

Case Study: Napa Valley Unified School District

Carnegie Summit 2021 Session:

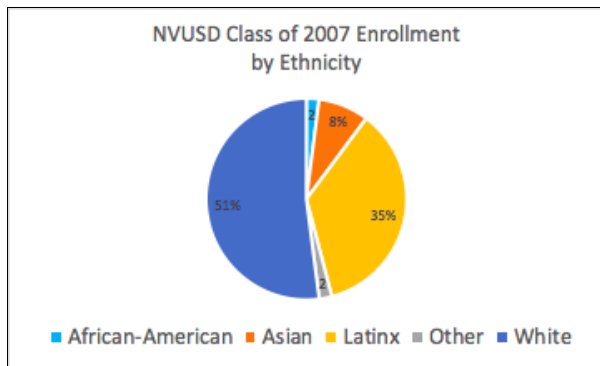
“Educational Opportunity Audits: Engaging Stakeholders, Exposing Inequities, and Taking Action”

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Napa Valley Unified School District, a diverse school system of roughly 18,000 students, worked with The Education Trust-West in 2006-2007 to conduct an Educational Opportunity Audit and help them develop plans to dramatically expand students’ access to rigorous college and career preparatory coursework in high school. Over the past fifteen years, they have more than doubled the percent of graduates completing eligibility requirements for California’s public university system, and they *have quadrupled* the eligibility rates for their Latinx and African-American students.

Phase 1: Educational Opportunity Audit

Figure 1: Student Demographics



Source: Education Trust-West transcript analysis (2007)

Figure 2: Sample key findings from the EOA

College Prep Science: 30% of all 2007 seniors had completed two or more lab science courses, and Latinx students were underrepresented: they comprised 35% of the senior class in 2007, but only 15% of the students who had successfully completed two or more lab sciences.

College Prep Math: 36% of all 2007 seniors had not successfully completed a single college eligibility qualifying math course, and Latinx students were overrepresented: they comprised 35% of the senior class in 2007, but over half (51%) of the students with no college-prep math courses.

Source: Ed Trust-West transcript analysis (2007)

The audit of student transcripts and analysis of assessment data clearly showed:

- Students of color were highly unlikely to be college- or career-ready upon graduation from high school. For example, Latinx students made up 35% of the 2007 senior class, but represented 55% of the seniors lacking the credits needed to meet the A-G requirements.
- High school tracking started early, with students assigned to “college” and “general” tracks in ninth grade and with little opportunity to move from “general” to “college” track courses.
- Too many students were failing, or earning D’s, in Algebra I, biology, and English language arts courses.
- Students struggling in demanding subjects had little in the way of a safety net. Requiring students to repeat failed courses was a common remediation strategy, and students struggling in college preparatory courses tended to get reassigned to general level courses.

Qualitative data obtained through focus groups raised the sense of urgency to address inequities in the district high schools. Focus group surveys conducted with students, parents, teachers and counselors revealed:

- All students in focus groups stated that they wanted to go to college, but they shared that general classes were not rigorous and could be a barrier for college eligibility/admission. They described students who needed the most support as least likely to get it. They appreciated having opportunities to explore careers and interests, but wanted more access to counselors to help them learn about college and career.
- Teachers and counselors identified a large percent of students as “unengaged” with either classes or activities, and expressed concern about promoting a “one size fits all” approach that might alienate or discourage some students and increase demand for student interventions that were already under-resourced. They were very concerned about large class sizes and called for more meaningful professional development.
- Parents expressed concern that some students were “pigeon-holed” into a particular pathway, that some students “fall through the cracks”, that classes were large and that there were not enough counselors to support students explore college and career opportunities.

Phase 2: Blueprint for Action Planning

Napa educators decided that they wanted to be something more than an “honors courses for white kids” district.

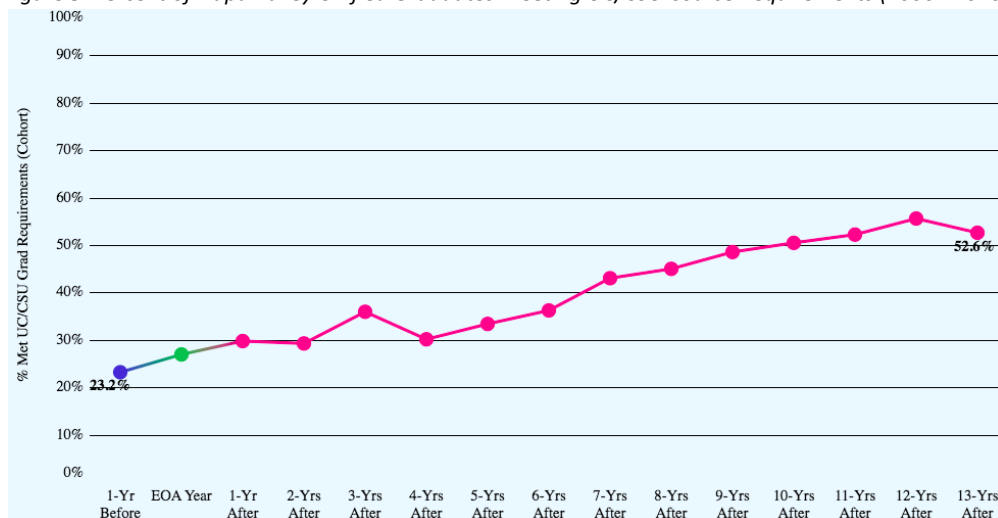
The district, with the support of ETW, convened a large Blueprint planning committee of stakeholders to engage in an action planning process that would result in a detailed roadmap for implementation of the new graduation requirements. The committee included representation from high school administrators, faculty and staff, representatives from elementary and middle schools, students, parents, community members, advocacy groups and district leadership. This large assemblage was tasked to form working committees and develop plans in areas that included:

- Curriculum and instruction
- Student Supports
- Special Needs Students & English Language Learners
- Career-Technical Education
- Professional Development

The blueprint planning work was accomplished through frequent meetings with facilitated discussions designed to garner consensus on appropriate actions, and set up timelines and accountability structures. Consistent leadership with dedicated focus ensured that the goals and actions from the EOA Blueprint process were sustained through various initiatives and sources of funding (e.g. Title I compliance/review). With 13 years of data now available since the first cohort graduated under the new requirements, the results are truly remarkable.

Over the past 14 years, the district **more than doubled** (from 23% to 53%) the percentage of graduates completing the “A-G” course sequence needed to gain admission to a public university in California. That 30-point improvement is **double** the rate of improvement posted by Non-EOA California districts over the same timeframe. They improved 15 points from 36% to 51%. It is worth noting that the district achieved these results amidst increases in high school enrollment (7% between 2008-2018) and other demographic shifts such as increased Latinx enrollment (from 45% to 55% districtwide between 2009-2019) and a growing percentage of students districtwide qualifying for Free-and-Reduced Lunch (from 40% to 50% between 2008-2018).¹

Figure 3. Percent of Napa Valley Unified Graduates Meeting UC/CSU Course Requirements (2006 - 2020)



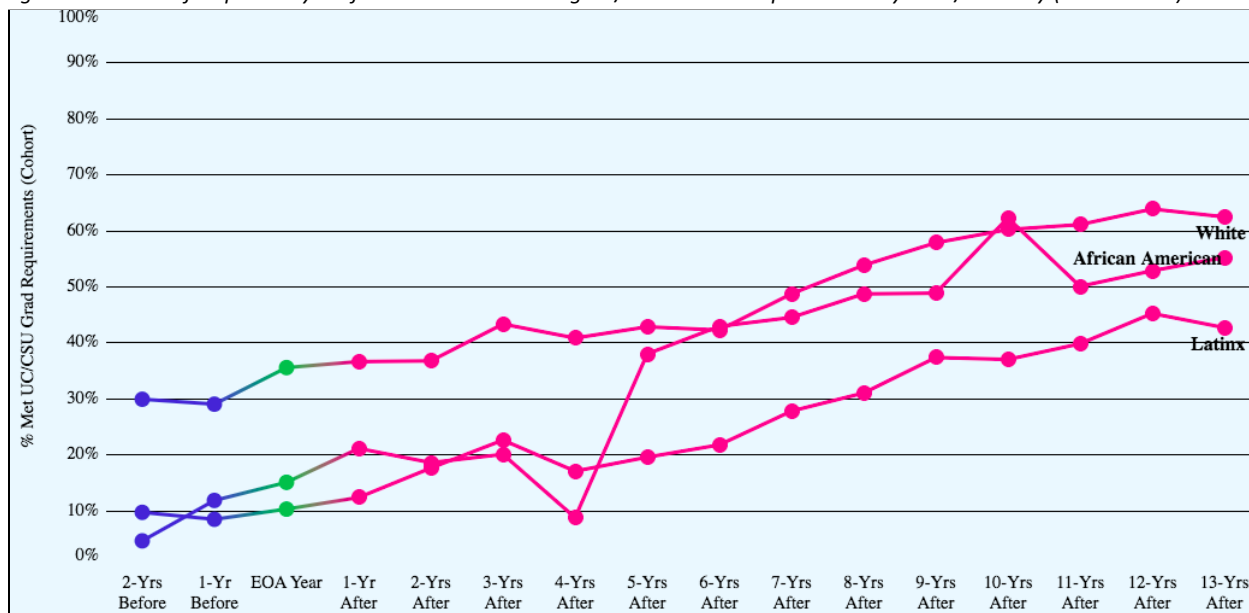
% of NVUSD graduates meeting UC/CSU course requirements more than doubled over 14 years (from 23% to 53%), and NVUSD surpassed the California average in 2016, 10 years after ETW conducted the Education Opportunity Audit.

Source: XQ Institute analysis of California Department of Education data

Most importantly, **Napa’s Latinx “A-G” completion rates improved from 9% to 43% and their African-American “A-G” completion rates improved from 12% to 55%.** While the gap between Latinx and white NVUSD students improved slightly between 2006 and 2020 (narrowing from 22% to 19%), the gap between African-American students and white students in NVUSD narrowed considerably (from 17% to 7%) in the same timeframe. In 2019-2020, NVUSD Latinx graduates performed as well as their peers in non-EOA districts across the state (43% vs. 42%) and African American graduates outperformed their non-EOA district peers (55% vs. 40%).

¹ Schraeder & Associates, (2019). Demographic Analysis & Facility Capacity Study 2018-2019. Based on CDE publicly available data.

Figure 4: Percent of Napa Valley Unified Graduates Meeting UC/CSU Course Requirements by Race/Ethnicity (2006 - 2020)



Source: XQ Institute analysis of California Department of Education data

Napa’s success story is a story of constant monitoring and adjusting toward their goal of ensuring college and career readiness for all. What’s especially important about Napa’s journey is how district leaders maintained their focus on A-G completion in the face of external pressure. Each new demand – from being placed in NCLB’s Program Improvement to the advent of the Common Core – brought renewed commitment to expanding access to rigorous coursework. Napa school leaders could do this because they had built good will among key stakeholders (teachers, counselors, and families), providing them with actionable data about students and asking them to be part of the solution.

More than ten years after the 2006-2007 EOA conducted by the Education Trust-West, **the XQ Institute supported a follow-up analysis of student transcripts for the Class of 2016 and found that almost all high school students in NVUSD (95%) were enrolled in enough courses to complete the college-prep sequence.** That alone is an impressive accomplishment, coming close to universal A-G access. More work lies ahead, but the steady priority of preparing all students for college and career is having a positive impact.

Figure 5 highlights key steps in the process of improvement: 1) Education Opportunity Audit Conducted; 2) EOA Report Published; 3) EOA Findings & Recommendations Presented to the School Board; 4) Committees Established; 5) Blueprint for Action Developed; 6) Blueprint for Action Implemented; 7) On-going Monitoring.

Figure 5: Roadmap of Improvement



Accomplishments:

Faced with the audit findings, Napa could have taken the typical shortcut of adding new programs for struggling students. Instead, they took the long road, focusing on improving best first instruction in high school classrooms. Asking teachers to examine their grading practices. Matching teachers with specific areas of strength to students needing support in those topics. Promoting instructional strategies designed to empower students to lead their own learning. On top of this, the district invested in a web of academic supports, with the explicit goals of boosting A-G completion and expanding college preparation. It wasn’t about implementing one intervention or another, but rather matching supports to student needs much more systematically throughout the district. As one district leader put it, “we had to wrap ourselves around certain kids.”

Napa did several important things (this list is not exhaustive, but calls out critical decisions/actions):

- School leaders used the data from actual student transcripts and conversations with students and their families, equity champions could shine a light on practices in new ways.
- The district made a concerted effort to eliminate courses that do not meet A-G requirements and to steer ninth grade students into the A-G sequence. As a result, 95% of Napa’s seniors in 2016 at least attempted the A-G sequence.
- The district invested in instructional coaching for teachers and in the implementation of student-centered instructional strategies (e.g., project based learning) all in an effort to improve “best first” instruction and reduce failure rates.
- The district invested in supports for students who were struggling, most notably AVID, creating a culture of high expectations for college-going.
- The district made key changes to how counselors do their jobs, for example implementing “Counselors on the Move,” which put counselors in classrooms giving universal messages about post-secondary options to students.
- The school board increased its math requirement from two years to three, making it more likely that students would complete the Algebra II course required for UC/CSU admission. (Note that the district later shifted the math requirements to align with new State expectations and to place more of an emphasis on problem-based learning.) The board also aligned the district graduation requirements to meet the UC/CSU eligibility requirements in the arts and world language.
- The district made efforts to align Career and Technical Education courses to state standards and the A-G criteria. For example, at Vintage High School, the number of CTE courses meeting A-G requirements jumped from three in 2012-13 to eighteen in 2017-18.
- Finally, the schools made a concerted effort to steer ninth graders into A-G courses to put them on the right track from the outset.

Key Learnings

- ❖ School leaders recognized the importance of a system-wide commitment to equity
- ❖ Keeping an unrelenting focus on the goal of college and career readiness for all is necessary and possible when leaders commit themselves to the “North Star”
- ❖ The district started with a focus on effective instruction, then added supports (e.g., Avid, college readiness academy, improved support to ELLs)
- ❖ The key was not implementing one intervention or another, but rather examining the data and matching supports to student needs much more systematically throughout the district.
- ❖ Keeping an unrelenting focus on the goal of college and career readiness for all is necessary, including: