Strategic Practices for Student Success
Improving Dashboard Indicators:
A Study of Riverside County School Districts

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Introduction

Riverside County covers over 7,300 square miles with a county population of nearly 2.5 million, serving a student population of approximately 420,000 according to 2024-2025 enrollment data[1]. Riverside County students are served by 23 school districts, along with numerous charter schools, and programs operated by the Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE). In addition to direct student services, the RCOE provides specific educational, financial, legislative, and leadership services and support to all TK-12 school districts and charter schools in Riverside County. As an organization, it is comprised of the elected Riverside County Superintendent of Schools and the array of individuals employed by the County Superintendent to help fulfill their statutory duties and responsibilities. The RCOE Pledge states that *every student in Riverside County will graduate from high school academically and socially prepared for college, the workforce, and civic responsibility*. The Pledge serves to define student success in relevant, measurable, and achievable terms and is the foundation for the work of the RCOE.

The **California Statewide System of Support**[2] is designed as a tiered model that affords services to school districts and schools based upon identified needs in order to support continuous improvement efforts. The first tier, **General Assistance**, consists of resources and support made available to all local educational agencies (LEAs). **Differentiated Assistance** (DA) is the second tier of assistance required by the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) statute, provided to LEAs that meet eligibility criteria[3]. DA eligibility is determined based on student group outcomes on the CA School Dashboard. The Dashboard is published annually and contains outcome data in various state indicators for school districts, schools, and student groups across eight state priorities identified in LCFF[4]. Indicators include academic outcomes in English language arts and mathematics, English learner progress, chronic absenteeism, suspension, graduation, and college/career preparedness. County superintendents, charter authorizers, the California Department of Education (CDE), and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) provide DA for eligible LEAs in the form of individually designed assistance to address identified performance issues, including significant disparities in performance among student groups[5].

In Riverside County, DA consists of several common processes that are differentiated for each eligible district. As required per CA Education Code 52071, the RCOE supports districts with identifying strengths and weaknesses through a root cause analysis process. This is coupled with working collaboratively with the school district to secure assistance from an academic, programmatic, or fiscal expert(s) to identify and implement effective programs and practices that are designed to improve performance in any areas of weakness identified by the school district.

After the annual publication of the CA School Dashboard, representatives from the RCOE communicate with representatives in each eligible district. This is followed by an initial meeting between a team from the RCOE and a team from each district to review data and discuss strengths and challenges. A plan is established for conducting a root cause analysis (RCA) in any areas of focus stemming from CA School Dashboard outcomes. After completing the RCA and determining specific actions, additional supports and services are offered. If the district is in need of the offered services, the RCOE and the district team collaboratively plan for the implementation of identified services. Every effort is made to align the DA process with the timeline for each district's development of its Local Control and Accountability Plan[6] (LCAP) to ensure that any areas of identified need inform actions and services within the LCAP. As additional needs arise, districts coordinate with a liaison from the RCOE to determine how to address these needs.

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[1] CA Department of Education (CDE) - Enrollment data in DataQuest
https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/EnrEthGrd.aspx?cds=33&agglevel=county&year=2024-25
[2] Statewide System of Support https://ccee-ca.org/about-the-system/
[3] LEA Criteria for Differentiated Assistance https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/leaproposedcrit.asp
[4] LCFF State Priorities https://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/lcff1sys-resources.asp
[5] CDE System of Support https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/csss.asp
[6] Local Control and Accountability Plan https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/lc/

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this self-study was to gain insight into district successes in improving outcomes in state indicators for specific student groups as perceived and reported by school district leaders in Riverside County, with an additional focus on how the RCOE's DA support impacted student outcomes. In the spirit of continuous improvement, the results of the study will inform the RCOE's future DA services to expand upon successes and identify actions to overcome challenges.

This study used multiple methods to seek input from school district leaders. Dashboard data was analyzed to determine areas of improvement in state indicators for various student groups according to CA School Dashboard outcomes published in 2022, 2023, and 2024. This data represented annual outcomes from school years 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024. Based on quantitative analysis, school district leaders were asked to participate in empathy interviews using a semi-structured interview protocol. District participants were selected to participate in the interview if they served in a leadership position in any district that demonstrated growth for state indicators between 2022-2024 and continued to serve in the same district. District leaders from twelve districts responded that they would be willing to participate in interviews (see Appendix A for a list of participating districts).

Interview questions in the semi-structured interview protocol included district-specific data to ascertain districts' perceptions about improved student group outcomes in specific areas. For example, if the Dashboard data for a particular district showed improved outcomes for English learners in academics from 2022-2024, the district's interview protocol included questions specific to the indicator and student group showing growth. For example, one district was asked:

> *Based on 2024 Dashboard data, various student groups declined in the chronic absenteeism indicator. What are the top two to three actions or strategies intentionally implemented by the district to which you primarily attribute this improvement?*

> *An anonymous district was eligible for DA based on outcomes for students with disabilities (SWD) in prior years. SWDs in the anonymous district have NOT met DA eligibility criteria based on the last two Dashboard years (2023 and 2024). What are the top two to three actions or strategies intentionally implemented by the district to which you primarily attribute this improvement?*

Following the interviews, interview responses were qualitatively coded for trends and themes related to the successes of specific student groups across various indicators. Input about the benefits and challenges of DA was also coded. Trends and themes were compiled and summarized in this report.

See sample interview protocol in Appendix B.

Differentiated Assistance Eligibility and Student Group Dashboard Outcomes

Summary of Dashboard Eligibility and Student Group Outcomes

Prior to identifying districts to interview, quantitative data were reviewed to determine areas of challenge and areas of success reflected on the CA School Dashboard. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts identified as eligible for DA in 2019 retained DA eligibility in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. This was due to the suspension of the CA School Dashboard publication as a result of CA Senate Bill 98 and Assembly Bill 130 in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. DA eligibility resumed in 2022-2023 with the publication of the CA School Dashboard in December 2022. For the purposes of this study, Dashboard data were reviewed from Dashboard publication years 2022, 2023, and 2024.

Twenty-two districts met DA eligibility criteria in 2022-2023 based on 2022 CA School Dashboard outcomes reflective of the 2021-2022 school year. This included all but one of the 23 districts in Riverside County. Eligibility was primarily based on the statewide increase in chronic absenteeism for most student groups, coupled with declining academic outcomes following the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the 22 school districts eligible for DA in Riverside County, 79 student groups met DA eligibility criteria.

Twenty districts met DA eligibility criteria in 2023-2024 based on 2023 CA School Dashboard outcomes reflective of the 2022-2023 school year, which was a decline of two districts from the prior year. This included all but three of the 23 districts in Riverside County. Chronic absenteeism continued to be an area of need based on Dashboard outcomes, as did rising suspension rates and declining college/career preparedness. Across the 20 school districts eligible for DA in Riverside County, 63 student groups met DA eligibility criteria, a decline of 16 student groups meeting eligibility criteria from the prior year.

There was a marked decline in the number of school districts and student groups meeting eligibility criteria for DA in 2024. **Fourteen districts met DA eligibility criteria in 2024-2025** based on 2024 CA School Dashboard outcomes reflective of the 2023-2024 school year; a decline of six districts from the prior year. In 2024, eligibility included twelve districts that continued to meet DA criteria from the prior year, along with two districts not eligible in the prior year (2023-2024) that newly met DA criteria in 2024-2025.

Number of Districts in Riverside County Meeting Eligibility Criteria for DA

2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2022-2023[8]	2023-2024	2024-2025
10 of 23	15 of 23	12 of 23	22 of 23	20 of 23	14 of 23

Across the 14 school districts eligible for DA in 2024, only 26 student groups met DA eligibility criteria, a decline of 37 student groups meeting eligibility criteria from the prior year, with notable reductions in chronic absenteeism and suspension and increases in graduation rate and college/career preparedness. Eight districts met DA eligibility criteria based on Dashboard outcomes for **foster youth**, followed by seven districts meeting DA criteria based on Dashboard outcomes for **long-term English learners**, three districts meeting criteria based on outcomes for **students with disabilities** and **homeless youth**, two meeting criteria for **American Indian** students, and one district each meeting criteria for **English learners**, **African American** students, and **Pacific Islander** students.

Number of Student Groups in Riverside County Meeting Eligibility Criteria for DA

2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
14	39	32	79	63	26

Number of Districts Meeting Eligibility Criteria for Differentiated Assistance by Student Group and by Year (No data in 2020 and 2021)
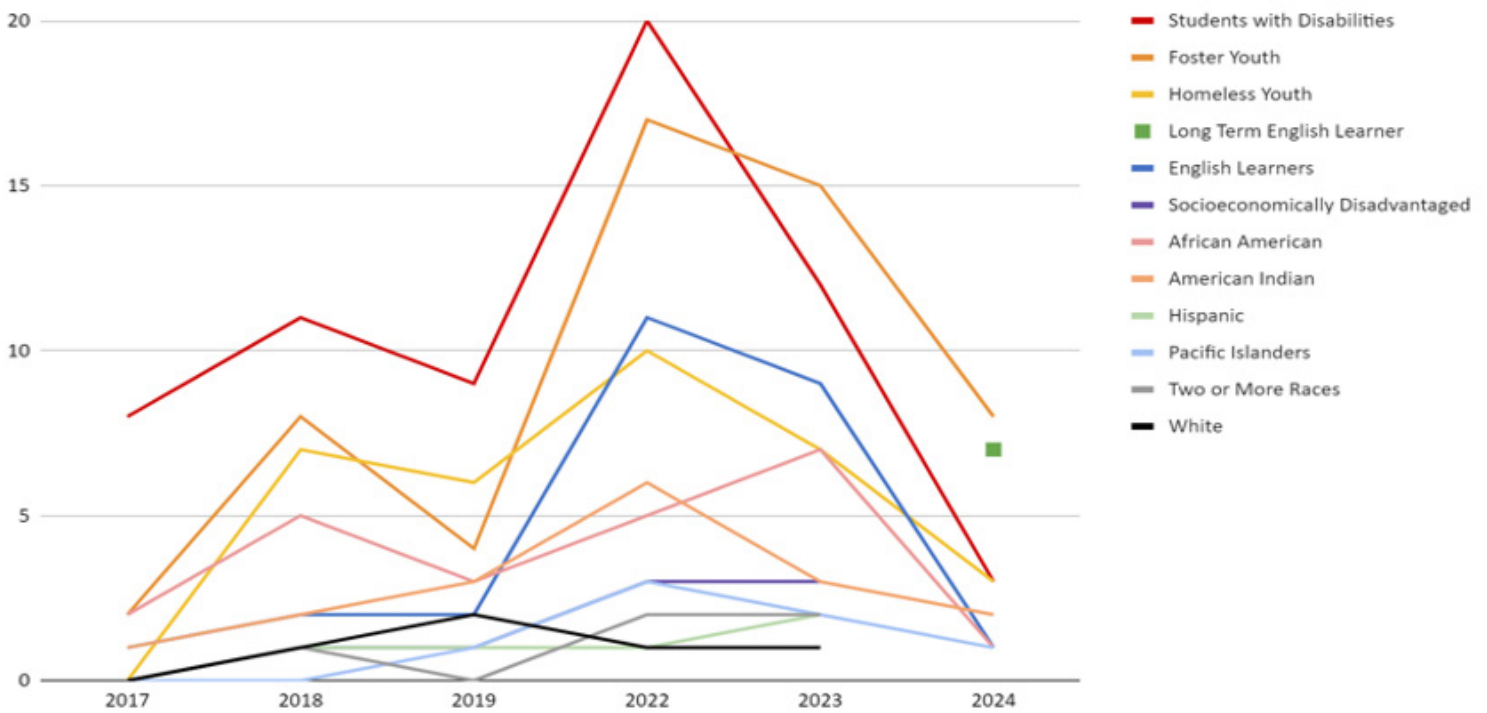
*No data in 2020 or 2021 due to the suspension of the CA School Dashboard. Districts eligible for DA in 2019-2020 retained eligibility in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022.

Key Findings

Districts across Riverside County have made measurable improvements across multiple Dashboard indicators by aligning strategic practices with student needs. The most successful efforts were grounded in:

- Data-informed systems of support.
- Intentional cross-departmental collaboration.
- Strong investment in professional learning.
- Inclusive and restorative school cultures.

Rather than isolated interventions, these districts approached improvement as a systems challenge, proving that sustainable gains are possible when the work is coherent, collaborative, and student-centered.

Based on the analysis of the qualitative interview transcripts, several key findings emerged that offer actionable insights for school districts seeking to improve California School Dashboard indicator outcomes and achieve greater success for student groups, particularly those historically underserved. These findings reflect consistent patterns across districts and highlight the conditions, practices, and mindsets associated with measurable improvement.

1. **Systems, Not Silos, Drive Sustainable Improvement**
   Districts that made progress did so by building coherent, cross-functional systems—not isolated interventions. Success came from aligning the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), data protocols, and instructional leadership across all schools and departments.

   - *Why it matters: Reduces fragmentation and ensures student support is not dependent on individual sites or staff.*
   - *Example: Several districts emphasized the need for "calibration across school sites" and common Tier 1 practices to ensure access for all students, regardless of school assignment.*

2. **Student Group Data Must be Personalized and Prioritized**
   Effective districts moved beyond aggregate data to deeply understand student group patterns and individual student outcomes, especially for students with disabilities (SWD), English learners (ELs), long-term ELs (LTELs), foster youth, and homeless youth.

   - *Why it matters: Specific supports must reflect the lived experiences and barriers unique to each student.*
   - *Example: Districts developed individual "EL stories" to understand the individual students; some assigned counselors to support and monitor foster youth on a case-by-case basis.*

3. **Leadership Capacity is a Critical Lever**
   Improvements in Dashboard outcomes were often tied to intentional development of site and district leaders.

   - *Why it matters: Empowered and prepared leaders are more likely to implement systemic changes consistently and effectively.*
   - *Example: Multiple districts emphasized the need to "teach leadership," especially how to manage change, analyze data, and coordinate teams.*

4. **Culture Shifts Precede Outcome Shifts**
   Districts highlighted that improving climate and culture—particularly around belonging, behavior, and engagement—was foundational to improving academic, suspension, and attendance metrics.

   - *Why it matters: Without a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment, interventions in academics or discipline fall short.*
   - *Example: Increasing access to counselors and assigning mentors to foster and homeless youth were among strategies mentioned.*

5. **Early Wins Build Momentum**
   Districts that made gains often started by focusing on "low-hanging fruit" before tackling more complex challenges.

   - *Why it matters: Demonstrating short-term impact builds credibility, motivation, and buy-in among staff.*
   - *Example: Targeting students struggling with attendance challenges before they became chronically absent proved highly effective.*

6. **Improvement Science Tools Add Structure to Reflection**
   Districts that used protocols such as root cause analysis, empathy interviews, initiative mapping, and student shadowing reported more meaningful insights and engagement from school teams.

   - *Why it matters: These tools deepen understanding of "why" problems persist and guide more strategic action planning.*
   - *Example: Staff reported that shadowing a student and conducting empathy interviews created greater urgency and ownership than reviewing quantitative data alone.*

Implications for District Practice

To improve Dashboard indicators and support student group success, districts should:

- Establish **districtwide systems** for Multi-Tiered System of Supports, data use, and effective Tier 1 instruction.
- Prioritize **student group monitoring** and targeted supports.
- Build **site leadership capacity** for principals, assistant principals, teacher-leaders, and counselors.
- Use **improvement science tools** to drive root cause analysis and strategic planning.
- Focus initial efforts on **winnable targets** to build staff confidence.
- Shift adult mindsets by emphasizing **school culture** and **relationship-building**.

Strategies Supporting Student Group Success

Using qualitative data from district interviews, the top three strategies were identified as contributing to improvements in outcomes across multiple indicators. The analysis is organized by five programmatic student groups: foster youth, homeless youth, English learners, long-term English learners, and students with disabilities.

Foster Youth

Consistent Adult Relationships and Check-Ins: Districts implemented systems enabling foster youth to participate in one-on-one check-ins with counselors or other site-based staff to monitor academic progress, attendance, and well-being. Resources were accessed and provided accordingly.

Site-Based Foster Youth Leads: Districts created site-specific leads for foster students and brought them together to develop consistent supports across schools. These site teams were empowered to lead engagement and school-connection efforts for their students and contributed to identifying effective resources for students.

Data Cleanup and Integration: Districts focused on cleaning up data through internal processes and coordinating data reconciliation with the Riverside County Office of Education, enabling more accurate tracking and timely interventions.

> ## Quotes From District Representatives
>
> **MORENO VALLEY USD**
> *"Our Foster Youth Counselor is funded in the LCAP and collaborates with school teams and reviews data with them. They follow students by name and work with families. We have a great relationship with group homes and foster families. Constant communication and collaboration have really made a difference, putting a strong focus on our foster youth."*
>
> **VAL VERDE USD**
> *"Our goal is to give foster youth a sense of ownership and belonging. We connect them with clubs, friends, and activities that matter. They are always moving around—our goal is to be their stable place."*
>
> **ROMOLAND SD**
> *"Counselors must carve out one-on-ones with each foster youth student monthly; check-ins on attendance, behavior, and their academic achievement, and just general well-being."*
>
> **MENIFEE UNION SD**
> *"We've really provided a focus on foster students because we have about a hundred foster youth. We are very capable of knowing the kids. We also consider who the teacher is that would connect with them, so we can connect them to a caring adult."*

Homeless Youth

MTSS and Attendance Team Structures: Districts implemented strong attendance teams that review data weekly to identify homeless students with chronic absenteeism. These teams design personalized interventions and supports, including mentorship, counseling, and check-ins.

Community Liaison and Outreach Models: Community liaisons in various districts play a crucial role in addressing housing, transportation, and mental health barriers. They also make home visits and offer wraparound support in collaboration with community partners.

Restorative and Alternative Programs: Programs like ATS (Alternative to Suspension) or the Restorative Interventions Supporting Empowerment (RISE) program were implemented, designed as restorative hubs for youth, including homeless and foster students. These provide mental health support and academic continuity while reducing exclusionary discipline and emphasizing the importance of school attendance.

Quotes From District Representatives

JURUPA USD
"We were able to hire a counselor to directly support our McKinney-Vento and foster students, and additional peer specialists to check in with the students; not only to improve attendance, but make sure that they feel connected and engaged at school, which will also improve their academics."

MENIFEE UNION SD
"Community liaisons are a huge piece of this puzzle; they're part of attendance teams and have focused on getting kids to school and also providing the support that they need. Anything from getting cars fixed to providing housing resources—efforts that have really impacted our homeless and foster youth."

PERRIS UNION HIGH SD
"Social workers meet with homeless students as a tier one support to explain available resources and guide them through access to services."

English Learners (ELs)

Designated and Integrated English Language Development (ELD) Instruction: Districts emphasized the revitalization of designated ELD using walk-to-learn models and integration of ELD within core instruction. Teachers received extensive training in ELD strategies and routines, lesson study, and English Learner Proficiency Assessments of California (ELPAC) administration and instructional practices.

Student Goal Setting and Data Transparency: Districts set reclassification as a driving metric for EL success. Fifth and eighth-grade ELs meet with educators throughout the year to review their progress and set reclassification goals to reinforce and support reclassification before transitions to the next grade span. This process is mirrored at the leadership level through principal data check-ins.

English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) Ownership: All teachers—not just test administrators—are trained on ELPAC strategies, language routines, and structures to align classroom instruction with assessment expectations. Credentialed teachers deliver ELD instruction, administer assessments, and analyze assessment outcomes to ensure students receive appropriate language support from the most qualified educators.

> ## Quotes From District Representatives
>
> **ROMOLAND SD**
> *"Grade level teams meet as a PLC [Professional Learning Community] every single week, and it is an expectation that they are always talking about and looking through the lens of their ELs."*
>
> **NUVIEW UNION SD**
> *"We were seeing with our data that there was a divide, especially between our English learners and other groups. So, bringing that front and center, one of our LCAP goals is now an English Learner goal. We've continued with a lot more professional development for our staff, specifically in the area of English Language Development."*
>
> **COACHELLA VALLEY USD**
> *"Shifting to a seven-period schedule freed up room so EL students can take both required ELD and elective or CTE [Career and Technical Education] classes."*

Long-Term English Learners (LTELs)

Curriculum and Program Redesign: Districts adopted a designated ELD curriculum specifically for LTELs scoring Level 1 or 2 on ELPAC, with support from the RCOE. LTEL students receive targeted support focused on reclassification pathways and explicit academic language development (vocabulary, syntax, grammar, registers).

Instructional Scheduling and Placement: Districts structured LTEL courses distinctly from courses for newcomer ELs, emphasizing content and explicit academic language development specific to their needs. Master scheduling was used to ensure targeted access.

Progress-Monitoring and Language Goal Setting: LTEL students participated in continuous data-driven discussions, personalized action plans, and family engagement initiatives around reclassification. Teachers understand English learner stories and adapt instruction accordingly.

Quotes From District Representatives

ROMOLAND SD

"We focus on reclassification all year long through progress monitoring the different criteria that it takes for a student to reclassify. It's not just at the district office. Site administrators know it, the teachers know it, even the students know exactly what it takes to reclassify because they've had one-on-one goal-setting conferences where they've sat down with their teacher and or their site administrator, especially at the fifth and eighth grade level."

JURUPA USD

"We make sure our CTE teachers, VAPA [Visual and Performing Arts], and world language teachers get professional development on quality teaching for English learners, trying to target the needs of the students and support them in all classes."

DESERT SANDS USD

"We've been performing data chats. Part of those data chats involves empathy interviews with our LTELs. Empathy interviews are absolutely critical to understanding the student. This also includes having family EL Family data chats where the student is involved and the parents are involved."

Students with Disabilities (SWD)

Inclusive Practices and Co-Teaching Models: Districts have eliminated self-contained mild/moderate classes in favor of inclusive models. Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are rostered in general education classes, with special education teachers and aides supporting instruction through push-in models. These efforts increased access to grade-level standards for students with disabilities without removing them from core instruction. Master schedules are strategically built to maximize these supports. One district described inclusive master schedules at the elementary level to optimize instructional aide deployment and provide targeted small-group instruction aligned to IEP goals.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Teachers use a UDL lesson planning organizer to anticipate and establish a plan to remove barriers. Instruction is designed for a wide range of learning styles and academic needs, benefiting both general and special populations. Implementing a districtwide UDL framework is supported by lesson planning organizers. Teachers preemptively plan to address individual student needs and anticipate barriers to learning, ensuring SWD access to Tier 1 instruction alongside peers.

Professional Development and Collaboration: Districts provided joint professional development for general and special education staff, building a shared language around evidence-based practices and IEP implementation. Progress monitoring, formative assessments, and data-informed adjustments are emphasized.

Quotes From District Representatives

PERRIS ELEMENTARY SD
"Joint professional development is key, so any professional development that our general education teachers get, our special education staff are also provided with those evidence-based practices strategies. With that came the message of 'all means all,' and tier one is for everyone."

DESERT SANDS USD
"One thing that I think has been a huge standout is that we've reinvigorated our MTSS process. Teams have gone back through tier one training, tier two training, and we've included special education staff in those trainings and in the development of plans. Our special education coordinators and program specialists are part of the training and planning process."

BEAUMONT USD
"We have really worked at the site level to ensure that all of our special education teachers work cohesively with our general education teachers to make sure students have access to core instruction. We do not have mild-moderate programs that are fully self-contained. Instead, we have learning centers, which means that all kids are rostered to a general education classroom and are connected to a general education classroom, receiving their core ELA and math from their general education teacher, and the special education teacher provides support. At the high school, teachers have been monitoring progress and holding IEP meetings when a student is not passing their classes."

MURRIETA VALLEY USD
"We realized that sometimes our special education students don't have access at our alternative school if they are not meeting general requirements. That seemed not equitable, so we devised a way for students to stay at their home campus yet earn the alternative-school diploma requirement, with the home campus acting as a kind of satellite, if you will, of the alternative campus. So now students can still get all the support that they are entitled to."

Strategies Supporting Indicator Improvement

Districts across Riverside County have implemented a range of strategies aimed at boosting outcomes as measured by the California School Dashboard. This section categorizes the most impactful strategies across six Dashboard indicators: academics, English learner progress, chronic absenteeism, suspension rates, graduation rates, and college and career indicator (CCI). The findings are derived from in-depth interviews with district leaders and staff from diverse districts, each contributing innovative and replicable models for improvement.

Academics

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) & MTSS: Multiple districts emphasized UDL and inclusive Tier 1 instruction that proactively anticipates learner needs. Developing and implementing an MTSS is crucial to ensuring early intervention and streamlined academic support for struggling learners.

Targeted Professional Development With Instructional Coaching Support: Many districts implemented professional development focused on evidence-based reading instruction (e.g., Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training) and math practices (e.g., Building Thinking Classrooms). Several districts embedded these trainings within a larger MTSS framework for consistency and alignment. In addition, strategies provided during professional development sessions were reinforced through instructional coaching cycles, including co-planning, lesson delivery, and feedback. A major focus of professional development and coaching is the instructional core to ensure that students are connected through rigorous, standards-aligned content.

Collaboration Time and Structures: Several districts formed teams of general education teachers, special education staff, and counselors to analyze root causes of academic underperformance and respond with targeted instructional supports. Others embedded Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) collaboration blocks or periods into the master schedule. Collaboration time was dedicated to analyzing student work, planning instruction, and reflecting on formative data. Some districts also held "principal PLCs" and "assistant principal PLCs" to model data-driven leadership practices.

Assessments: Formative assessment practices, such as daily exit tickets in core content areas, ensured student mastery of daily learning targets. This strategy helped prevent learning gaps by enabling immediate reteaching and grouping for support. Designated assessment supports and accommodations became embedded into instructional practices to ensure students had the necessary tools to succeed on standardized assessments.

Quotes From District Representatives:
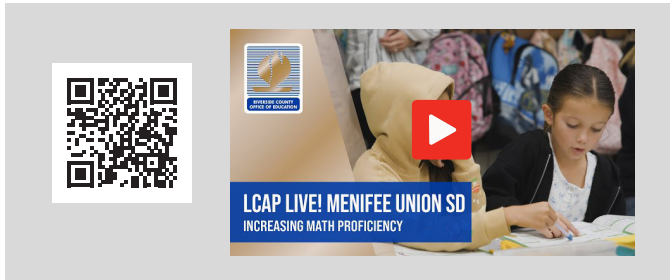
NUVIEW UNION SD
"We are seeing evidence of the math training that we've had reflected in the classrooms when we're doing walks—that's the part that's the best! It's great to sit at the district office and have a training, but if we're not seeing it come to fruition in the classrooms, then what's the point?"

MURRIETA VALLEY USD
"Our PLTs [Professional Learning Teams] and MTSS [Multi-Tiered System of Supports] have been our two focus areas for the last few years. Our math-score improvement is impacting kids' accomplishment in meeting CCI [College/Career Indicator] and I'd attribute it to our focus on PLTs, our building of common assessments, and our focus on standards and common pacing."

ROMOLAND SD
"We had a strategic action that we put in place for this entire year that we had agreed upon the year before, and that was with site administrators and teachers in every single classroom having an exit ticket for every single student in the core content area, so that they would know immediately where a student was at with that learning intention or success criteria for that lesson, so that they couldn't get further and further behind and they could very quickly pull the small group or pull them one-on-one."

LCAP LIVE! MENIFEE UNION SD
INCREASING MATH PROFICIENCY

ENGLISH LEARNERS IMPROVE
ENGLISH SKILLS AT NUVIEW UNION S.D.

LCAP Live! is a California School Public Relations Association (CalSPRA) award-winning video series that brings LCAP actions to life through interviews with district and school staff, parents, and students. This section of the report features LCAP Live! videos that exemplify the strategies shared by district leaders during their interviews.

English Learner Progress Indicator (ELPI)

Emphasis on Early Reclassification: Districts focused their efforts on reclassifying ELs by 5th or 8th grade through personalized student-teacher-admin goal-setting meetings. This included student familiarity with reclassification criteria and ongoing tracking of progress.

Designated and Integrated ELD With Professional Development: Multiple districts conducted lesson studies, ELD walkthroughs, and coaching cycles for teachers with the support of the RCOE. One district described adding a designated ELD curriculum specifically for LTELs scoring Levels 1–2 on the ELPAC. Another emphasized test calibration by training all teachers—not just test administrators—on ELPAC content to better align instruction with assessment expectations.

Systems for Continuous Monitoring: Districts implemented EL data protocols that included monitoring progress, identifying reclassification barriers, and tracking instructional supports. These systems extended into PLC meetings, where ELs were a standing agenda item.

LCAP LIVE!
ROMOLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT
ENGLISH LEARNER SUCCESS

" Quotes From District Representatives

DESERT SANDS USD
"With our high leverage strategies, we want our students to be collaborating. We want them to be engaged in discourse. We want them to be using the vocabulary that pertains to the content that they're being taught. Having sentence frames, sentence starters, and routines is critical to the work we're doing with getting our kids to engage in collaborative conversations and academic discourse."

MENIFEE UNION SD
"We've had a lot of professional development - designated and integrated ELD lesson study or lesson planning with shadowing. We are looking for student engagement in the lessons. We're also training teachers to use ELPAC interim assessments, and they're finding value in them."

ROMOLAND SD
"We track reclassification all year—administrators, teachers, and even the students know exactly what it takes to reclassify because they've had one-on-one goal-setting conferences."
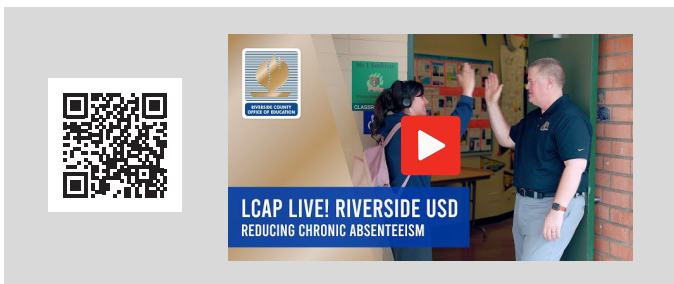
"

Chronic Absenteeism

Attendance Teams and Data-Driven MTSS: Many districts described their support and monitoring of site-level attendance teams. Attendance teams met frequently, sometimes weekly or twice a month, and included administrators, counselors, clerks, liaisons, and teachers. Teams reviewed data disaggregated by student group and implemented tailored interventions as defined in an MTSS pyramid. These included mentorship, parent outreach, and social-emotional check-ins.

Shift to Positive Reinforcement Models: Some districts overhauled their Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) process to emphasize strengths-based outreach. Home visits began including praise, gift cards, and recognition for improvement—not just compliance checks.

Home Engagement and Root Cause Addressing: District staff actively visited homes and assessed student and family needs, including transportation, health care, or trauma-informed supports. This shift to a family-engaged lens was foundational in reducing absenteeism for highly mobile or underserved students.

LCAP LIVE! RIVERSIDE USD
REDUCING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Suspension

Campus Culture Shifts: Districts focused on improving school climate and culture. One specifically mentioned eliminating environmental triggers, such as cell phones, at the middle school level, and reported improved social engagement, peer connection, and reduced behavioral incidents. Another mentioned that they investigated the root causes of student suspensions, and included principals, academic coaches, special education staff, psychologists, counselors, and the executive cabinet to gain multiple perspectives. The staff collectively planned how to learn from student voice through empathy interviews, which created a culture of shared ownership.

Student Wellness Investments: Several districts employed school-based mental health therapists and Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) to support students with intense behavioral needs, improving their coping skills and reducing classroom disruptions. These professionals offered Tier 3 support for students with emotional and behavioral needs, contributing to improved self-regulation and reduced office referrals.

Restorative Alternatives and Behavioral MTSS: Districts developed tiered behavioral support systems focused on restorative practices, including restorative circles and early interventions to reduce suspensions. Sites collaborated in weekly meetings to determine appropriate Tier 2 and 3 interventions and how to best implement services for students.

LCAP LIVE! VAL VERDE USD
R.I.S.E. PROGRAM AND HOME VISITS

> ## Quotes From District Representatives
>
> **PERRIS ELEMENTARY SD**
> *"Conducting a root cause analysis with initiative mapping and empathy interviews has been very instrumental in building background knowledge in understanding what was happening. Then, of course, what followed was very intentional, targeted actions."*
>
> **PERRIS UNION HIGH SD**
> *"Instead of out-of-school suspension, we send students to ATS—Alternative to Suspension—so they keep learning while getting counseling support. I think the most impactful program is the training that we have for our ATS teachers, making sure that our restorative practices are put in place and making sure that everyone is of the same mindset when it comes to discipline. We have to look at antecedents that led to the behavior and address those antecedents to lead to better outcomes and better choices for our students."*
>
> **ROMOLAND SD**
> *"We've leveled up our MTSS for social-emotional learning and behavior, with a focus on tier three support. We had counselors at the school, but we've added school-based mental health therapists, so any student in need of that tier three level support for therapy can have that."*

Graduation

Transcript Monitoring: Districts conducted transcript audits multiple times per year, flagging at-risk students as early as 9th grade; two districts reviewed high school readiness indicators for middle school students before students entered high school. These audits informed schoolwide and individualized graduation action plans and site intervention.

Modified Graduation Plans and Credit Recovery: Districts offered modified diploma pathways for students with disabilities. These options were strategically used only when necessary and were accompanied by support to keep students on general diploma tracks as frequently as possible. One district mentioned that all students are scheduled into A–G aligned courses by default, and any deviation requires a formal opt-out through a parent conference.

Foster Youth Graduation Tracking: Assigning dedicated counselors or site-based liaisons to ensure foster youth were on track to graduate was a specific strategy mentioned by several districts to support foster youth. These staff tracked credits, provided one-on-one support, and advocated for these students' academic needs.

"

Quotes From District Representatives

BEAUMONT USD
"Our high school teachers have been monitoring and holding IEP meetings when students are not passing their classes. We have definitely been focusing on transition plans for the high school students, and next year we're going to start them at middle school."

JURUPA USD
"Transcript audits really looked at access and success of our students, so we were able to identify the A to G courses that our students are not having access to. Our sites are readjusting master schedules to try to change our system to give our kids more access."

MORENO VALLEY USD
"We do transcript audits twice a year with 70–80 staff members from the SELPA [Special Education Local Plan Area] department, EL [English Learner] department, student services, from everywhere. And we're not just checking credits—we're looking for trends and patterns, errors, a-g rates, and anything that impacts graduation."

MURRIETA VALLEY USD
"High school counselors really have a systemized process in meeting with our students individually… tracking their A–G progress, FAFSA, CTE pathway progress, college applications - counselors are keeping track and making sure students are meeting those metrics and placed appropriately."

"

College/Career Preparedness

CTE Pathway Expansion and Data Monitoring: Districts improved CCI outcomes by identifying areas where students—especially ELs and SWD —were already succeeding (e.g., Career Technical Education, dual enrollment) and scaling those pathways. Districts integrated transcript audits and professional development for CTE teachers to better support specific students, including ELs and SWDs.

Increased Access: Districts creatively structured their days to ensure students had access to courses. One district implemented a seven-period day to enable ELs and SWD to participate in college prep and CTE programs, while also receiving academic and language support classes. Late buses and teacher stipends facilitated after-school dual enrollment classes.

Biliteracy and Dual Enrollment Push: Several districts expanded Seal of Biliteracy testing for ELs and embedded it into their CCI tracking system. Counselors also worked to schedule students into A–G aligned courses by default.

> ## Quotes From District Representatives
>
> **COACHELLA VALLEY USD**
> *"We did a deep dive into cleaning up our A-G data, cleaning up our completers data… and just making sure that the students who were actually completing were being accurately captured. We also moved to a seven-period day, letting ELs [English Learners] and students with IEPs fit CTE, AVID, and Puente without sacrificing ELD or support classes—access went up district-wide."*
>
> **JURUPA USD**
> *"We looked at where we were seeing success for student groups in meeting CCI, and it was about leveraging that. We saw that there was great success for student groups in CTE pathways, that they were having success in dual enrollment."*
>
> **MURRIETA VALLEY USD**
> *"High school kickoff allows CTE programs to come and show their wares and have hands-on experiences and booths for the middle school students to get exposure to it early."*

District Perceptions About Differentiated Assistance

During interviews, district representatives shared various strategies for improving student outcomes across various indicators. Interview participants were then asked, "*Did eligibility for DA support the district with improving outcomes for students?*" Responses to this question resulted in various themes.

DA Eligibility Served as a Catalyst for Improvement
- Districts described DA as a turning point that prompted reflection, systems analysis, and ultimately, action.
- Rather than viewing it as punitive, many saw it as a constructive accountability mechanism that brought urgency to areas needing improvement.
- Several districts credited DA for prompting cross-departmental collaboration, particularly between special education, general education, and student services teams, with support from the RCOE as an external facilitator.
- DA eligibility brought awareness and accountability to the forefront and helped districts align departments.

Districts Valued County Office of Education (COE) Support
- COE support was praised by multiple districts. Districts appreciated having thought partners from outside the system who brought new perspectives.
- Districts appreciated the RCOE's support in facilitating system investigations and root cause analysis processes. They particularly named improvement tools such as empathy interviews and initiative mapping as key to uncovering systemic needs.
- Districts described the RCOE staff as "coaches, not auditors," who walked alongside them in the work.

DA Eligibility Amplified the Necessity for Data Clarity and System Mapping
- DA was credited with helping districts interpret their data and determine inaccuracies, leading to improved data practices. This was especially important in improving foster youth monitoring and increasing graduation rates.
- The use of tools such as transcript analysis and California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) audits helped districts recognize misalignments or missed opportunities for the data to show improvements.

DA Eligibility Contributed to the Empowerment of School Site Leaders
- DA support often extended to school leaders, helping them build capacity around leadership for equity and improvement.
- Several districts noted how site administrators now use data protocols, engage in root cause analysis, and lead their teams more effectively.
- DA was described as a mindset shift, where school leaders moved from seeing performance as a "district" responsibility to recognizing their role in influencing outcomes.
- Relationships developed during the DA process opened opportunities for school leaders to collaborate with peers, county office staff, and district departments to support their improvement efforts.

Overall, districts perceive DA not as a label of failure, but as a structured opportunity for growth, especially when paired with skilled support from the COE. The DA process helped districts uncover systemic gaps, elevate student group performance, and strengthen leadership practices. There is a growing call to expand and refine DA tools for all districts—whether identified or not—as part of a broader culture of continuous improvement.

District Feedback to Policymakers

District participants were asked if they had any feedback for California policy-makers about the accountability and continuous improvement system. This system includes the LCAP, the Dashboard, and tiered supports such as DA. One clear call to action was to "unify systems more clearly." Participants also expressed a desire for a more streamlined accountability and assessment system.

Simplify the Local Control and Accountability Plan and Other Reporting Requirements

Districts expressed strong frustration with the **redundancy and burden** of compliance-heavy reporting. Leaders noted the volume of plans (LCAP, CSI, DA, etc.), quarterly progress forms, and disconnected timelines as a barrier to real instructional leadership. Policymakers should consolidate or align these systems to reduce administrative burden.

> *"Make the LCAP less cumbersome to write. It's burdensome not just for Ed Services—but for Human resources, Business services, and site leaders, too."*

> *"We spend too much time writing and reporting on plans instead of implementing them."*

> *"There is a missing layer of policy-to-practice support for senior system leaders managing implementation of all of the required programs."*

Invest in Leadership Development for Continuous Improvement

Several leaders emphasized the **need for training and time** to help site and district leaders develop skills in **data analysis, improvement science, and systems thinking**. They argued that these practices should be taught before DA identification as a tier 1, universal support.

> *"Leaders don't come out of the classroom knowing how to lead change. There's no formal training on root cause analysis or improvement science in administrative credentialing programs."*

> *"Teach the science of improvement proactively, not just when needs show up on the Dashboard."*

Address Systemic Barriers to Community Engagement

Some districts urged the state to rethink **how community engagement is evaluated**—not just in terms of stakeholder meetings, but in how effectively schools build trust, especially with underserved communities like foster and homeless families.

> *"The system expects families to come to us—but many won't or can't. We need to be resourced to go to them."*

> *"Real engagement requires deep relationships. You can't measure that with attendance at a meeting."*

Recommendations

Based on the interview transcripts, several clear themes emerged from school district leaders when offering advice to their peers in other districts. Their guidance centers on systems-building, leadership development, equity-driven practices, and continuous improvement mindsets. Below is a summary of these themes, with supporting examples.

1. **Build Strong, Sustainable Systems—Don't Rely on Individual Effort**
   District leaders emphasized the importance of creating coherent, districtwide systems rather than relying on isolated initiatives or individual champions. Successful outcomes were attributed to the intentional alignment of structures, roles, and routines. Establishing strong collaboration across departments is vital to ensure shared ownership and alignment of goals for student outcomes.

   "Developing systems whereby there's clear communication and expectations throughout is key, with some level of calibration of services, so you don't have one site doing one thing, another site doing another, and you're getting different results." — Perris Union High SD

   "There's a lot of overlap with district leaders to work cohesively to ensure that students with disabilities are the focus at all levels." — Beaumont USD

2. **Develop Leaders at All Levels**
   Districts stressed the need to equip school leaders with training and tools to lead change, interpret data, and implement improvement plans. Structure teams and routines with intention. Set expectations for team roles, data use, and frequency of meetings.

   "We really develop our assistant principals, because new leaders have to learn how to implement systems."
   "Principals need real-time data about their school in front of them to make decisions." — Romoland SD

   "Sites are required to have attendance teams. Teams meet twice a month and include administrators, school counselors, attendance clerks, and community liaisons." — Menifee Union SD

3. **Use Data Frequently and With Purpose**
   Frequent data analysis—down to individual students—was a hallmark of success. Leaders encouraged others to build data routines into meetings and to focus on specific, actionable metrics.

   "We conduct transcript audits multiple times per year, not just to check boxes, but to find patterns and act on them." — Moreno Valley USD

4. **Prioritize Inclusion and Equity for Underserved Groups**
   Leaders urged their peers to center the needs of historically underserved groups—particularly students with disabilities, English learners, foster youth, and homeless students—by embedding support into Tier 1 systems, not isolating it.

   "Any professional development that our general education teachers get, our special education staff also are provided with those evidence-based practices and strategies." — Perris Elementary SD

5. **Start Small, Focus Strategically, and Build Momentum**
   Rather than trying to solve everything at once, leaders recommended identifying opportunities for early success to build belief and buy-in.

   "Start with challenges that are 'low-hanging fruit.' Those are the ones you can move quickly and show progress." — Val Verde USD

6. **Create a Culture of Shared Ownership**
   Districts emphasized the power of collective responsibility, ensuring that school teams feel empowered—not just directed—to lead change.

   "Build a team… and put multiple stakeholders in it. It might start out small, but it will grow. You're going to have to start with people that are interested in the work and just keep bringing people in."
   — Coachella Valley USD

   "The overall philosophy in our district as a whole is that these are our students, rather than yours or mine. That really has taken hold this year." — Desert Sands USD

7. **Invest in Access and Expect Success**
   Districts emphasized the need to allocate funds where student needs existed and to leverage resources and partnerships to expand student access to programs, supports, and services. Don't isolate funding streams—intentionally combine them to build a robust and sustainable system of support. Normalize high expectations and ensure that schedule design promotes college and career readiness.

   "We really started to align our SPSAs [School Plans for Student Achievement] with our LCAP, and we were much more intentional about it; how we were spending our funds to ensure that the goals we had established were aligned." — Nuview Union SD

   "The work of CCI [College and Career Indicator] brings in so many other resources. We braid LCAP, state grants, Perkins, and Strong Workforce to build the program." — Jurupa USD

   "Scheduling students into A–G is the default. If they're off track, we get them into credit recovery, and if they are electing not to, then there's a parent conference." — Murrieta Valley USD

Appendix A

List of Participating Districts

Districts Participating in Semi-Structured Interviews

Beaumont Unified School District

Coachella Valley Unified School District

Desert Sands Unified School District

Jurupa Unified School District

Menifee Union School District

Moreno Valley Unified School District

Murrieta Valley Unified School District

Nuview Union School District

Perris Elementary School District

Perris Union High School District

Romoland School District

Val Verde Unified School District

Appendix B

SAMPLE Semi-Structured Interview Protocol
Duration: Approximately 20 Minutes

Quantitative Data Tables for _____ Unified School District

Students With Disabilities: Not Eligible for DA for 2 Consecutive Years

Dashboard Year	ELA	Math	Grad	Chronic	Suspension
2022	-98.7	-128.3	73.8%	41.8%	4.6%
2023	-92	-115	77.7%	38.4%	5.4%
2024	-98.8	-116	94.2%	26.6%	3.9%

Chronic Absenteeism Indicator

Dashboard Year	All	SED	EL	LTEL
2022	32.1%	37.2%	35%	N/A
2023	30.2%	34%	30.4%	31.9%
2024	20%	22.7%	18.3%	18.1%

Eligibility for DA by Year and by Student Group

2017-2018 (Dashboard 2017)	2018-2019 (Dashboard 2018)	2019-2020 (Dashboard 2019)	2020-2021 & 2021-2022	2022-2023 (Dashboard 2022)	2023-2024 (Dashboard 2023)	2024-2025 (Dashboard 2024)
Students With Disabilities	Not Eligible	Students With Disabilities	*(Maintained from 2019-2020)*	Students With Disabilities Foster Youth American Indian	Homeless Youth Foster Youth English Learners	*Did not meet eligibility criteria in 2024.* *Continue DA year 2 support based on 2023 eligibility.*

Interview Questions

Response Notes

1 Based on 2024 Dashboard data, various student groups improved in the <u>chronic absenteeism</u> indicator(s). What are the top two to three actions or strategies intentionally implemented by the LEA to which you primarily attribute this improvement?

FOLLOW-UP QUESTION IF NOT ANSWERED WITHIN Q1:
Are there specific actions in the LCAP (or other district plans) that support efforts to improve outcomes in <u>chronic absenteeism</u>?

2 _____USD was eligible for DA based on outcomes for students with disabilities (SWD) in prior years. Outcomes for SWDs have NOT met DA eligibility criteria based on the last two Dashboard years. What are the top two to three actions or strategies intentionally implemented by the LEA to which you primarily attribute this improvement?

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS IF NOT ANSWERED IN Q2:

- Did eligibility for DA support the LEA in improving outcomes for SWD?

- How might the RCOE improve the DA process?

3 Based on your success, what advice would you give if you could advise other districts striving to improve outcomes for chronic absenteeism or for SWD?

4 If you could provide input to CA policymakers about the accountability and continuous improvement system, which includes LCAP, the Dashboard, and tiered supports such as DA, what advice or guidance would you give?

5 Any additional comments?