

Case Study: San Diego Unified School District

Carnegie Summit 2021

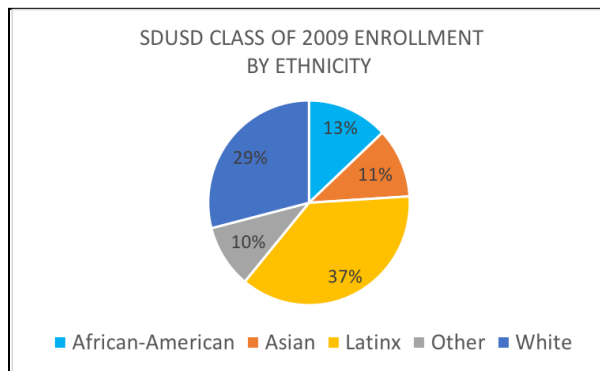
“Educational Opportunity Audits: Engaging Stakeholders, Exposing Inequities, and Taking Action”

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San Diego Unified School District, a large diverse system current PK-12 enrollment of nearly 123,000 students, reached out to The Education Trust-West (ETW) in 2009 to conduct an Educational Opportunity Audit and help the district develop a Blueprint for Action. The Blueprint would address obstacles preventing large numbers of students from accessing rigorous college and career preparatory coursework in high school. The San Diego story started with a school board resolution which laid out the vision that all San Diego Unified graduates would be prepared for post-secondary success and be eligible to attend a public California University. More than ten years later, San Diego students graduate “college eligible” at rates far exceeding their peers statewide -- both overall and for various student subgroups. In 2016

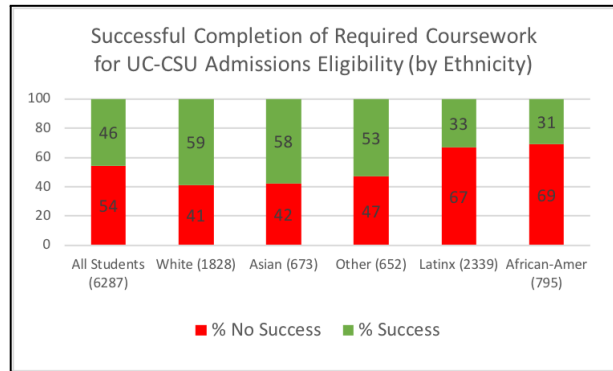
Phase 1: Educational Opportunity Audit

Figure 1: Student Demographics



Source: Education Trust-West transcript analysis, 2009-2010

Figure 2: Sample Key finding from the EOA Report



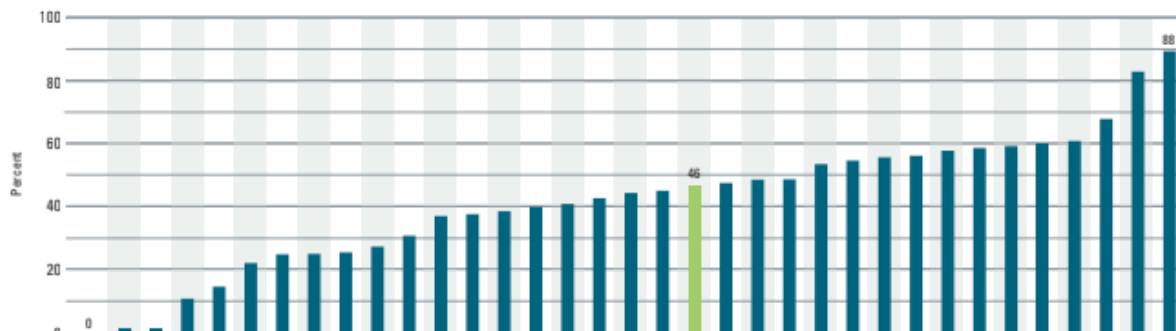
Source: Education Trust-West transcript analysis, 2009-2010

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

- Most students in the district (54%) graduated unprepared for college and career (see Figure 2)
- Opportunity and achievement gaps were huge for students of color (see Figure 2), students from low-income families, students with special needs, and English Language Learner students
- There was tremendous variation in the level of preparation across high schools ranging from 0 to 88 percent graduating eligible to attend a California university (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percent of students who successfully completed UC-CSU admissions coursework by school (46% = District average)

Figure 3: SDUSD A-G success rates by high school.



Source: Education Trust-West transcript analysis, 2009-2010

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:

- Students overwhelmingly expressed plans to go to college, although not all understood the process or felt prepared to succeed in postsecondary education.
- Parents agreed that students should have access to the courses they need to be ready to attend college or pursue a career after high school.
- Teachers expressed reservations about raising graduation requirements for all, worried about a potential lack of support for students who would struggle as well as their ability to maintain high rigor when all students were required to take academically demanding courses.
- Counselors were concerned about large caseloads and their ability to provide personalized attention to students and families.

Phase 2: Blueprint for Action Planning

Once the audit was completed, the district, with the support of ETW, convened a large Blueprint Planning Committee to engage in an action planning process to develop 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:

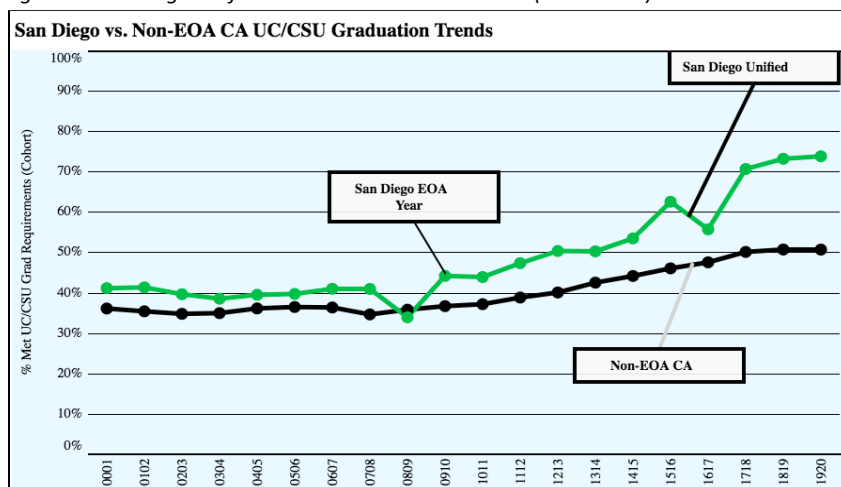
- Curriculum & instruction
- Student Supports
- Special Needs
- English Learners
- Career-Technical Education
- Professional Development
- Community Engagement
- Data Analytics

The Blueprint planning work was accomplished through frequent meetings over the course of a year. The working groups functioned with the support of facilitated discussions to garner consensus on appropriate actions, establish timelines, and set-up district-wide accountability structures. A steering committee took on the role of reviewing and refining the plans and recommendations of all the working committees in order to ensure a cohesive overarching plan of action. Once initial plans were in place, the working committees continued to meet and review progress in implementation. This continued involvement and openness to a very public process were instrumental in San Diego’s success.

Impact

Since their EOA in 2009-2010 San Diego students have posted significant gains in meeting California college eligibility course requirements across the board, including impressive gains for most groups and closing previously persistent gaps between white students and African-American students (from 25% to 15%) and between white students and Latinx students (from 28% to 19%).

Figure 4: San Diego Unified vs. Non EOA Districts in CA (2001-2020)

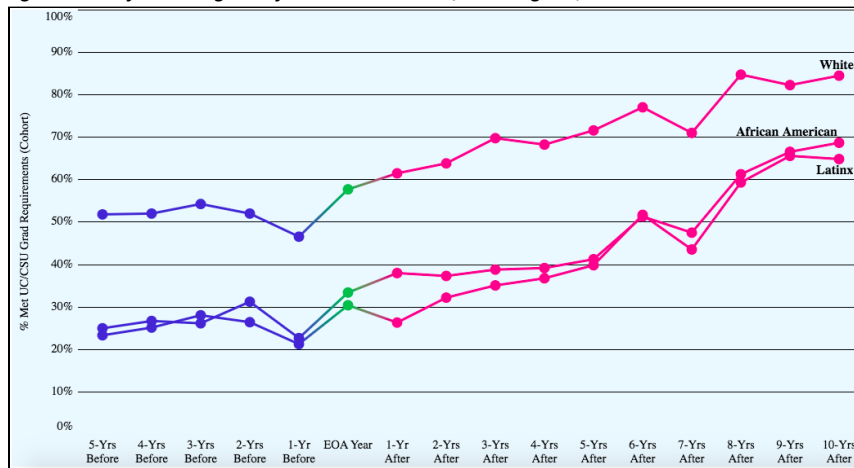


74% of San Diego Unified’s 2020 graduates met California college admissions course requirements, up from 46% in 2010: a 28% gain.

That improvement is double the improvement of all Non-EOA districts in California (which was 14%).

Source: XQ Institute analysis of California Department of Education data

Figure 5: % of San Diego Unified Graduates UC/CSU Eligible, 2005-2020



Students from all racial and ethnic groups improved, and gaps between white students and students of color narrowed (from 25% to 15% for African-American students, and from 28% to 19% for Latinx students).

Source: XQ Institute analysis of California Department of Education data

To summarize, San Diego’s success story is a story of an unrelenting focus on equity, continued involvement of internal and external stakeholders, and a sustained commitment to the goal of college and career readiness for all.

Figure 6 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 6: Roadmap of Improvement



Strategies for Success

- ❖ The district raised the high school graduation requirements for the Class of 2016 to align with the admissions requirements of the state’s university system.
- ❖ Though by no means inclusive of all the things San Diego has accomplished and continues to improve on, some of the important initial actions that made the implementation sustainable over time include:
 - Districtwide working committees, meeting on a regular basis, led the effort and worked diligently to align policies and practices to the new graduation requirements
 - Progress in improving student graduation outcomes was continually monitored and publicly reported on
 - To sustain the momentum and commitment to the equity agenda, district leadership received extensive cultural competence training
 - As new requirements phased in, filling teacher shortages in areas such as math and world languages were addressed with aggressive recruitment program
 - Safety nets and supports were created and/or enhanced with an emphasis on just in time interventions for struggling students to keep them on track to graduation
 - Programs and supports for special needs and English learners were developed with specific accommodations to ensure access and success in rigorous coursework
 - Professional development for teachers was prioritized to ensure instructional skills and strategies needed to ensure all students would be successful in a rigorous course of study
 - Attention was given to the pipeline in order to ensure elementary and middle school students were being prepared for a rigorous high school experience
 - An authentic commitment to meaningful student, parent and community engagement was central to the continued improvement in outcomes.

Key Lessons/Learnings:

- ❖ Student voice is powerful. Equity focused goals around rigorous high school preparation for all students can be realized when students have a meaningful place at the table and are actively engaged throughout the process.
- ❖ Maintaining a sense of urgency over time is critical for tackling long-standing equity issues. Courageous leadership is vitally important to maintaining a steadfast commitment to “stay the course” pursuing equity goals.
- ❖ Knowing constituencies well and connecting with them directly is essential to building trust and buy-in to any major change. Actively listening to and responding to concerns of stakeholders as major changes are being contemplated are necessary to build and sustain support.
- ❖ Keeping an unrelenting focus on the goal of college and career readiness for all is essential, including: (1) a willingness to be open and honest about challenges and opportunities as changes in policy and practice are implemented and resistance to change is encountered; and (2) an ongoing commitment to involve both internal and external stakeholders in the process every step along the way.