacy.



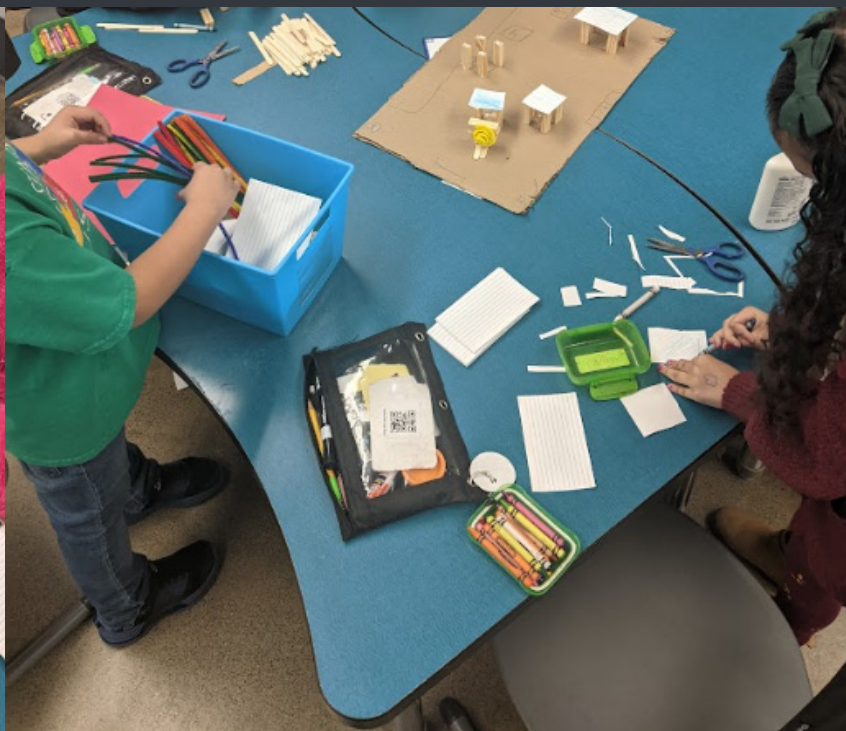
In this project, learners apply their knowledge of nutrition by analyzing the cafeteria menu at their own learning community.

At the high school level, developing the Lifelong Learning Standards is seen as an essential part of preparing learners for future success. Using the language of multi-tiered system of support, or MTSS, Lindsay High School principal Cindy Alonzo refers to the Lifelong Learning Standards as the foundation—or Tier 1—of Lindsay’s program, and she also points to its prominence in expectations for graduation. “We strive to call those out, integrate them in the content as much as possible, and develop those within our learners,” she says. “We also have a senior exit exam where learners talk about what they’ve learned and how they’ve grown since they’ve been in Lindsay Unified and those Lifelong Learning Standards are things that they hit.”

Across the curriculum, the Lifelong Learning Standards are often linked with academic learning and demonstrating proficiency in subject-area content. Many LUSD educators see the standards and academic achievement as mutually reinforcing. However, this mindset has developed over time and for some was initially a struggle. Cinnamon, for example, recalls a time when “lifelong learning or anything in the social-emotional realm would have been viewed as kind of fluff—the target is whatever the content is. It took me a bit of time because [as an educator] you’re an academic person. You’re really pushing academics, but realizing how much they’re connected is where our shift in mindset is. [The Lifelong Learning Standards] are really important as an embedded piece and not as a separate thing that we do sometimes.”

At these exit interviews, Barry explains, “Every learner is sitting in front of a panel of community people, school people, school board members. They tell their story, and they demonstrate their seven spheres of competence in the Lifelong Learning Standards. They talk about their plans for the future, which demonstrates their goal-setting and their civic-minded and global orientation. You can’t graduate until you demonstrate your proficiency.”

In the same way that learners in district schools exercise agency, LUSD learning facilitators have choices and options on how to integrate Lifelong Learning Standards with academic content standards. According to Cindy, learning facilitators at Lindsay High School strive for common “high markers” in their practice, such as designing learning that is relevant, hands-on, and performance based, but at the same time, she says, “People



See this [outline and rubric](#) to learn more about senior exit presentations at Lindsay High School.

Senior Project Exhibition Outline & Rubric	
TIME FRAME	PRESENTATION OUTLINE & EXPECTATIONS
1-2 MINUTES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slide deck includes overview slide introducing themselves (Name, age, where they grew up, info about their family or culture) Learned in their spoken presentation, offers interesting or insightful information about themselves (i.e., I speak two languages, I love to read, etc.)
2 MINUTES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slide deck includes visuals or information that represents challenges, success, and/or obstacles they have had in their learning experiences (can include elementary school, but should focus on high school) Learner reflects on their spoken presentation, offers challenges and successes and how they have successfully brought them to life in their senior year
2 MINUTES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slide deck includes visuals or information that represents goals they have set (i.e., going to college, going to work, how they will do for college, etc.) Learner reflects on their spoken presentation, offers progress and goals, actions they've taken to start those goals and plans, and where they ultimately want to end up
1 MINUTE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slide deck includes closing slide that thanks the viewer and offers a final thought Learner offers, in their spoken presentation, a thank you for the time and a final thought that represents how they feel about the accomplishment of graduation
A SUCCESSFUL EXHIBITION PRESENTATION INCLUDES:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Person who connects with the audience Slides with content Clear and legible or close readability Answers "their" questions (i.e., "her" "his") Many professional-looking items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear steps to their progress (i.e., not too many items that are hard to read) High information-to-words ratio (i.e., paragraphs of text) Effective visuals that represent key learning points

can decide what fits for them based on their curriculum. Our history department and our science department do use a lot of project-based learning, English as well. With math, we just want [learning] to be relevant and hands on.”

“It’s very flexible,” says Cinnamon. “[A Lifelong Learning Standard] could show up on a playlist. Depending on the age of the learners, it could be a guided lesson. It could be something that is done in a project, especially if it’s service oriented. We don’t just say, ‘Well, we’re going to put it in here and hope it fits.’ It has to be intentional.”



QUICK WIN

Use the Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) process to help learners think about their data and what kinds of short- and long-term meaningful goals they can set.

This is an opportunity for a goal orientation discussion!

LESSON-PLANNING AND DESIGN STRATEGIES

- Build learner understanding of criteria for success through scoring rubrics or exemplars (P)
- Provide direct instruction on goal setting and criteria for high-quality goals (e.g., SMART goals) (P)
- Facilitate daily or weekly goal-setting routines (P)
- Set upper and lower limits for learner-developed goals in advance of goal setting (P)
- Establish and articulate goals with learners (P/F)
- Model goal setting (P/F)
- Support and monitor learners’ use of quantitative and qualitative data to set goals (P/F)
- Use quantitative and qualitative (e.g., assessment) data to create goals with learners (P/F)

P = planned
F = facilitated spontaneously

According to Cinnamon Scheufele, the executive director for curriculum and instruction, a key resource for supporting learning facilitators to find a natural fit between the Lifelong Learning Standards and their own subjects and approach to teaching is the LUSD “[Look Fors Guide](#),” which features Lifelong Learning Standards. The Guide presents learner behaviors related to each outcome, videos of teaching practices, a research summary, and other resources, along with suggested actions for learning facilitators, both planned and spontaneous, like these ideas from the [Goal Orientation Looks Fors’](#) page.



In some subjects the fit with lifelong learning skills seems natural, even self-evident. For example, Nancy Wills, the chair of Lindsay High School's visual and performing arts department, explains how Lifelong Learning Standards have always been essential in her music classes. "I run a flamenco guitar program, so in my subject, you have to have these skills. If you don't have good practice habits, if you don't have grit, if you don't have self-determination, there's really no way to be successful. There's a direct correlation between your work habits and the final product, which is really visible and audible in music. [The standards] were something I really wanted to incorporate into what I do in the classroom in order to produce a better product."

For Nancy, however, embracing learner agency is a more recent focus. She describes the evolution of her teaching in response to the challenges posed by COVID-19. "When the pandemic hit I had to really change the way I thought about what I was doing. I was having such a hard time getting kids to respond at all. That was a really difficult time. So I changed my program to be completely learner centered."

One of the first areas in which Nancy promoted learner agency was in the choice of resources and ways to learn. "Rather than only using traditional music reading, I also incorporated YouTube tutorials, different types of resources, and different types of learning. Things that are available and used by professional musicians. When I went to

school," she recalls, "We learned to read music. That's how you had to access music because you didn't have any other resources. You had to read in order to play. That's not true today."

Nancy also transformed her curriculum and grading practices in ways that place learners' goals and growth at the forefront. For example, she organized her assignments into two-week cycles of learning, goal-setting, feedback, and performance. Using Empower, Nancy shares video demonstrations of new techniques, tutorials, feedback on learners' performances, and a list of songs learners can choose from. Or, she says, they can propose one of their own "and then tell me how they're going to learn it by providing a link or a YouTube tutorial so I can see what they are working on."

Although mastery of the musical selections is still an overarching goal, Nancy explains that, "mastery is not what I'm grading. What I'm grading is the process." When learners perform for the class at the end of the two-week cycle, Nancy says, she does not expect perfection and does not treat the performance as a final product. She assigns grades based on how learners "have been following the process and if I can see that they're using the feedback and doing the things that are going to help them progress."

According to Nancy, the changes have been "really terrifying, but also super rewarding. What was so terrifying was that I've had a very successful, high-quality program, but only 40

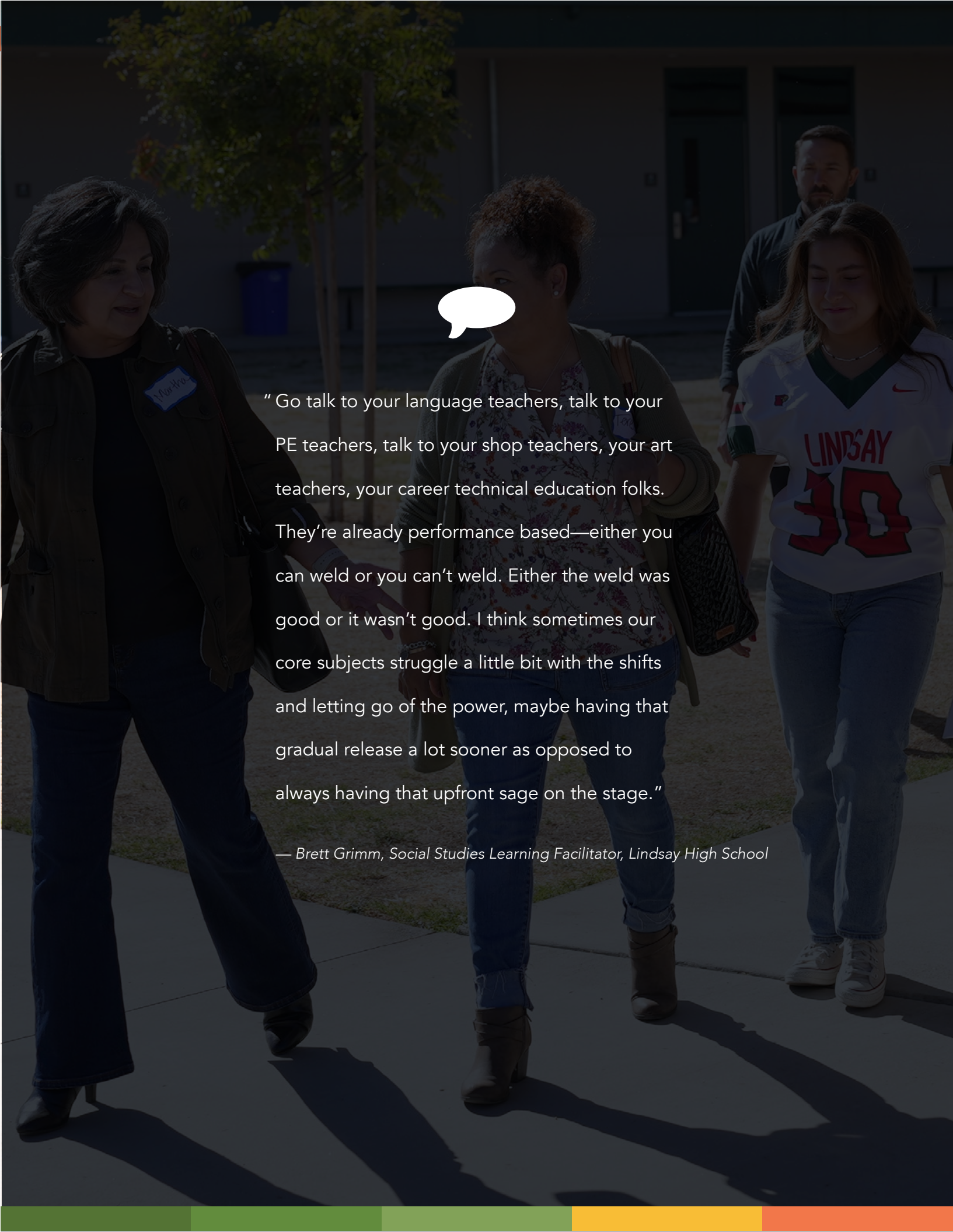
percent of those kids were really excelling. The others were just kind of hanging on. Now it's a little more out of control because I have 200 kids. They're all learning different things, but they're learning the things that they want to, what they're passionate about. Kids are so excited to come to class now."

In addition to bolstering her students' desire to learn, Nancy observes, "This is where the lifelong learning comes into play quite a bit. They're trying much harder. They're willing to keep going."

Certain subjects and learning experiences seem to be particularly conducive to developing the Lifelong Learning Standards, yet Lindsay educators like Scott have found ways to integrate them in multiple learning contexts. For example, in his role coaching robotics teams, Scott actively supports learners to cultivate the skills they need for competition and also for life—teamwork, preparation, and presenting themselves well. However, he also addresses the Lifelong Learning Standards in his math and engineering classes.

"The key is to be intentional and transparent with learners," he says. "I think it's important for us to graduate excellent citizens and people more than anything else. And if you don't talk about it in class, then it's not important. I'm overt in my approach to making them good people, so when we have open discussions in classrooms, I tell them the purpose of it up front: 'This is the reason I'm doing this. This is why this discussion is happening.'"

For example, he says, "I refer to things that have happened in my life or bring in videos of speeches by famous people like Denzel Washington talking about what happened in their lives, how they have gone through the same things that [learners] are going to go through, how it worked with their lives and now they're famous. Then we link those ideas back into my math class to encourage them to hope, to dream, to set proper goals."



"Go talk to your language teachers, talk to your PE teachers, talk to your shop teachers, your art teachers, your career technical education folks. They're already performance based—either you can weld or you can't weld. Either the weld was good or it wasn't good. I think sometimes our core subjects struggle a little bit with the shifts and letting go of the power, maybe having that gradual release a lot sooner as opposed to always having that upfront sage on the stage."

— Brett Grimm, Social Studies Learning Facilitator, Lindsay High School



03 From Teacher to Learning Facilitator

After fifteen years of transformation and co-creation of Lindsay's Ideal Learning Experience, phrases like *learning facilitator* (or LF) and *learning community* instead of *teacher* and *school* have become universal. District leaders, principals, educators, and learners spontaneously use this language to convey and constantly reinforce LUSD's learner-centered culture. More than a change in terminology, however, words like these reflect a shared mindset that shapes every aspect of teaching and learning, from the personalized, competency-based PBS model for learners to the hiring, coaching, evaluation, and professional development of educators.

According to many members of the LUSD community, the district's focus on the learner stands in such sharp contrast to traditional thinking that it can be challenging for outsiders to understand and for new learning facilitators to put into practice. Cinnamon, for example, expresses the disconnect between traditional teacher preparation and the needs of Lindsay learners this way: "People come out of universities and they think that the teacher is going to be the center, doing all the talking and [learners] are in rows and they listen." As a result, she says, evaluation and professional growth in a traditional model "tends to focus on the adult, on the teaching: How's the lesson going? How is it prepared? But you can have the best lesson you've ever taught, and—I almost hate to say it—if the learners are not really learning, it almost doesn't matter. We're not adult centered at Lindsay."

Yazmin Martin Aceves, coordinator of the district's teacher residency program, explains what learner centered means in terms of mindsets and practices, especially for new learning facilitators: "Something that we support LFs to understand is that a learner-centered environment is really about giving up some ownership and co-creating a learning environment with the learners." To that end, she explains, learners and their learning facilitators co-create a document that expresses the shared vision and behavioral and cultural norms that will define the learning experience in that learning environment—what the LUSD community calls a "code of cooperation."

Rather than expecting learners to be compliant recipients of knowledge and adult guidance, she says, "The learning facilitator really helps learners track and set their own goals. And since they have this shared vision together, learners know as soon as they step into that learning environment what their next steps are."

Practically speaking, Yazmin notes, teaching at LUSD requires personalization and flexibility. "The lesson plan is not going to be one-size-fits all. [Learning facilitators] need to understand that learners learn in different ways and in different time frames. They need to be thinking about all of their learners, to see that some learners might need extra time and give them that time through mini-lessons and reteaching."

Moreover, she says, even the concept of a grade-level assignment is much more fluid in a performance-based system. “You might have sixth graders, but you might be teaching them in content level five, level six, or some of them can be going on to content level seven. You have to know different grade levels to be able to meet all of your learners where they are and then where they’re going to be headed.”

More broadly, she says, learning facilitators “need to really care about the learner and make sure that the learners are their number one priority.” Scott amplifies the importance of placing learners, their needs, and their futures at the center of adult practice. “We have LFs that last one or two years that are excellent LFs,” he says, “but if you don’t connect with kids, if there’s no vision for you of those kids’ growing for life past high school, this isn’t the place that you’re looking for. You’re not going to be staying in this district.”

Recognizing that the mindsets and teaching practices expected of adults in a learner-centered, personalized, performance-based system are different from those in traditional models, LUSD has established its own pipeline for recruiting, hiring, and supporting learning facilitators. According to Barry, the majority of newly hired learning facilitators in district schools “are now people who live in the community, who’ve come through our system and chose to go into teaching—and whose debt we retire when they make a commitment

to come work for Lindsay and/or other Title I schools. Those are the people who are coming to work in Lindsay. It makes it a lot easier because they know the system and they’ve embraced it.”

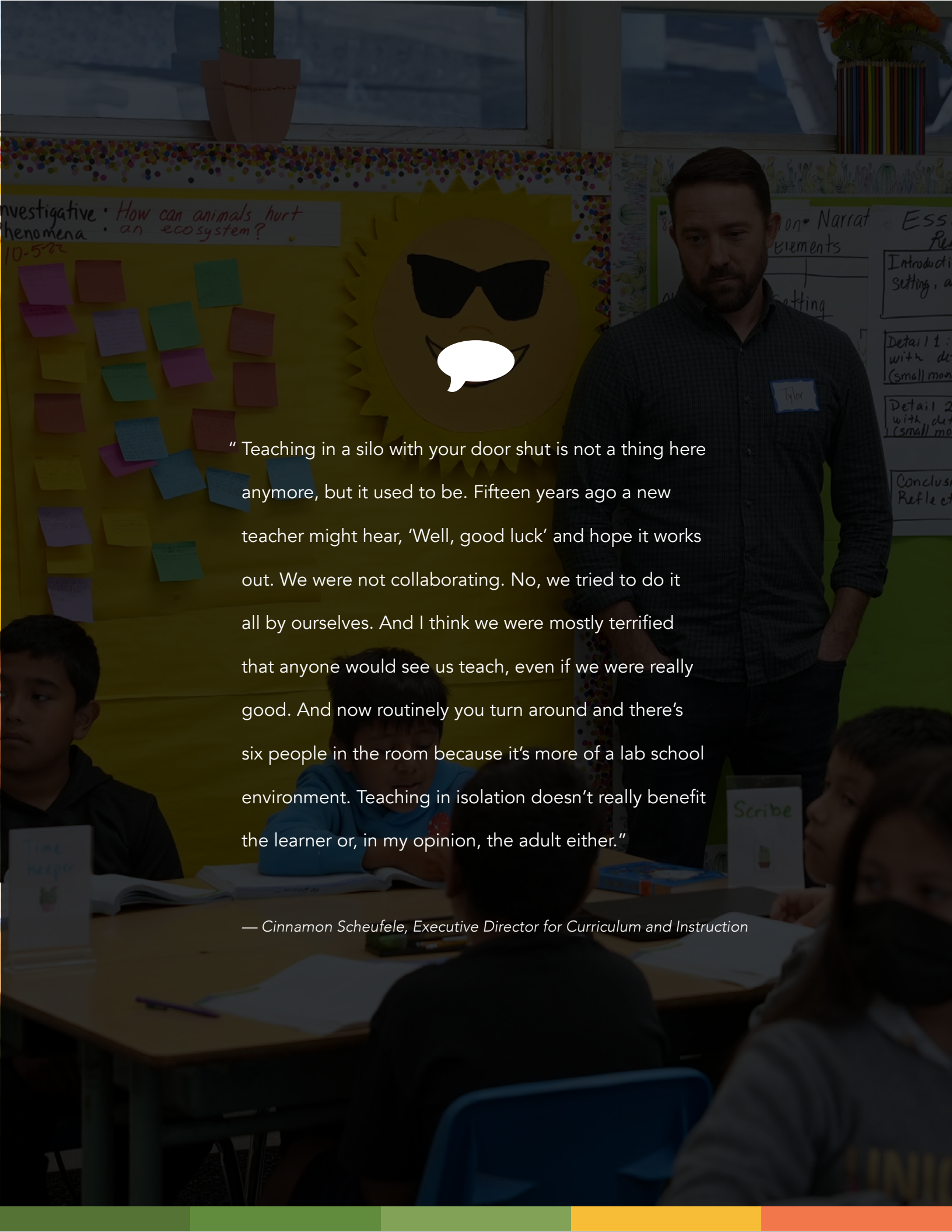
Another route some learning facilitators take is through Lindsay’s teacher residency program. In partnership with Alder Graduate School of Education, LUSD supports aspiring learning facilitators to earn teaching credentials and prepares them to experience success working in district schools. “Most of the residents have graduated from Lindsay High, and they already have that understanding of Lindsay,” says Yazmin. “It makes it much easier because they have that connection to the community.”

According to Yazmin, each resident is partnered with a mentor learning facilitator, with whom they work for a year. As coordinator of the program, she also engages in a coaching cycle in which she and the mentor learning facilitator observe the resident every other week and provide feedback, identifying strengths—or “glows”—as well as specific areas to work on. “Then when I’m gone that next week,” she explains, the mentor learning facilitator continues to work with the resident on that one growth area. “Sometimes it might take them a week or it might take them two weeks or a little longer. So even within the residency, we do try to personalize it to really meet the needs of the residents.”



“The staff on our campus are all focused on the kids and how they interact with you and how they interact with each other. If somebody’s having a hard time, we make sure that they have access to somebody who can talk with them. This is not an accidental thing. It’s a focus. It’s on purpose. We’re making sure that kids have connection—not just on our campus but building outside connections so that when they leave us they will be self-motivated and able to take care of themselves.”

— Scott Wood, Math Learning Facilitator, Lindsay High School



“Teaching in a silo with your door shut is not a thing here anymore, but it used to be. Fifteen years ago a new teacher might hear, ‘Well, good luck’ and hope it works out. We were not collaborating. No, we tried to do it all by ourselves. And I think we were mostly terrified that anyone would see us teach, even if we were really good. And now routinely you turn around and there’s six people in the room because it’s more of a lab school environment. Teaching in isolation doesn’t really benefit the learner or, in my opinion, the adult either.”

— Cinnamon Scheufele, Executive Director for Curriculum and Instruction

Coaching is a cornerstone of supporting learning facilitators and fostering a growth mindset among adults at Lindsay schools. District educators have spent years writing and refining documents like a comprehensive learning facilitator handbook (now in its fourth revision) and the [Look Fors Guide](#) to support professional learning of new and experienced learning facilitators. However, as Cindy points out, “Although we do indoctrinate our new LFs for something like five days of training as soon as they’re hired, having coaches and mentors and other people that can continue to provide support, hand in hand with the principal, is what allows for theory to become practice, to become habits.”

For Joel, coaching new learning facilitators is about pointing out and supporting growth opportunities. “We’re not evaluating them. It’s a hundred percent coaching. It is about how to help the learning facilitators increase their knowledge and be able to support their learners.” Evaluation is part of being a learning facilitator, Joel acknowledges, but he emphasizes the importance of feedback in a learner-centered model like Lindsay’s. “We need to understand that evaluation is about the students’ learning. It isn’t about the LF. It isn’t personal. It’s about the end goal, which is educating our learners and helping them be prepared for the world. So we’re using our data, we’re using observations. Come into my class. What do you see? Critique it, analyze it.”

“It’s about fostering that mindset that it’s okay to fail,” he says. “It’s okay to make mistakes. My digital lesson didn’t work. What am I going to do to learn from it and fix it?” To Joel, all members of a learning community must embrace and model a growth mindset, starting with leaders. “It starts with our administration. If they make a mistake, they say, ‘Okay, I acknowledge I made a mistake and now this is what I’m going to do to fix it. And this is what I learned from it, which is going to make our system better.’ It starts with the people on the top.”

Embracing a growth mindset, says Barry, is one way all adults in the system model the Lifelong Learning Standards. “This set of seven standards for lifelong learning is just as applicable to me, Barry, as it is for Benjamin in kindergarten,” he maintains. “We all feel committed to these standards, and we work really hard to develop them for ourselves as well. So all of us, every person—the bus driver, the yard duty person, the custodian—has a personalized learning plan. We all are developing in our own way. And it’s about cooperation, not competition. It’s the Lindsay way to be collaborative. And that breeds a culture of caring, compassionate people, which is one of the cooler components of lifelong learning.” ■



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