Improving mathematics achievement through the Fresno-Long Beach Learning Partnership
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Description of proposed brief
To date, more than two-thirds of states have approved the Common Core Standards in English language arts and mathematics. Adopting the standards present a number of implementation challenges, including adapting instructional resources and the development of common assessments that align with those standards. As states consider the implementation challenges of adopting these standards, we hope to provide insight by highlighting the Fresno-Long Beach Partnership strategies to improve student achievement in mathematics. Their approach to mathematics instruction is closely aligned to the development of mathematical concepts and thinking that is embedded in the Common Core Standards.

Though formalized in 2008, the Partnership between Fresno and Long Beach Unified School Districts builds upon their earlier collaborations in the area of mathematics. Long Beach had experienced some success with the implementation of its Math Achievement Program and Professional Development (MAP²D), a program developed by a fifth grade teacher in the district. Based upon practices associated with Singapore mathematics and adapted to the Long Beach context, the program includes curricular, pedagogical and professional development components designed to accelerate the progress of low-achieving students.

Leaders in Fresno were watching the gains that Long Beach was experiencing in two key areas: mathematics proficiency levels for elementary students and access to higher levels of mathematics for an increasing number of high school students. Visits to the Long Beach district ultimately led to Fresno’s adoption Beyond the Basic Facts and Lesson Design, a program that built upon Long Beach’s MAP²D.

As they have deepened their collaboration through the Partnership, both districts are learning important lessons. For example, during one of their quarterly meetings, the mathematics curriculum leaders from each district discussed 8th grade algebra readiness. Although the districts had chosen different textbooks, both noticed their students were experiencing similar challenges. Through their conversation, they concluded that the state standards were the source of the problem, rather than any specific practice in either district. Comparing data across districts facilitated this discovery. In addition, math content experts in both districts are collaborating on the development of common assessments and will pilot the use of technology-driven materials rather than textbook-driven math curricula. There has also been attention given to patterns of grouping middle school students, particularly at the sixth grade level.

As a result of these collaborative efforts, both districts have sharpened their focus on identifying and removing barriers that have impeded student success in higher levels of mathematics. The brief will discuss these efforts in further depth. They have also looked more closely at issues related to curriculum content, instructional strategies and the professional development of coaches, principals and teachers. These efforts, along with data showing results in student achievement, will also be highlighted in the brief.
Finally we believe other district leaders and state education agency staff will be interested to see how the Partnership is affecting the development of instructional leaders and mathematics instruction in both districts. Coaches and principals from Fresno have visited Long Beach and Long Beach coaches and principals have visited Fresno to support their development as effective instructional leaders. This fall, we will conduct a survey of elementary and middle school principals to gain a clearer understanding of their view of the Partnership. In addition, we will conduct a number of site visits to develop case studies of schools to address questions about the effect of the Partnership on improvements in student achievement.