

**Evaluating e21  
Professional Development and  
Home-School-Community Involvement**

Joanne Bookmyer  
in collaboration with Bob Carlson

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and Summary .....	1
Section I: Overview of Data Collection and Methodology .....	1
Section II: Key Findings Related to Professional Development .....	2
Professional Development Structure .....	2
Key Findings Related to Overall Professional Development Practices .....	3
Discussion of Professional Development Practices Typically Associated with Effective Small Learning Communities .....	7
Section III: Key Findings Related to Home-School-Involvement .....	12
Section IV: Key Findings Related to Overall Implementation of E21 .....	15
Structural Components .....	15
Evidence of Implementation .....	16
Barriers Impacting Implementations .....	20
Section V: Issues Related to Implementation and the Professional Development and Home-School-Community Components that may Merit Further Exploration .....	23
Acknowledgements .....	26
Appendix A: Survey Protocols	
Appendix B: e21 Goals and Benchmarks	

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**INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY**

This report presents findings of an evaluation of the Sacramento City Unified School District's (SCUSD) Comprehensive High School Reform Initiative known as "e21." Linking Education and Economic Development (LEED Sacramento) undertook this evaluation as part of an on-going effort to assess the progress of implementing Small Schools and Small Learning Communities.

The evaluation focused on four of SCUSD's participating high schools and was intended to be exploratory and formative in nature. Its purpose was to determine if professional development and home-school-community involvement goals and benchmarks detailed in the Schools for a New Society 2003-2004 Action Plan were being addressed, and to identify interesting or key issues that might inform decisions about how the initiative as a whole, and key partners within it, could best proceed.

The benefits of small learning communities (SLC) were acknowledged by all of the informants, even in schools where implementation has faced resistance. The results of this evaluation indicate a number of the elements of success reported by Kathleen Cotton (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, *New Small Learning Communities: Findings From Recent Literature*, December 2001) are present in the SCUSD. Further, exciting and promising practices are emerging. While inconsistent, there is evidence that shows teachers are being provided with the autonomy and support they need to focus on student learning and improving their own practice. The results also suggest that SLC are beginning to build their own sense of identity, in part by building career pathways, but are struggling with how to build relationships with both students and their families. This should not be surprising as staff are being asked to shift from a mentality that supported large and often impersonal comprehensive high schools to one that embraces small learning communities.

**SECTION 1:**  
**OVERVIEW OF DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY**

**Section I** provides an overview of the data collection process.

**Section II** of the report consists of key findings specific to the overall professional development component of the initiative and professional development practices typically associated with effective small learning communities (SLC).

**Section III** of the report includes key findings specific to the home-school-community component of the initiative.

**Section IV** provides key findings specific to the overall implementation of e21. This includes findings on two of the structural components of the initiative, evidence of implementation (supporting the conclusion that shifts in attitude and behaviors in support of the initiative are occurring), and a listing of barriers impacting implementation of the e21 initiative.

**Section V** explores issues related to the professional development and home-school-community and implementation components that may merit further attention.

Representative quotes taken directly from interview transcripts are incorporated into each section of the report.

The evaluation was qualitative in nature and was based on a total of fifteen semi-structured interviews with key LEED staff and consultants, school improvement facilitators (SIF), and school principals and lead teachers at four SCUSD High Schools. Interviews were held during the spring of 2004. Survey protocols were developed (Appendix A) and approval to conduct research in SCUSD was obtained. The survey questions served to shape the discussion rather than to ensure each informant responded to the same questions (resulting in semi-structured rather than structured interviews). Interviews lasted anywhere from thirty minutes to one and one-half hours. Interviews were transcribed and coded based on interview prompts and emerging themes. Informant responses were consistent within sites. In other words, principals, lead teachers, and SIFs at each school responded similarly to the prompts. There was variation across schools, indicative of the differing degrees of “buy-in” and commitment to the e21 initiative.

Joanne Bookmyer, Research and Evaluation Analyst (CRESS Center, School of Education, University of California at Davis) carried out the interviews and analysis in collaboration with Bob Carlson, Director of the Center for Student Assessment and Program Accountability (Sacramento County Office of Education).

## **SECTION II: KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

This section presents key findings specific to the overall professional development component of the initiative and to professional development practices typically associated with effective small learning communities (SLC)

### **Professional Development Structure**

The e21 professional development model is built around the establishment of five essential leadership structures<sup>1</sup>: the Leadership Team, the School Improvement Facilitator (SIF) Learning Network, the Teacher Leaders Network, the Instructional Leadership Partnership with the High School Division, and the Instructional Cabinet. These five structures were intended to provide the initial support needed to imbed leadership capacity in participating schools<sup>2</sup>. Implementation of the leadership structure was intended to precede the actual formation or creation of SLC,

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<sup>1</sup> Based on information provided by LEED and the professional development consultants.

<sup>2</sup> Capacity being defined here as teachers who are knowledgeable of best practices relative to staff development and instruction.

including imbedding key structural and relational components such as Advisory, Common Planning Time, etc.

Implementation of the Leadership Structure was delayed by district level transition and turnover, while according to the professional development consultants the formation of SLC proceeded largely as planned.<sup>3</sup> The result was that overall readiness and buy-in was not as strong as it might have been, and stakeholders faced an “overload” in terms of having to make significant structural and relational changes without the leadership capacity that was originally intended.

As the initiative matures, the Leadership Structure is intended to take on the role of assisting SLC in identifying student and teacher needs. The ultimate goal of the professional development model is to make teachers aware of what resources are available to them, to provide teachers with knowledge about powerful instructional strategies, and to help insure that the selected strategies are those that have the highest likelihood of transferring to daily use.<sup>4</sup>

In general, the professional development consultants are responsible for supporting the leadership structure, and the District Office is responsible for the overall framework and curricular components. Both entities provide professional development on an ad hoc basis to individual school sites. To date, this has included training on Advisory, Individual Learning Plans, and Senior Projects, and more generic workshops about forming and sustaining SLC and team building. Professional development in support of the leadership structure and the overall framework has also been provided, as has professional development specific to instruction (e.g., teaching math benchmarks, literacy training, etc.).

### **Key Findings Related to Overall Professional Development Practices**

**1. Informants seem to be in consensus that at this point in time the e21 initiative is primarily concerned with restructuring the school (creating a leadership framework and building capacity), rather than on improving instruction.<sup>5</sup>**

The “line” between what constitutes e21 professional development and professional development on instructional issues is clear to those most closely associated with the initiative, but is less clear to those further removed (teachers). General consensus was that having a cohesive teacher- and student-centered framework in place supports restructuring and helps to facilitate good instruction.

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<sup>3</sup> Taking into account site-based differences in the speed and degree to which implementation occurred.

<sup>4</sup> Again, based on information provided by the professional development consultants.

<sup>5</sup> Sites seem more focused on and concerned with creating support structures and issues related to those structures (such as addressing contractual issues around Advisory and scheduling issues around Common Planning Time). This seems reasonable as, according to the professional development consultants, the early stages of implementation entailed reorganization and capacity building. School sites are only now being presented with the opportunity to “personalize” the initiative by focusing their attention on relevant content knowledge and pedagogical issues.

*E21 in and by itself is not an initiative about instruction; it's not suddenly something new, like Madeline Hunter or anything else. It's a matter of how you structure your campus in order for students to feel safe and feel connected, have a relationship, and ultimately for good instruction and learning to take place, and to look at how we evaluate students differently through projects and internships and those kinds of things. It's an opportunity for growth. Principal*

**2. Overall satisfaction with professional development opportunities varied, but a significant number of informants seemed to feel that much of the training that was offered was not done well.**

Informants expressed general dissatisfaction with District Office's delivery of professional development related to the initiative, mentioning turn-over, cutbacks, and lack of cooperation/communication between the schools and District Office.

*I think professional development for e21 is not something that has been done well. It is not cohesive. It is not a long-range kind of plan. An example, we were told in May of last year that we would be implementing Advisory this year as part of e21. There were a couple days of training offered but it was hurriedly put together and it was obvious that it was hurriedly put together. You know, we were working with staff and they weren't convinced they should do it, and then they were kind of forced into it. And there's been a lot of that. Principal*

**3. There appears to be a “disconnect” between the school sites and the District Office's instructional learning and professional development units in the area of professional development.**

Informants, in particular school principals, mentioned that the professional development provided by the district was not appropriate and/or sufficient for their needs. Informants also expressed concerns that district staff was not supportive of the initiative.

*Two gentlemen who came to review our school said it is amazing that you've done so much with so little support from the district. . . . I think that we can do a better job of supporting folks who are trying to go through this painful transition. Principal*

*It's been a struggle because you've got a lot of people at the District Office and you're asking them to change their jobs, and change is never easy. Lots of time's people say, "I used to know exactly what I'm supposed to do, but now I have no clue." So it's been a difficult process. SIF*

**4. Informants would like to have more control over the type of professional development that is made available. It was suggested that sites have a better understanding of their professional development needs than the District Office<sup>6</sup>.**

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<sup>6</sup> One SLC teacher made it clear that it is the SLC responsibility to tell the District Office what they need, "I don't think any school in the district can say the district isn't supporting us. The district doesn't know what we need. We haven't told them what we need."

Some informants mentioned that their sites were either seeking their own professional development from external sources or developing it internally. While e21 staff and some informants perceive this as a desirable end, some informants seemed to interpret this as having to assume the responsibility for something the district should be providing. Informants also mentioned that rather than district-wide “generic” offerings, they would like more of the professional development that is offered to be driven by the needs of the school site.

*Actually, it [professional development on Advisory] was really frustrating for a lot of teachers. It wasn't homegrown, it didn't generate out of our faculty, but it was brought in by the district. It was informative, in that it had worked in other schools; they brought people and students in to speak, but it didn't relate specifically to issues that we have here at [school]. . . . There's a real sense that most of the professional development, someone has a brilliant idea in the central office and says, "Hey, you guys do this," as opposed to a leadership group here on campus that comes up with what we feel a professional development should be. We're trying to move in that direction, so that it's more of a focus on the site. Principal*

*It would be good if the need for someone to come from the outside is perceived from the site, "Oh, we don't know how to do that." That's when the central office would be really good because they have those contacts. They've been doing the research and going and visiting the different school districts that are implementing it, and would have good suggestions for people to bring in. A lot of times it's all well intentioned, they say, "This is what this district did. Let's put it out there," but we haven't generated the need yet. We need to have a need generated at the site, "Oh, we need that," and it will be better received. That's what we're working on trying to do. Lead Teacher*

**5. There is an interest and need for more, or at least more targeted, professional development. SLC teachers expressed an interest in better understanding the “big picture” before they were introduced to the “nuts and bolts” components.**

*A lot of teachers want more. I think we all know that we're trying to figure this out as we go, of course, but I think that we feel pretty overwhelmed with some of the transitions. Like, we should have created advocates. We're doing the best we can and we're kind of, in a lot of ways, creating a lot of this ourselves, but I know they (teachers) want more professional development. I know that starting this summer, there's actually quite a bit. . . . coming up the teachers are going to feel a lot more comfortable with some of these things because there'll be more professional development. Lead Teacher*

*Throughout the year I'd have to say that a lot of teachers were given opportunities to continue their understanding of what a small learning community is all about, why is that particular structure so important in this reform effort. I have to say a good number of them have attended those in-services, either provided by the district or in-house. . . . I always feel that it's insufficient even though we've put in a lot of effort to*

*provide teachers with that. I would really like a more comprehensive month-by-month target in terms of small learning communities types of in-services. If you talk to teachers now I think many of them still feel it is important for us to continue to have that.* Principal

**6. Overall, informants seem satisfied and appreciative of the site-based work of the professional development consultants, and of increased opportunities to provide on-site professional development.**

*They [external training consultants] give people strategies, which the district has not trained people very well in I don't think, in how to adjust to the wide range of learners that are in your classroom.* Principal

*Of the professional development that we've done, one is called SIM, which is the Strategic Instruction Model. I think that this has resulted from e21 because it is our strategy that helps us adhere to our standards, and we're trying to get it to become common across the entire curriculum. We had professional development last summer where only maybe 15 or 20 people attended and I was one of them. I was really impressed with it. I used it in my classroom. It really gears the kids towards the standards. It keeps the teachers on common ground. It keeps them all organized, which is very helpful in a small learning community situation.* Lead Teacher

**7. There is a very strong commitment to the initiative on the part of the Teacher Leaders. Informants believe the Teacher Leader Network is giving teachers the opportunity to participate in school leadership and their own professional development.**

*I think the Teacher Leader Network might be the structure that's most taken root and has been the most successful and powerful, and these are teachers who really didn't know what a teacher leader is or what a small learning community is and what is the work of a small learning community and how do you bring 12-15 teachers together and say "OK here we are," and so that's a structure that's very much needed. I just worked with them the other day, and we were summarizing the year and looking back on the year and their, oh gosh, their list of accomplishments, their lessons learned, their identification of most satisfying experiences were impressive. . . . They all have a ton of great stories inside them of colleagues coming together and taking more charge of their behavior and their teaching and their children, and it's really cool.*  
LEED

*So the structure of having Lead Teachers is really important and has been helpful and worked really well in terms of leading the SLC. I look at them as department heads, and I'm really happy to have them. Certainly, there are new groups of teachers that are willing to take on that leadership, which is not easy. They are working with teachers that are very resistant to change as well.* Principal

**8. Professional development is being defined in non-traditional ways, and teachers seem to be excited about the opportunity to learn in ways other than through participation in**



**workshops and seminars. For example, both Common Planning Time and partnerships with the community were described as forms of professional development.**

*The time together, Common Planning Time is really good, and I think we have almost 100% attendance. The value of the Common Planning Time is pretty much school-wide accepted. This is something we really need to do. It's communication about students, not technically professional development, but it is in the sense of developing a program in our SLC.* Lead Teacher

*If you ask me how we provide in-service to a lot of the teachers. . . it's through a lot of these field trips. They are learning along with the students. . . . I want you to understand this isn't just teachers sitting down listening to a person lecturing to them. We have it [professional development] through various means; field trips, workshops.* Principal

*We've gotten responses from UC Davis. Some petroleum company wants to come and do some science work with us because of our focus on the environment. The city of Sacramento wants to come, and SMUD wants to do some work with us on a project to put art on the city buildings throughout the community. All of that can be tied into what the teachers want to do for professional development.* Lead Teacher

## **Discussion of Professional Development Practices Typically Associated with Effective Small Learning Communities**

To better understand current practices, informants were asked to respond to prompts specific to professional practices typically associated with effective small learning communities (see Appendix B).

### **1. Curriculum is aligned with district, state, national, and industry standards.**

The informants did not appear to perceive curriculum alignment as a priority of the initiative at this point in time, nor did they believe there was a comprehensive plan in place to address it in the future,<sup>7</sup> although there is a perception that this area will become a priority as SLC and individual teachers begin to turn their attentions to professional development and brokering their own training. That said, school sites are addressing curricular standards in a variety of ways, and it is a priority in schools under State mandate (State intervention).

Several informants felt that the District Office should assume more of the responsibility for curriculum alignment, but others felt that professional development around standards should be developed at the individual school sites.

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<sup>7</sup> None of the informants mentioned or alluded to 'industry standards.'

*Kids need engaging and rigorous classroom instruction and there hasn't been that this year. In one respect, it's sort of like year one is about letting the SLC restructure and take root so that we can get on to the much harder and important work of improving instruction everyday in classrooms. LEED*

*e21 brings the structure while we continue to focus on effective instruction within that structure. There has to be both. You can have a beautiful structure, but if the teachers don't know how to teach. . . . you might get to know the kids well, the kids might want to come to school, they make good friends, they are connected, but their academic improvement in terms of knowledge is not going to move as fast as we want them to. Effective instruction has to be in place for teachers to feel good about themselves because they've done well as a teacher and for kids to improve because they've learned a lot along the way. Principal*

## **2. Students involved in their own learning (e.g., professional development related to the development of Individual Learning Plans).**

The perception on the part of teachers and school sites appears to be that a necessary first step to involving students in their own learning is to institutionalize the structures or tools needed to support student involvement (such as Block Scheduling, Advisory, and Individual Learning Plans). LEED staff, however, seems to see the conceptual components as the more critical first step (knowing who your students are and investing time with those children and having a “safety net” in place). In either case, it is not clear if the structures and professional development around the use of these structures is sufficient, or if the SLC have “bought into” the concept of involving students in their own learning. Implementation and support for structures such as Advisory and Individual Learning Plans vary widely among sites.

Other strategies to involve students in their own learning (such as individualized attention, ongoing feedback to help students improve their work, engaging students in the learning process, and ensuring student understanding of graduation and college-entry requirements) were not mentioned with the exception of one individual, a principal, who mentioned the use of education pathways as a strategy to involve students.

*At one level it's about teachers knowing kids well and investing time with those children, relative to what their learning strengths and weakness are, how is it that we can partner together so that we can help you be as successful as possible with school, classes, and graduating on time. That is conceptual. Then there's the pragmatic part of, “what kind of tools are adopted that would help us as far as measuring your progress and planning your progress?” The district has designed some tools that are artifacts that you could see and training for teacher leaders who then take this and train their communities in the use of this individual learning plan that teachers use in their Advisory classes. LEED*

*It's important to understand that while standards-based instruction is important, the Individual Learning Plan so that kids understand ninth grade level, so that they know these are the steps I have to choose to follow to graduate [are also important]. A lot*

*of our kids don't even think about graduating high school until the end of the junior year. Well, all the classes they flunked in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade are going to come back to haunt them. So all of those things are important, but it's also important to realize there has to be other ways to teach kids to keep them engaged, and the direct method of reading out of the book and lecturing them doesn't work. It doesn't work with most kids. It's kind of that balance where you see things that are connected, like the ILP and the standards-based approach, etc., but you need a repertoire of teaching strategies that engage the kids; otherwise it doesn't matter. All those things you've put in place are great, but they mean nothing unless you get the kids engaged with their own learning. SIF*

### **3. Measures in place to make sure all students are learning, particularly measures that address the needs of English Language Learners (ELL), students with disabilities, and under-performing students.**

There is mixed evidence that shows schools/SLC are focusing on strategies to ensure all students are learning. There does appear to be more of an orientation towards using data to inform instruction, largely in response to the encouragement of the site improvement facilitators (SIF), who are aggressively sharing data with school sites and SLC. Staff seem accepting of this, requesting even more data be shared, as well as asking for assistance in how to interpret that data.

*One of my jobs is to just gather data and feed it to them. For example, towards the end of the year, I gave every SLC a composite list of all their 9<sup>th</sup> graders and highlighted every kid that was already behind 10 units. Come June, if they're behind 20 units, they become likely dropout candidates. So I handed out the list to all the Lead Teachers and said, "Talk about it. I don't care what else you do during that hour. Say you have 37 kids who are already behind this many units, and you have 57 kids who are behind this many units. Talk about how you're going to go after those 9<sup>th</sup> graders." SIF*

Actual success in meeting the needs of English Language Learners (ELL), students with disabilities, and under-performing students is mixed. The needs of students with disabilities seem to be the least addressed at all school sites, while sites facing sanctions appear to be focusing heavily on the needs of under-performing students.<sup>8</sup>

With some exceptions there is a tendency to place ELL students into their own SLC with the hope that they will be able to join other SLC once their language skill levels are adequate.<sup>9</sup>

There is some perception that the responsibility for ensuring that the needs of targeted populations are accommodated falls under the auspices of the district office. There also seems to be some confusion about what addressing the needs of targeted populations actually means in terms of the initiative. One informant mentioned that, "While one of the goals of the SLC is to

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<sup>8</sup> Several informants mentioned the advantage of having additional support funds to support SLC.

<sup>9</sup> This strategy can be interpreted as a way to provide targeted support for students or as a failure to integrate sub-populations into the mainstream.

meet the needs of special populations, the SLC are supposed to look, demographically, like the school” and questioned how this was to happen.

*I want to make sure I share with you that we are not trying to track our immigrant students, however, we do put them in their ability language level in terms of English. Math they are all over the place, as they should be because of their math background, but in English many of them are either in the beginning or intermediate level. We do have some in advanced, so we target them in their English level and teach at that level to them, they will improve much better in their English language skills. By grouping them, we have to group them with some history teacher or science teacher, so we finally designed an International SLC. Principal*

#### **4. Relate instructional strategies to real-life situations.**

Sites appear to be creating partnerships with the business and academic communities as the primary strategy to relate instructional strategies to real-life situations, and partnerships with business and higher education institutions appear to be forming in at least some SLC at each of the school sites.<sup>10</sup> Other potential strategies to relate instructional strategies to real-life situations (for example, a focus on technology or problem solving, multicultural emphasis in daily curriculum, or a community services components) were not mentioned by the informants.<sup>11</sup>

*I think that they're [the community] ready to get involved. They are bending over backwards to try to get involved with the schools and participate. Not always financially, but with the want to come in and speak, or whatever. Lead Teacher*

*One thing I just wanted to mention about your question regarding real world learning and real life situational strategies, I would say that that is happening and it varies from school to school. It's been highly dependent on the types of partners that they've been able to have, what type of SLC it is, if it has a career theme, etc., and the different kinds of partnerships that they've been able to build with community members. I think that the footprints of that are there. LEED*

Not all teachers are in agreement that business partnerships should be a strategy employed by schools.<sup>12</sup>

*I would not say that we've made any new connections and I'm not sure anyone here is equipped to do that. We don't have the time and the resources... Principal*

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<sup>10</sup> According to informants, parents like the idea of workplace visits and stronger college/university connections. Teachers see these relationships as beneficial to their students and seem to see the community involvement as part of their own professional development.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that informants were not explicitly questioned about any of these strategies.

<sup>12</sup> One principal mentioned that at one point in time each school had an entrepreneur assigned to help schools make connections with the community. This principal added that the position was not effective, but was unclear if this was an outcome of the position or the person occupying the position.

*You know, it's all over the board. I have one faculty member that thinks evil corporations are coming in trying to take over schools, and I have others that say we're not doing enough. If they've got the money, let's use what we can get. Not every kid is going to college so we don't need to bring in just IBM and Bill Gates, we also need to bring the plumbers union, and the electricians union so if a student doesn't want to go to college, they can be an apprentice or journeyman plumber or electrician by the time they graduate.* Lead Teacher

##### **5. Involving teachers in modifying instructional strategies, selecting curriculum materials, and improving assessment measures (providing opportunities for teachers to develop their own practice and professional development).**

A structural change that appears to be encouraging SLC/teacher interest in taking responsibility for their practice has been the restructuring of teacher interaction so that it occurs on a cross-departmental rather than disciplinary level. Informants reported increased communication among teachers, as well as the increased use of cross-curriculum instruction.

*One of the strongest SLC is one that really works together to cross curriculum. . . There are all sorts of debates and research about how many times we need to hear something in order for it to transfer over to long-term memory. . . . Then they're working on a project, it becomes more powerful for the students. Those are the kinds of conversations that teachers are having. They're also having the same expectations as the students, and that's a good thing. Sometimes the student will get credit in both English and history for a single project they're working on. I think the students feel the bond more with their SLC because they see their teachers working collaboratively.* Principal

*They needed this year, I think, to kind of start pulling together. They [teachers] never worked together as a group. We were broken down by departments, and there was a lot of resistance to breaking up that structure. Now, many of them see it as a good thing. They have new friends. . . Now they know people in the math department, the science department, the social studies department. Really, in this big school, they never talked before.* Principal

*Taking the power away from the departments, I think, was the most important thing at [school]. It just empowered so many people and new teachers that so often are not listened to because they are new teachers. Just because you're new doesn't mean you don't have great ideas and you don't bring a host of important things to the table, and a lot of times that wasn't listened to because you're a new teacher and you don't understand. So I think it was the single most important thing that impacted instruction in learning on our campus, removing the power structure of departments. They're no longer a power on campus, and that makes a huge difference.* SIF

One notable example of what can happen when teachers are given autonomy to modify instructional strategies involves one school's math department.

*One of the things that happened at about that time was that we had a very young math department, and after about a year they thought they'd push the envelope a bit, and they said they really want to change the way math is done here. So they presented a process and a program and then they took it to the new principal, because [the principal] and they said, "What do you think if we did this, we think this is how math should be taught here." Well [the principal] was very much of an empowerer. He very much got it that his job was to facilitate. He said, "Go with it, tell me how much it's going to cost and we'll do it." Well, in the past, out of all our kids, six kids passed Algebra. The year after the first year of implementation, we had 300 kids pass. SIF*

*Now the small learning communities decide what kind of professional development they need. They come up with that by looking at the data from their small learning communities, and deciding, "All of our kids are consistently missing the mark at this thing. Is this something we can do on our own or do we need outside help?" SIF*

SLC interest in taking responsibility for their professional development varies from individual and site to site dependent in part on the stage of implementation. Reasons for this are unclear, but newer teachers seem more apt to embrace these opportunities than veteran teachers. When it does occur, it appears to be very effective. An example of a this was provided by a Lead Teacher:

*I've done that [developed professional development opportunities] with my own small learning community. [In a previous position] I learned a lot about study skills and was certified to train study skills. So last summer I held my own two-day workshop for my small learning community. I said, "this is going to be invaluable to us because if we all learn this and pass this on to our students we will have common ground. Kids need to know how to be organized, how to take notes, how to make outlines, and they need to learn how to study." Those are things I taught my entire community.*  
Lead Teacher

### **SECTION III: KEY FINDINGS RELATATE TO HOME-SCHOOL-INVOLVEMENT**

At the time of this evaluation a comprehensive home-school-community plan was not in place, and the SCUSD Parent Community Coordinator had just started in a new position supported by LEED. This person indicated that she would ultimately like to see a parent-community center at each site, staffed by a paid position. In addition, each site would support a Parent Council comprised of parent representatives from each SLC. The primary function of this structure would be to facilitate improved communication.

**1. Informants at each of the sites expressed an interest in developing and sustaining effective home-school relationships. All sites, however, appear to be struggling with ways to do this.<sup>13</sup>**

Informants did not clearly articulate what parent involvement actually is – some seemed to interpret it as simply attending parent meetings, others more broadly as attending student performances. Language and cultural barriers, a lack of trust on the part of disenfranchised parents, and a lack of time and resources on the part of teachers were frequently mentioned by the informants as reasons for low levels of involvement.

It is unclear if all of the school sites are aware of, or planning to take advantage of, the services of LEED's Parent Community Coordinator as she was not mentioned by the site-based informants as a resource. The Coordinator appears to be taking a site-level approach rather than working with individual SLC.

*That's probably one area where our SLC [says SLC but is making reference to school site] hasn't done as well. I know there are focus groups that have been put together where parents are involved. I don't know if all parents were involved, but they tended to be the parents of the higher achieving students. We did do a community outreach to [neighborhood] which is government, low-income housing, in the fall. It was not tremendously attended. It was a barbeque where the faculty went to meet parents, but I think it was because they didn't really believe we would show up. We got some of that kind of feedback. We're planning on doing that again, reaching out to another community east of us. We understand the importance of it, and we're trying to do more and more of that because [parents] feel that we really don't care. I think if anyone talked to us, they would know it's not true. It's just a perception that they have. Lead Teacher*

*The kids whose parents have been involved that I consistently see have done very well. Probably our hardest group of parents to reach is the parents that don't speak English, though we have those services on campus. We have Spanish and Hmong speakers who actually do translations for us. We've even been trained in home visits, but it still is very hard to reach that group. Language is a barrier, and maybe they aren't comfortable with the culture." Lead Teacher*

*I have several teachers who are really strong advocates of minority students, and they really understand how parents of those students feel disenfranchised a lot of times, maybe not on purpose. . . . It's not a conscious effort [on the part of the schools and teachers] to do that, although it might be perceived that way. One of my teachers thought that this group was left out of the committee on purpose; I don't think that was true. I think that it was who wanted to be involved, or who had the time to be involved, or who thought that they might be heard. We're working on that, trying to*

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<sup>13</sup> There is at least some perception on the part of teachers that high schools will never have high levels of parent involvement. One said, "There is an expectation on the part of the parent that we are taking care of their children and we will let them know if anything needs to be handled."

*achieve that equity and get the different groups involved in the process. It's a difficult task to get that many different groups together. We've had better success reaching out to the business community than with the parents.* Lead Teacher

Notable examples that show parent involvement can and is being improved have been identified. For instance, one school's Parent Council appears to be increasing the number of parents involved as they work to create a more positive environment.

*You have to remember that we started at below zero since the only parents that were involved here were the naysayers and the troublemakers. So we got to zero by eliminating them [from Parent Council] and then we brought in great people.* Principal

*Parent involvement on our campus used to be negative, parents were only there because their kids were suspended, or a parent was upset with a teacher. [Now] our Parent Council's whole mindset is how to create a positive environment on campus for students, teachers, and parents. That's their mantra and their mindset.* SIF

**2. SLC interest and commitment to parent involvement varies between communities and across schools. Some of the staff perceives parent involvement as a school/administrative issue rather than an SLC/teacher issue. The promotion of parent involvement is currently being driven by administration, however informants expressed interest in shifting to a more parent-driven model.**

*In this area we still need a lot of work. I know at the beginning of the year, I called as many parents as I could to say, I'm the child's Advisory teacher, I'm the lead teacher in this community, if you have any questions about what we're doing this is how you can reach me. They were very appreciative of that. Since there are over 400 students in this community, I delegated and I said to each of the teachers, "I think you have to call your parents in your Advisory and let them know who you are." Many of them did, some of them did not. They just felt they had too much to do, and if the parent needed to talk to them, they would eventually talk to them. That was just the way they handled it at the time.* Lead Teacher

**3. There is a disconnect between the District Office Parent Engagement Department and school sites. The perception is that the Parent Engagement Department has traditionally focused on "parent education" rather than on helping parents to become advocates for their children.**

*They [District Office] haven't [provided assistance in reaching out to parents], it's sort of been left to us to come up with creative ideas. I think the district has done things to try to talk to parents, they've had parents involved with the e21 process, but again it hasn't necessarily been under-achieving students' parents.* Lead Teacher



**4. While informants mentioned that parents are supportive of SLC, some parents have expressed concerns about their children's choices being limited by the new structure.**

*At first they were a little concerned about if we were going to restrict their child's choices, because that is big in this community. We have a lot of high profile elective classes and AP classes. So parents wanted to know that e21 was not going to destroy that for their kids. The parents who are very involved. Principal*

**5. Sites seem to have mixed interest and success in reaching out to community and faith-based organizations, although feedback on this was limited.<sup>14</sup>**

The school's existing culture and administrative interest in building these types of relationships appear to be determining factors in if, and how, this occurs. For example, the presence of Healthy Start programs seems indicative of a community-focused school culture.

**SECTION IV:  
KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OVERALL IMPLEMENTATION OF E21**

Informants mentioned a number of factors that have contributed to initiative's success and that may have contributed to delays in implementation. Section IV summarizes these factors.

**Structural Components**

Two structural components, Common Planning Time and Advisory, were frequently mentioned in relation to the e21 initiative.

**Common Planning Time**

Staff reaction to Common Planning Time was mixed, primarily on a school-by-school basis. Schools that more fully implemented it appear to be happy with the results. Teachers especially seemed to appreciate the opportunity to interact with teachers in other subject areas. Common Planning Time was also mentioned as an effective form of professional development.

*It's an evolving process. It's another change that people need to adjust to. Initially. . . the teachers were very reluctant and hesitant about what it was going to be and what purpose it would serve. Would we really be planning or would administration and people in the higher levels be telling us what to do? So they were really concerned about that. Initially, there was a lot of paper work and a lot of things we had to talk about that took a lot of our time. Lead Teacher*

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<sup>14</sup> The evaluator did attend the Meadowview Faith/Community Leaders Breakfast on June 16, 2004. The purpose of this event was to establish a reinforcing network with faith, business and community leaders to ensure that family participation with schools is implemented and academic success is assured. As a direct result of the meeting, a relationship was established between a Faith Community group and a SCUSD high school. In addition, tentative plans have been made with the Faith Community to establish an Adopt-A-School program.

*The attendance has been very good. We have four teachers who don't attend ever, ever, ever. This is out of 103 teachers because they're making some kind of political statement. Actually, one of them came once to a faculty session because we had student panel, but that was the only time she ever came. You have people who miss every now and then. I would say on average we have better than 90% attendance. SIF*

## **Advisory**

While the majority of informants described Advisory as an important component of SLC,<sup>15</sup> a number of issues have prevented it from taking root. These issues include: individual teacher and teacher union resistance to an extra preparation, staff's belief that students don't find it meaningful, varying degrees of interest on the part of the teacher, and general discomfort with being asked to take on a different and sometimes uncomfortable "touchy feely" role. The need for more professional development and support specific to Advisory was mentioned frequently.

*Some of the teachers were not really happy with Advisory. It sounded like an extra prep and it was very difficult to do when they had five classes to teach. They put up walls against making it successful. Lead Teacher*

*They [staff] thought that there needed to be more structure, more meaning for students, and that it needed to have a grade or a pass/fail attached to it. Kids needed to get a credit for it. As it was, kids were not feeling accountable or acting accountable because they knew they didn't get a grade, so most kids/teenagers will not work or be motivated, even if it is for their benefit, unless they get something in return for it. Lead Teacher*

*[Implementation of Advisory was] very uneven depending on whether teachers bought into it or not. . . Most teachers put the binder on the shelf and did their own thing, which was ok as long as they were engaging students. Not all of them did that. Lead Teacher*

## **Evidence of Implementation**

As with any systemic reform, how much of what is happening can be attributable to e21 is difficult to determine. There is, however, strong evidence that suggests shifts in attitude in behaviors. Informants' perceptions about the sustainability of the initiative were mixed. As might

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<sup>15</sup> A SIF mentioned that teachers obtain a lot of information about their students through their SLC, but more often, they get information from Advisory. "If you are an Advisory for 9<sup>th</sup> graders, I give you their grades every 5 weeks. That's where the conversations are started, 'What are you doing if 19 out of 21 kids have Ds and Fs?' They bring in counselors; we've brought in study skills books, survival skills things. The real work with 9<sup>th</sup> grades, and the real discussion of, 'Oh my gosh, look how many of you have Ds and Fs,' are in advisories."

be expected, informants invested in the initiative appear to be more optimistic about its long-term success.

Evidence that suggests implementation is occurring includes (in no particular order):

### **1. Focus on student achievement**

*[School] saw jumps on EL end-of-year exams. I know [Professional Development Consultant] came to help the English Department out. Maybe the improvements are more apparent because of e21; it just brings so many things to light and makes you more aware of things that are going on around campus. Lead Teacher*

### **2. Focus on ensuring all students are learning**

*There is an enormous amount of loyalty to the kids, and they [teachers] don't want to see it lost. . . This is a school with some fabulous traditions, but this is a school with a tradition of letting kids drop out. We have to acknowledge that one of our traditions is letting a couple of our kids disappear every couple of years. SIF*

### **3. Shifts in school culture**

*That IS related to e21, absolutely. My student teacher who is eventually going back home down south, but I had her interview anyway. She heard horrible things about our school, but she couldn't believe how wrong they were. She came to our meetings with our teachers, and she said that if it hadn't been for the small learning community, she wouldn't have liked to be at this site as much. She really just couldn't believe how incredibly strong the communities are. She was torn. She said, "I really wanted to stay." And long-term subs say that too. They really do. It's kind of nice. I'm hoping that the people will want to stay for a long time. Lead Teacher*

### **4. Sense of community / loss of anonymity**

*All the schools, all the communities are in one area. . . and you walk out and you know all the kids, period. Even the ones that aren't in my class, I know them. I see them walking around and I say, "what are you doing, go back to class" and they say, "OK Miss [name]." So they all know who I am. They all pretty much respect the teachers and they all know we're located in one central area. So kids come out of classrooms, they come and visit, and it's neat because we really have bonded much better than in previous years. Lead Teacher*

*They [teachers] love the idea of Advisory. They actually were very timid about walking into it because of the last year. I'll ask them now, "Do you want to change the format, do you want to swap this around?" And they say, "No way! I've bonded with these kids, I've told them I'd be with them for their entire high school career, I want them." Lead Teacher*

*They [students] are not anonymous to people, they are people that have needs, that people can pay attention to. Principal*

## **5. Interaction/communication between teachers**

*The best thing about the small learning community is the interaction between the teachers. Because we learned how to function as a team. . . I have wonderful teachers, there's a lot of leadership qualities in my community and because we work well as a team the kids see it and it creates this great enthusiasm. The collaboration is probably the best thing, it's amazing. . . . I've never had as much fun collaborating with a history teacher and a math teacher. English teachers don't like math teachers. Lead Teacher*

## **6. Student-focused instruction**

*There have been a few students that haven't been performing well in my classes, and I've been wondering why they haven't been because maybe initially they were and then something changed. So I went to a few of the teachers that I knew had the student. I talked to them, found out if they were having similar issues. . . . [Whereas before] I might not have gone to a lot of teachers. I might have gone to one or two. . . but it would have taken a longer time because right now we're all in the same general vicinity. I can go across the hall if I know that another teacher has the same student and say, "what's going on here" or ask if there are some strategies I could use for that student instead of the ones I'm using. So it's very student oriented. Lead Teacher*

## **7. Teacher-driven instruction**

*The teachers drive our curriculum, the teachers drive our needs and what they want to do within their classes with the given that we have to share facilities and funding sources." Principal*

## **8. Changes in instructional practice**

*Most of the best practices came about in the English and math programs. I heard for many years in [school] that these kids can't learn and these kids are broken because of the environment they come from. There's only so much we can do, etc. Well now that math has had two years of incredible success, and now that our reading program in its first year has seen 4 to 5 grade levels of literacy go up, it's really taken wind out of the sails that want to stop that. So when it comes to best practices, one of the most exciting things is the fact that other departments are now saying, what do we need to do to model English and math? SIF*

*I don't know if I can credit e21 with our academic improvement last year. Every single subgroup has improved, and I don't want to get into the fallacy of causation, but I think that the structuring, the conversation, the project-based learning, the*

*emphasizing of effective instruction all played a role in our improvement last year.*  
Principal

## **9. Sense of accountability**

*Just that accountability of, “every teacher knows who you are and they’re talking about you,” the students know that. They’re very surprised when their math teacher knows that they’re not dressing for PE. That just sort of changes the culture and leads them a little bit in the right direction.* Lead Teacher

*I think we are gaining more and more believers and more and more teachers are understanding that they will be held accountable. I think that message is loud and clear. You can view that as positive or negative. Positive is, “Good, we know exactly who to go to and what to do to help teachers who need help.” We also know what our obstacles are and we need to overcome those obstacles.* Principal

*It could have been that we were just doing things differently, it didn’t matter what we did, as long as we did something differently, we would have got that bump. But in theory, I can only see it working well for the underachieving, the achievement gap as we call it, because we’re going to be held more accountable. We saw that in Advisories. We would print up the deficiency notices before they even got sent home; the kids had a copy in their hand. As soon as it was in the computer, each Advisory teacher could get a copy. You could sit down with them and say, “Ok, what do you think your grades are?” It’s amazing how many think they’re passing everything, “Well, no, you’re not, so let’s focus on one of these classes. Which one are you going to fix?” I don’t think we turn F students into A students, but we do turn a big chunk of F’s into D’s and C’s.* Lead Teacher

## **10. The attitude of key stakeholders and the school’s culture regarding school reform.**

*I thought, “It’s better to be a part of it so you can help direct it rather than just sit and complain about it.” That’s why I did it. It’s been interesting, being able to see why reform is so difficult.* Lead Teacher

*At [school], they have a new principal that came on board during the summer last year. . . he came from a middle school environment, and he came in with really no need to preserve a traditional comprehensive high school environment and a real commitment to the reform.* LEED

## **11. Despite key stakeholder disagreements about which components of the e21 initiative are necessary and about the speed with which implementation should occur, informants largely seem to be in agreement that the idea and ultimate goal of supporting SLC is worth pursuing.**

*Probably the greatest strength is that it makes sense to people. That smaller is better; the big 2700 student high schools are too anonymous for a lot of kids.* Principal

*People are beginning to understand and agree with this whole format, because of the conversations that they've had this year. It really takes time; we cannot go from A to B so soon and so fast and when we run into difficulty to just retreat.* Principal

### **Barriers Impacting Implementation**

The degree of 'buy-in' from participating schools varies widely as does the degree of implementation. Factors that contribute to the delay of implementation appear to include (in no particular order):

#### **1. Conflicts with the teacher union.**

*The biggest constriction was that union contract. Because we said I'm going to take this English teacher and put her over here and we're going to pay her to be a lead teacher. The union said, 'oh, you can't do that.' And in many cases the union was right. This district should not have applied for the Carnegie grant until they knew that the union was on board, and a lot of the central offices were on board. There was no foresight about how big a stumbling block that was going to be. It's really disturbing, and my principal colleagues have stopped pushing it [e21] because they've been getting too much opposition.* Principal

*Even though we are advancing, we are advancing slowly and with much difficulty, because the teacher union is not on board. I feel that as the principal, my hands are tied.* Principal

#### **2. A "wait and see" attitude regarding SCUSD's school board and new superintendent's commitment to the initiative.**

*The high school leadership division is undergoing transitions and unknowns and then there's changing superintendency. It's unknown about her level of ownership and commitment. She's learning, studying, and observing. So it is a really critical point.* LEED

#### **3. Doubts regarding the availability of long-term funding needed to support what is thought of as an expensive initiative.**

*One of the things we've been trying to overcome is the fact that they've seen different reforms come and go, and it's still a question in some peoples' minds that, "Once the grant money runs out, will we be able to continue?" Nobody's been able to answer that question, especially with the way the budget is in California. We may not be able to even sustain it once the grant goes away. A lot of people are saying, "Why put so much effort into it if we're going to try something different in two years?"* Lead Teacher

**4. Animosity between the school sites and the District Office over the e21 initiative.<sup>16</sup> This includes the belief that the initiative was implemented using a top-down process and that site-based staff did not have the opportunity to provide sufficient input into the process.**

*There is a core group that really wants to do this. It's the fringe group that we're trying to pull in, and a lot of resentment is that they feel it's sort of been a top-down thing. I don't know that that's necessarily true, but that's the perception. We had a lot of planning all last year as far as knowing that we were going to implement e21. People had the opportunity and they didn't take advantage of that. Then they come back and say, "I was never consulted." There's that fine balance of do you let them go and keep going? Lead Teacher*

**5. Differing understandings of what components a SLC needs to be effective and differing opinions regarding what justifies "non-negotiable" components of the initiative.**

*The non-negotiables were not established and then really distinct, consistent, and clear messages about what we mean by a "small learning community" were diffused and ever changing. . . LEED*

*I think part of the problem is that we try to do 27 things at once. They just decided that we had to do an Individual Learning Plan, Senior Project, Advisories, Small Learning Communities, Common Planning Time, and all these things had to be implemented at the exact same time after having a system that's been the same for 50 years? Now all of a sudden there's this sense of urgency. You have no idea which one of these things it is that's giving you a bang for your buck. You have no idea which one of these things is actually giving you some sort of benefit. SIF*

*Our intention was to invest our energy in the 140 9<sup>th</sup> graders in each of the SLC and to move those kids so they get to that junior year and are really likely to finish. It was never our intention to have these really tiny groups of kids in all 4 years. SIF*

**6. The prevailing attitude among a number of stakeholders that this is "yet another reform that will come and go."**

*Unfortunately, not all of them are on board with this e21 initiative, many of them are very skeptical and say, "Well, you have this money from Carnegie, let's see how many years you're going to run this and then it's going to go back to the usual." Principal*

**7. A population of 'engaged' parents wanting what is best for 'their' kids (magnet programs, academies) and who are not necessarily interested in reform efforts that might result in the loss of these perceived benefits.<sup>17</sup>**

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<sup>16</sup> This conclusion is based on the perspective of informants at school sites. No district level staff was interviewed as part of this evaluation.

<sup>17</sup> Typical SLC structure calls for the elimination of magnet programs and academies in favor of mainstreaming and steps to ensure that all students are given the same opportunities. This appears to be

*If you've got places like [school] where there are a lot of successful programs, parents are going to rally around those programs. To a certain extent, we're based on competitiveness in the U.S. There's a certain mindset of the survival of the fittest. Parents of the most successful kids are one of the biggest problems to reform. Because it's working fine for my kid, and I'm sorry the other 15 kids aren't doing so well but that's not my responsibility. Trying to get a community to say, "not all of our kids are being successful" is a difficult thing to do. SIF*

**8. A population of teachers who have made it clear that they are reluctant to “give up” magnet programs and academies that were in place prior to e21 (such as ROTC and PACE).**

*One thing that might happen on campus is that the magnet program may become exempt from the grant money because it's not a SLC and doesn't meet the criteria of the grant. We don't care. That program is 17 years old and it's been operating with no money for 17 years. Our attitude is that we don't need the money. SIF*

*There are two small learning communities here that were established before e21 started. . . The only difference is that this year ROTC and the police academy joined together to form one small learning community. The other one is the PACE small learning community, and I think they've been in existence 2 years and they were already preparing to be in existence before e21 was established and they were pretty well organized with the type of classes they have and their goals and their types of students. Both of those academy students are admitted by application, so they go through a screening process. The other four small learning communities, the students when they fill out their schedule, choose which ones they want to go to and it's not by application. So I think that those two are working and they're setting a good example for what we hope to achieve. Lead Teacher*

**9. Perceived differences in veteran vs. new teachers' willingness to adopt the initiative.**

*Thankfully we had had a number of teachers retire. So the ratio was getting to a point to where we had mostly new teachers. The difference in new teachers is striking, and this is going to sound bad, but it isn't. I'm not saying all veteran teachers didn't care, but there was this sense of hopelessness, except what I can do in my classroom. So if I can do something for one or two kids, even though 2300 are suffering, that's all I can do. They [veteran teachers] helped out quite a bit, but the majority of the push came from the new teachers who said that this wasn't right, and it was unacceptable. . . SIF*

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much more of an issue at McClatchy and Kennedy than at Johnson and Burbank, perhaps in part because of the “if it ain't broke don't fix it” attitude that was expressed by a number of informants and the reality that Johnson and Burbank's student population serves a higher percentage of under-performing students.



## **10. Inconsistent communication of roles and expectations.**

*My first time doing that [asking a colleague to facilitate a meeting] I got a response from one of the teachers who said that was my responsibility and I should not give my responsibility to other teachers. I'm the lead teacher, they have five classes to teach, I don't. So I wrote her back and said, "No I think that there's a misunderstanding here. I'm not quite sure you understand what the lead teacher's responsibilities are." That wasn't really clear to a lot of our teachers. So I wrote her back and told her what it is that I do, and what other lead teachers do and I think you should be aware of it so you'll understand what I'm asking. She wrote me back, "I had no idea." Lead Teacher*

### **SECTION V: ISSUES RELATED TO IMPLEMENTATION AND THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOME-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY COMPONENTS THAT MAY MERIT FURTHER EXPLORATION**

Researchers have identified “the conditions and practices that can enable small schools to achieve their potential—to become true learning communities” (Cotton, 2001, p. 13). A number of these “elements of success” are evident in the SCUSD and have been used below to suggest future directions for LEED to pursue in their quest for understanding and improving the e21 initiative.

#### **1. Autonomy and support for teaching**

The example of the school math department mentioned in this narrative suggests that when teachers are given the autonomy and support to develop instructional strategies it can result in improved student achievement.

A suggestion for further exploration would be a closer investigation of the school math department and/or identification and investigation of additional instances in which teachers have been given decision-making authority in the areas of curriculum and instruction. This might include the Teacher Leader Network, which was frequently mentioned as one of the most effective components of the initiative. Further investigation might focus on the underlying structure of the Teacher Leader Network and its effectiveness as a communication and capacity building tool for the initiative.

Alternatively, exploration might focus on data-driven instruction. SIF and other school administrators are actively encouraging the use of data-driven instruction and sites seem to be receptive to using data to improve classroom practice and meet the needs of targeted populations. An exploration of what types of data SLC are requesting and what they are doing with the information would help to inform district practices in this area. Linking this to student achievement may also be a possibility.

Finally, examples of non-traditional but desirable professional development opportunities were mentioned. For instance, despite reservations on the part of a few teachers, informants expressed overall satisfaction with budding partnerships with the workplace and academic communities. Several informants described these business/higher education partnerships as professional development opportunities. A closer look at business/higher education partnerships that are forming might serve to clarify the types and nature of these relationships and their perceived impact on classroom practice.

Additional study might also uncover other exemplary forms of professional development that are a direct outcome of the e21 initiative. One simple but apparently effective model has been to provide opportunities for teacher collaboration (e.g., Common Planning Time). A number of informants mentioned the benefits of getting to know and have an opportunity to work with teachers in other subject areas. A closer examination of the nature and quantity of integrated curriculum teams on classroom practice and student achievement might contribute to an increased understanding of effective professional development and classroom practices.

## **2. Identity**

While the participating schools supported magnet programs and academies that functioned largely as small learning communities prior to e21, the notion of career pathways as a way to focus instruction and learning is new to most teachers participating in the initiative.

The majority of principals and teachers seemed to be very excited about the notion of student pathways to the world of work and post-secondary education. They see the increased opportunity to both visit the work place and to invite representatives from the workplace into their classrooms as beneficial to their students. It is interesting that several informants saw these interactions as a form of professional development. Identifying and showcasing effective partnerships could help SLC to better understand the potential positive outcomes and facilitate implementation. A second potential area for exploration would be to identify academic and technical skills needed by students and to determine if those skills are being acquired. A third potential area for exploration in this area might include a longitudinal exploration that follows a group of students as they transition from high school to postsecondary education and/or employment.

## **3. Personalization**

When teachers have relationships with students and their families all “are more motivated to work and make a success of the schooling enterprise” (Cotton, p. 29). Personalization includes such things as getting to knowing students well, heterogeneity, and parent and community involvement.

There are at least several instances of the effective use of Advisory as a strategy to focus on student learning. Identifying these instances and showcasing best practices could help SLC to better understand the potential positive outcomes of knowing students well. In addition, tracking some of the emerging relationships between staff and students over a period of time would create a way to look at how these relationships influence student achievement and student success.

In every instance, when asked which SLC were most effective, informants mentioned magnet programs or academies, most of which were in place prior to e21 implementation and which target specific populations of students. It might prove informative to take a closer look at one or several of these programs in order to identify best practices and to develop strategies that other SLC in similar settings might adapt for their own use. It might also be informative to take a closer look at these programs, as well as the trend of placing ELL students in a separate SLC, to explore the notion of equitable practices as well as the practice of both deliberative and inadvertent tracking.

All of the sites, with one possible exception, appear to be struggling with the parent involvement component. Underlying issues are that sites do not have a clear model for what effective parent engagement should look like, do not have an understanding of what strategies are available to facilitate parent engagement at the high school level, and face numerous cultural and language barriers. The Parent Community Coordinator mentioned a survey that she is using on a limited basis. Perhaps working with her to expand and distribute that survey on a larger-scale would be useful both to identifying areas of need and to educate sites about the services she can make available to them. Additionally, it might be helpful to think about parent engagement in terms of affiliation/bonding. Is parents' sense of community increasing and is their sense of distrust decreasing? Do parents have the sense that the school is interested in their children's learning and general well-being?

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## APPENDIX A

### Survey Protocols e21 Small Learning Communities External Evaluation Principal and Lead Teacher Interview Protocol

#### Interview Discussion Guide

The following questions will provide the general framework for the interview. Follow-up questions will be asked, when appropriate, to gather further information. The introduction and debriefing statements will be read to the interviewees, and the *Statement of Confidentiality* will be provided.

The interview will focus on the following e21 goals and benchmarks (from the revised action plan in *Schools for a New Society: Progress Report, 2003*, SCUSD and LEED-Sacramento, pp. 60-61).

#### Professional Development:

- Goal 5: Provide rigorous, relevant, and standards-driven teaching and learning that meets the needs of all students.
- Align curriculum, standards and assessment.
  - Design and implement curriculum and instruction to accelerate the learning of ELL and students with special needs.
- Goal 6: Create a culture of continuous learning.
- Build the capacity of staff to deliver quality instruction and facilitate learning.

#### Home-School-Community Involvement:

- Goal 7: Create a culture of collective responsibility, ownership, and partnership across neighborhood and community.
- Ensure high expectations and requirements are established and communicated to all stakeholders.
- Goal 8: Develop and sustain strong and meaningful home-school-community alliances.
- Establish an effective two-way, customer-service oriented communication system among schools-homes-community.

#### Introduction

My name is Joanne Bookmyer. I am an evaluator from the CRESS Center at the University of California, Davis. I am part of a team that has been asked to evaluate two components of the district's e21 small learning communities initiative that your school is involved in. The two components are professional development and home-school-community involvement.

I am conducting interviews with teachers and principals and also conducting five focus groups with teachers and parents. The purpose of today's interview is to ask you a few questions about these two components. My purpose in asking is to better understand how your school is approaching each component. I am interested in understanding the process, not identifying particular people so please refrain from using ANY names in our discussion. It is anticipated that this study will continue for two additional years and that we will eventually use this information to develop case studies that might be used to showcase some of the different strategies and approaches schools are taking as they implement small learning communities.

Before we begin, I want provide you a *Statement of Confidentiality* that describes the study and how we will keep the information you provide confidential. [Provide interviewee a *Statement of Confidentiality*, review it quickly focusing on the last paragraph.]

The first part of the interview will revolve around professional development, and the second part will revolve around home-school-community partnerships.

Thank you in advance for participation. Your input is greatly appreciated.

### **Interview Questions**

1. To begin, would you please tell me what your position is, how it relates to the e21 small learning communities initiative, and how long you have been involved with the initiative.
2. Would you start by talking about the professional development opportunities that are available to the e21 SLCs at your school? I am interested in how much and what types of professional development are available or provided to teachers (and school staff). I am also interested in your opinion of its quality, sufficiency, and effectiveness.
3. Thinking specifically about the professional development that has been provided (or that is planned for the future) as part of the e21 SLC initiative, could you tell me if any of it focused on helping teachers to align their curriculum to state and industry standards?
4. Again, thinking specifically about professional development linked to the e21 SLC initiative, are there any steps being taken to help involve students in their own learning. For example, professional development related to the development of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs).
5. Has there been any professional development (or any that is planned for the future) that specifically addresses the needs of LEP/special education/underperforming students? I would like you to talk separately about each of these three groups of students.
6. I know that one focus of the small learning communities is to relate instructional strategies to real-life situations. Would you please talk about any professional development that has occurred (or that is planned for the future) that focuses on this goal?

7. How involved are teachers in developing their own professional development? Provide specific examples.
8. As part of our research we are interested in identifying and perhaps following several e21 SLCs over a period of time. We are interested in sites that have what might be considered “promising practices” from which we might learn more about what makes them effective. At this time, are you able to identify an SLC that is very effective in terms of the quality, sufficiency, and effectiveness of its professional development activities? If so, would you please talk about the SLC and why you think it is effective?
9. Turning to home-school-community involvement, would you please describe your parents and community and tell me a little about their interest and involvement in the small learning communities?
10. Has the school taken any particular steps to involve the parents/community more? If so, would you please describe the steps as well as any success to date?
11. From your perspective, how important is home-school-community involvement to your teachers?
12. What is your impression of parents and the communities’ reaction to the e21 SLC initiative? Have you noticed any changes in their level or type of involvement with the school?
13. Again, thinking about “promising practices, at this point in time, are you able to identify an SLC that is very effective in terms of its ability to foster and support home-school-community involvement? If so, would you please talk about the SLC and why you think it is effective?

### **Debriefing**

I would like to thank you for your participation. At this point, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this project. Do you have any questions for me?

*Thank you!*

## **e21 Small Learning Communities External Evaluation Teacher Focus Group Protocol**

### **Focus Group Discussion Guide**

The following questions will provide the general framework for the focus group discussion. Follow-up questions will be asked, when appropriate, to gather further information. The introduction and debriefing statements will be read to participants, and the *Statement of Confidentiality* will be distributed.

The focus group discussion will focus on the following e21 goals and benchmarks (from the revised action plan in *Schools for a New Society: Progress Report, 2003*, SCUSD and LEED-Sacramento, pp. 60-61).

#### Professional Development:

- Goal 5: Provide rigorous, relevant, and standards-driven teaching and learning that meets the needs of all students.
- Align curriculum, standards and assessment.
  - Design and implement curriculum and instruction to accelerate the learning of ELL and students with special needs.
- Goal 6: Create a culture of continuous learning.
- Build the capacity of staff to deliver quality instruction and facilitate learning.

#### Home-School-Community Involvement:

- Goal 7: Create a culture of collective responsibility, ownership, and partnership across neighborhood and community.
- Ensure high expectations and requirements are established and communicated to all stakeholders.
- Goal 8: Develop and sustain strong and meaningful home-school-community alliances.
- Establish an effective two-way, customer-service oriented communication system among schools-homes-community.

### **Introduction**

Thank you very much for coming! My name is Joanne Bookmyer and I will be facilitating today's discussion.

I am part of a team that has been asked to evaluate two components of the district's e21 small learning communities initiative that your school is involved in. The two components are professional development and home-school-community involvement.



I am conducting interviews with teachers and principals and also conducting five focus groups with teachers and parents – one of which you are a part of today. The purpose of today’s focus group is to ask you a few questions about these two components. My purpose in asking is to better understand how your school is approaching each component. I am interested in understanding the process, not identifying particular people so please refrain from using ANY names in our discussion. It is anticipated that this study will continue for two additional years and that we will eventually use this information to develop case studies that might be used to showcase some of the different strategies and approaches schools are taking as they implement small learning communities.

Before we begin, I want provide you a *Statement of Confidentiality* that describes the study and how we will keep the information you provide confidential. [Distribute *Statement of Confidentiality*, review it quickly focusing on the last paragraph.]

We have a limited amount of time, and I would like to give all of you an opportunity to participate, so I might have to interrupt from time-to-time to keep things moving. Let’s begin:

### **Focus Group Questions**

1. Could each of you tell me at what school you work, what your role is, and how long you have been a teacher at this school?
2. Would each of you take a few minutes to talk about any professional development that has been offered through the e21 small learning communities initiative that you have participated in or that you plan on participating in at a future time?
3. I would like to hear your opinions about the quality, sufficiency, and effectiveness of the professional development that we have been discussing, and if and how it has helped you deliver quality instruction and facilitate learning in your students.
4. Thinking specifically about the professional development that has been provided as part of the e21 SLC initiative, could you tell me if you have personally participated in any training that has focused on helping teachers to align their curriculum to state and industry standards? If so, would you please describe the professional development?
5. Have you participated in any professional development that specifically addresses the needs of LEP, special education, or underperforming students? I would like to talk separately about each of these three groups of students. If so, would you please describe the professional development?
6. At this point, do you have any suggestions about how professional development connected to the e21 small learning communities initiative might be improved?
7. Would you please talk in general about parents and community interest in the small learning communities? What has been their overall response to the initiative?

8. Have you (or the school) taken any particular steps to involve the parents/community in your small learning communities? If so, would you please describe the steps as well as any success to date?
9. Finally, do you have any suggestions for how to improve parent community involvement in your small learning community?

### **Debriefing**

I would like to thank you for your participation. At this point, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this project. Do you have any questions for me?

*Thank you!*

## APPENDIX B

### E21 Goals and Benchmarks

E21 goals and benchmarks (from the revised action plan in *Schools for a New Society: Progress Report, 2003*, SCUSD and LEED-Sacramento, pp. 60-61).

#### Professional Development:

Goal 5: Provide rigorous, relevant, and standards-driven teaching and learning that meets the needs of all students.

- Align curriculum, standards and assessment.
- Design and implement curriculum and instruction to accelerate the learning of ELL and students with special needs.

Goal 6: Create a culture of continuous learning.

- Build the capacity of staff to deliver quality instruction and facilitate learning.

#### Home-School-Community Involvement:

Goal 7: Create a culture of collective responsibility, ownership, and partnership across neighborhood and community.

- Ensure high expectations and requirements are established and communicated to all stakeholders.

Goal 8: Develop and sustain strong and meaningful home-school-community alliances.

- Establish an effective two-way, customer-service oriented communication system among schools-homes-community.