Los Angeles: 
A Case of System-Level Changes

This case study is part of a broader study by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) of grantees under the Ford Foundation’s More and Better Learning Time (MBLT) initiative. The study aimed to learn more about the motivation to pursue MBLT policies, the impact of MBLT grants, and the conditions and approaches found in schools that have successfully implemented and sustained MBLT. This is one of three case studies that focus on locations where MBLT reform activities were implemented.

People Interviewed

CEP conducted four interviews with individuals who played key roles in the adoption and subsequent implementation of MBLT in Los Angeles. All interviewees were selected based on input from the Ford Foundation. Below is a list of interviewees, their positions and organizations, and their relation to MBLT.

Maria Brenes, Executive Director, InnerCity Struggle
Addresses educational inequality in East Los Angeles through student and community engagement, including development of community schools

David Rattray, President, Unite-LA Inc.
Supports sustainable school turnaround processes, including expanded learning time, for chronically underperforming high schools

Peter Rivera, Senior Program Officer, California Community Foundation
Provides grants to promote and facilitate implementation of MBLT strategies, including community schools and Linked Learning, to improve educational outcomes in Los Angeles

Marisa Saunders, Principal Associate and Researcher, Annenberg Institute for School Reform
Conducts research, coordinates grantees, builds capacity and communications for MBLT

Overview of Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)

Los Angeles is the second largest school district in the country and serves a diverse population with a majority of Latino students. In the 2014-15 school year, LAUSD had 6,235,520 students, of which 73.7% were Latino. Table 1 includes key demographic and academic data for the district. As shown in the table, academic outcomes improved between 2009-10 and 2014-15,1 while the student population remained much the same. For example, while the percentage of Hispanic or Latino students remained constant during this period, the percentage of students graduating in their cohort increased by more than 7 percentage points. At the same time, dropout rates and suspensions have declined.

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1 This span of years reflects the available data from the Education Data Partnership website http://www.ed-data.org/
Table 1. Student demographics and academic outcomes, 2010-11 vs. 2014-15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2014-15</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>district average</td>
<td>district average</td>
<td>state average</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demographic indicators</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% eligible for free or reduced-price meals</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>75.6%</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% English learners</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance Indicators</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% cohort dropouts</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% graduating in cohort</td>
<td>62.4%</td>
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<td>% graduates meeting University of California and California State University course requirements</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of 12th graders taking the SAT*</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of 12th graders taking the ACT*</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<td>SAT reasoning test scores*</td>
<td>1291</td>
<td>1309</td>
<td>1473</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACT average 12th grade scores*</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>% passed high school English exam</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% passed high school math exam</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>85%</td>
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<tr>
<td>School climate Indicators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of suspensions</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26,569**</td>
<td>8,292</td>
<td>420,799</td>
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</table>


*Figures were not available for these indicator years through the Education Data Partnership; the percentages and numbers included were retrieved from [http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sp/ai/](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sp/ai/). Percentages and numbers were calculated by CEP.

**Data was not available for the 2009-10 school year. This figure represents the number of suspensions for school year 2011-12 and was retrieved from [http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filesesd.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filesesd.asp). The figure was calculated by CEP.

This study looks at some of the more and better learning time activities in LAUSD to see what is happening in successful MBLT initiatives throughout the district. Successful MBLT activities in LAUSD showed the following characteristics:

- **Focus on student needs and addressing inequity.** All interviewees discussed the importance of continued focus on providing high-quality education, practical and career-oriented experiences, and social services.

- **Community organizations.** In successful schools, MBLT programs were facilitated by community organizations that created connections among communities, schools, parents, education leaders, and policy makers.

- **System-level improvements.** Interviewees discussed the growing demand for MBLT approaches, such as Linked Learning which is housed in LAUSD’s central office. Participants in this case study also talked about increased collaboration among key stakeholders.

- **Continued attempts to address challenges.** Successful MBLT activities have started to shift LAUSD’s status quo and have tapped into stable sources of funding for MBLT activities.

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2 Because MBLT activities can vary greatly in their activities and intent, and their successes (or failures) are judged by different measures, CEP did not define "successful" MBLT programs, activities, or schools. Instead, survey respondents and interviewees responded to question using personal definitions of MBLT success.
• **Expansion to other schools.** Interviewees expected MBLT programs to continue to expand to other LAUSD schools; however, they also said more work was needed to embed MBLT in the district’s culture.

**Overview of MBLT in LAUSD**

*Three education reform programs have been particularly important for MBLT in LAUSD: Linked Learning, which integrates academic education with career and technical education and other core elements; community schools, which provide a range of services to families during and after school hours; and Promise Neighborhoods, which focus on transforming distressed communities.*

Of these three initiatives, Linked Learning has the most prominent role in LAUSD. Interviewees noted, however, that the three approaches are aligned in many ways and can work together to support all students in the district. As Marisa Saunders of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform explained, “There needs to be an understanding of how these approaches work together and support each other...They don’t work against each other; in school sites where more than one approach is in place, great things are happening.”

Each of the initiatives is described below.

**Linked Learning**

Primarily a high school reform, Linked Learning incorporates rigorous academics, career and technical education (CTE), work-based learning, and integrated student supports. As part of the integration of these four core components, each student enrolls in a Career Pathway that matches one of California’s 15 CTE industry sectors. LAUSD offers Career Pathway opportunities in health science and medical technology; information technology; manufacturing, law, and teaching; arts, media, and entertainment; energy, environment, and utilities; business and finance; and engineering. In the 2014-15 school year, LAUSD had six certified Career Pathways (SRI International, 2015).

In 2011, California state lawmakers passed Assembly Bill (AB) 790, which established a Linked Learning pilot program set to begin in the 2012-13 school year. Altogether, 20 school districts, including Los Angeles, applied for and were awarded funds for pilot programs (California Department of Education 2015).

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3 The 15 CTE sectors include agriculture and natural resources; arts, media, and entertainment; building and construction trades; business and finance; education, child development, and family services; energy, environment, and utilities; engineering and architecture; fashion and interior design; health science and medical technology; hospitality, tourism, and recreation; information and communication technologies; manufacturing and product development; marketing, sales, and service; public services; and transportation (California Department of Education, n.d.).

Each pilot site received a grant of $80,000 in the 2013-14 school year (CDE, 2015) and $6,250 in the 2014-15 school year (CDE, 2014b).

In LAUSD, Linked Learning has become a districtwide reform approach with a district Linked Learning Office. In the 2014-15 school year, 194,766 students attended one of 30 Linked Learning high schools or middle schools in Los Angeles; 91% of these students were minorities and 14% were English language learners (SRI International, 2015). In the 2016-17 school year, LAUSD had 39 high schools and 4 middle schools implementing Linked Learning programs, as well as its first Linked Learning elementary school. Students in the Linked Learning elementary school have the option to attend a Linked Learning middle school and high school (E. Solimon, personal communication, November 11, 2016).

David Rattray of United-LA explained that Linked Learning strongly supports the “better” in MBLT. Linked Learning provides students with more time inside the school day to participate in internships and job shadowing, giving them “a more relevant kind of pedagogy opposed to lecture-based teaching.”

Community Schools

The community school approach is designed so that “every community school responds to unique local needs and includes the voices of students, families, and residents. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone—beyond school hours, including evening and weekends” (Coalition for Community Schools, 2016). By expanding the scope and reach of traditional schools, community schools are able to provide more services to students (and their families), including expanded learning opportunities, essential health and social supports, and family and community engagement.

Unlike Linked Learning, the community schools initiative has not been adopted as a district-wide program. Peter Rivera of the California Community Foundation characterized the connection between LAUSD and community schools as “loose-knit.”

Instead, the community school movement has been driven by community members. “We have a number of organizing groups that have pushed for mobilization of wraparound services on campuses, so that’s kind of been the impetus to put those services [in schools],” explained Rivera. (In a wraparound model, representatives of different organizations and agencies develop a coordinated plan to provide a range of services to students and families). Maria Brenes, who leads the community organization InnerCity Struggle, concurred that community schools in Los Angeles are a product of local organizations working with communities:

At the grassroots level [we have] built awareness and understanding from a broad base of youth, parents, and community organizations about more and better learning time and community schools. And we have framed it. Just last summer we held a convening in the east side of civic leaders, community organizations, educators, parents, school leaders, district

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5 In school year 2013-14, $2 million for Linked Learning Pilot Schools was provided through Senate Bill 1070. To view the bill, see http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120SB1070. The state funds were matched by $2.2 million from the Irvine Foundation and $3.3 million from the California Community Colleges.
leaders—it was over 100 people...And what was really powerful was just the level of parent participation.

Brenes views community schools as a framework for ending the cycle of educational inequity, poverty, and injustice in Los Angeles. The goal of InnerCity Struggle is to turn around the city’s schools so they become “centers of opportunity,” she said. This can involve different strategies to support college access and improve school climate so that “students aren’t pushed out or punished.”

Currently, all the community school models in LAUSD are what the district refers to as “pilot schools.” This means they are part of a district network of public schools that “have autonomy over budget, staffing, governance, curriculum & assessment, and the school calendar” (Los Angeles Unified School District, n.d.).

Promise Neighborhoods

The Promise Neighborhood initiative is a federal program that provides funds to nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher education, or Indian tribes. Promise Neighborhoods are designed to “significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth in our most distressed communities, and to transform those communities by—

1. Identifying and increasing the capacity of eligible entities that are focused on achieving results for children and youth throughout the entire neighborhood;
2. Building a complete continuum of cradle-to-career solutions for both educational programs and family and community supports, with great schools at the center;
3. Integrating programs and breaking down agency ‘silos’ so that solutions are implemented effectively and efficiently across agencies” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.a).

In Los Angeles, two organizations have been awarded Promise Neighborhoods grants since 2010, the first year of the program. In 2010, the Youth Policy Institute and Proyecto Pastoral at Dolores Mission received a planning grant of roughly $500,000, and in 2012, the Youth Policy Institute received an implementation grant of roughly $28 million (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.b).

The Youth Policy Institute’s (YPI) Promise Neighborhood application proposed activities for elementary, middle, and high schools that aligned with more and better learning time activities, including afterschool academic support. Specifically, the application included offering “high quality academic support and learning” opportunities during school hours and out-of-school hours (Youth Policy Institute (YPI), 2012, pp. 52-53). YPI also proposes to increase enrichment activities and access to college preparatory curricula and programs that “ensure successful course completion and postsecondary college readiness” (YPI, 2012, p.53).

Motivations for Adopting MBLT

In LAUSD, the greatest motivators for implementing MBLT activities were to address students’ academic and social/emotional needs and reduce inequities. The availability of dedicated funding for MBLT, particularly from Ford and other foundations, was itself a motivator for some schools to undertake MBLT efforts.
Student need

Several interviewees pointed to the serious academic and social/emotional needs of Los Angeles students as a reason for pursuing MBLT strategies. Maria Brenes noted that in Los Angeles, as in many large urban school districts, low academic expectations had long been “accepted as the norm, especially for students of color.” When InnerCity Struggle first began its educational justice organizing work, she said, many students were not expected to be prepared for college, “and that the culture of low expectations disproportionately impacted students of color when we looked at the data.”

Even with the achievement gains made between 2010-11 and 2014-15, as shown earlier in Table 1, LAUSD students remain below the state average on several indicators, including a lower in-cohort graduation rate (72% in LAUSD, 82% in California) and lower pass rates on state exams for math (79%, 85%) and English (79%, 85%). Many interviewees emphasized that MBLT could improve student outcomes by providing higher-quality instruction and more engaging educational opportunities. For example, a central goal of Linked Learning is to provide high school students with high-quality learning experiences that are more relevant and career-oriented to increase student engagement.

Local community organizations have also “pushed for the mobilization of wraparound services,” said Peter Rivera of the California Community Foundation. As a result of this process, he said, several nonprofit organizations collaborate with high schools and “work with kids on everything from tutoring to social services, including counseling and psychology services, as well as health services.”

Inequity

Inequities in educational inputs and outcomes are one aspect of broader inequity problems in LAUSD that affect many communities and people of all ages. Brenes described this cycle of hardship:

> We have seen a crisis in public education with many of the young people of color not finishing their education and being tracked into the school-to-jail pipeline, into the low-wage economy, into the military disproportionately. And we saw that as an injustice, and as a way in which the cycle of poverty is perpetuated...The first days of our work were focused on exposing the injustice, the inequity, and the crisis...and raising the issue and empowering and mobilizing young people and families to understand the implications of the failure of their schools.

Saunders said that the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) had examined the conditions that were present for MBLT to take hold in LAUSD (AISR, 2014). They found that Linked Learning, community schools, and Promise Neighborhoods – all equity-based approaches – encourage the provision of support strategies that target the same students’ needs including academic and non-academic services, said Saunders. She continued, “MBLT provides an opportunity for those needs to be met, and to address the ever-widening opportunity gap between affluent and less-affluent families.”

Foundation funding and community organizations

Because CEP’s research focused on Ford Foundation grantees, it is not surprising that interviewees often mentioned the importance of the Ford Foundation’s funding for MBLT activities. However, the Ford Foundation is not the only grant-maker involved in the three reform programs in LAUSD. For example,
the James Irvine Foundation supports the expansion of the Linked Learning model throughout California and has invested more than $100 million into the reform strategy (SRI, 2015).

Other foundations were also mentioned by interviewees for their work and funding of Linked Learning, community schools, or MBLT activities:

- California Community Foundation
- California Foundation
- Californians Dedicated for Education
- Kent Foundation
- James Irvine Foundation
- LA Chamber of Commerce Foundation
- Stuart Foundation
- United Way of Los Angeles
- Weingart Foundation

In addition to the involvement and support of foundations, Rivera also stressed the importance of local community organization in driving MBLT efforts in schools. “These efforts are not just some foundations in downtown Los Angeles and New York coming in and throwing money at these efforts. It’s really about engaging folks in the conversation so that they’re driving it,” said Rivera.

**Conditions for Success**

Community organizations have had a large impact on the success of MBLT in Los Angeles. They have forged connections among communities, schools, parents, education leaders, and policy makers. Through their outreach and connections, community organizations have also contributed to other conditions for the success of MBLT in LAUSD by creating the political will for reform and fostering support among diverse stakeholders for the district’s three education reform programs.

**Community and community organizations**

When asked what conditions are needed for MBLT activities to be successful, every interviewee mentioned the importance of the relationship among the district, schools, community organizations, and parents. At the root of this relationship, Saunders explained, is the “understanding at the school level that they cannot do it alone and that community organizations and other external partners, have as much of a stake in seeing growth, progress, and success of their students as anybody else in the school.”

Participants said that strong community organizations have been central to school improvement in LAUSD and have contributed in various ways to the planning, implementation, and success of MBLT activities. Examples include mobilizing parents and students in support of MBLT, maintaining a focus on equity, and providing continuity amid turnover in school and district leadership. For example, said Brenes, community organizations have helped to build understanding of MBLT among a broad base of parents, youth, and community members. Rattray explained that community organizations have identified buildings and other community assets that could be used to support MBLT.

Community organizations can also help drive and sustain reforms like MBLT by holding education leaders and policy makers accountable, according to interviewees. “Ultimately the accountability lies in the community,” said Rivera. “And because [community organizations are] involved in the effort, they can say whether they support it or it needs to be adjusted or whether the strategies are not working for them.”
In schools that experience high turnover of staff and leaders, community organizations have provided a degree of stability for MBLT activities. “Whenever a new leader comes on board, [the community organizations] are engaging the principal and having the conversation with the principal around this—‘what we’re doing, how are you going to support us, and how can we support you?’” said Rivera. In addition, said Brenes, well-established community-based organizations “uphold a historical memory of the effort” and maintain a focus on equity despite turnover in the district office and school leadership.

**Political alliances and will**

A particularly important aspect of the work of community organizations involves forging and maintaining strong connections with education leaders and policy makers. As Saunders explained, community organizations have worked really hard to get a seat “at the table” when policy decisions are being made to make sure that they voice the concerns of community members. “A couple of board members will often reach out to leaders of these community organizations when they are thinking about a resolution and ask, ‘What do you think?’”

Community organizations also maintain connections with the district superintendents, district staff, teachers’ unions, and other organizations such as the LA Chamber of Commerce. Brenes talked about the need for InnerCity Struggle to forge relationships in urban districts where superintendents come and go:

> The last two superintendents were allies, but superintendents are very short-lived in LAUSD. Fortunately, the current superintendent, who was able to win broad support for her appointment, is someone who comes from the district and has been a supporter specifically of the college access and school climate work, which integrates more and better learning time strongly...So we have a foundation to build from in terms of collaborating with her.

Rattray pointed out that the LAUSD, like most large bureaucracies, is “huge and very vertically stacked,” which means that between the superintendent and a teacher are “sometimes 10 or 12 layers of supervision.” Instead of relying on one or two key connections, said Rattray, “it’s really important to have relationships all along the spectrum of the hierarchy.”

Alliances between community organizations and education leaders can also increase the political will to pursue equity policies that serve disadvantaged communities. As Rattray noted, fostering the political will for MBLT in LAUSD requires trying to shift the whole district mindset and “embed more and better learning time in other policies and practices.” But, he added, a community organization dealing with a large urban district can be as daunting as “a gnat trying to attach to an elephant and then see if the gnat can actually make the elephant turn.”

Despite the challenges, community organizations are having an impact. According to Brenes, the strategic alliances formed by InnerCity Struggle have resulted in “significant policy wins that are having a positive impact and have implications for the next generations of students who will attend LAUSD.”

In addition to benefitting from relationships between community organizations and LAUSD, many of the reforms taking place in the district are driven at the school level and depend on the support of
principals. As Rivera explained, “the leaders that we should be engaging are really the school principals and school site leaders.”

**Stakeholder support**

Interviewees in Los Angeles discussed the importance of securing support for MBLT activities at all levels of governance. At the state level, there was support for Linked Learning through with state legislation that created 20 Linked Learning pilot districts and provided two years of state funding (mentioned above). At the district level, there was uneven support for the three educational approaches, said Saunders, with “Linked Learning becoming an initiative of the district, versus community schools and Promise Neighborhoods where the district has yet to develop a full understanding of what they can bring to students, schools, and communities.”

Support from communities, schools, parents, and students is also essential if MBLT activities are going to be sustained over time, according to case study participants. As Rivera explained, “This school belongs to the community. You need to engage the community in any kind of reform efforts if they’re going to stick.” The promise of additional funding can be powerful, however, and some schools may adopt MBLT activities just because the money is there, and without any effort to engage the community. Rattray pointed out that that when school leaders do not have a deep commitment to MBLT and are “trying to do a one-off or something,” the effort will not stand the test of time. Leaders must be willing to reorganize their whole education program around MBLT, he added.

**Impacts**

Case study participants identified several positive impacts of MBLT efforts. At the school system level, the impacts most often mentioned were a growing awareness of and desire to participate in MBLT approaches among LAUSD schools and community organizations, and increased collaboration among key stakeholders. Interviewees also believed that the district’s three MBLT-relevant programs contributed to improved academic outcomes for students, although the effects of these programs cannot be isolated from other reforms occurring at the same time. One research study by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and interview data also linked LAUSD’s three education reforms with increased teacher collaboration and other positive teaching practices.

**Systemic advances**

All interviewees talked about positive changes in Los Angeles that they attributed to the three education reform programs. One such change was a cultural shift in the district in which more schools and community groups want to participate in the reforms. “It’s a huge success,” said Saunders, that “there is growing demand for these approaches.” In addition, different groups have come together to collaborate around the three approaches and MBLT activities. Other participants mentioned similar examples of how MBLT has expanded within the district:

**Rivera:** Linked Learning has really taken off. We have a number of high schools now that are on certification pathways...The district has embedded it in a district strategy.

**Brenes:** At the grassroots level, we have been successful in building awareness about the MBLT model and preparing young people and families on the ground to talk about it and
articulate the benefits...there is strong interest, excitement and commitment for how we can take the community school model to scale.

One of the biggest indicators of the success of LAUSD’s many reform efforts, and not just the three programs discussed in this report, is the number of students served, said Rattray. He mentioned Unite-LA serves up to 40,000 kids a year through various programs.

Another success, Rattray noted, was getting the “systems to work together better and advance—knock down barriers and enable changes to happen between and amongst all players.” Rivera made a similar point: “That’s an important win, just getting folks at the table together and having the conversation because they were operating in silos before.”

Impacts on students and teachers

The three education reform programs in LAUSD have also had positive impacts on disadvantaged students in the district, according to case study participants.

Some of the interviewees said that MBLT activities and the three education reform programs have contributed to LAUSD’s improved academic outcomes in recent years. It is important to note, however, that the effects of MBLT cannot be isolated from the other activities and programs implemented in LAUSD schools over the same time span. Examples of improved student outcomes include decreased dropout rates and increased graduation rates (previously shown in table 1). Moreover, the percentages of students passing state high school exams in English and math have increased, as have the percentage of graduates leaving high school who meet the University of California and California State University’s course requirements to be considered for acceptance in the state university system.

Saunders stressed that while the programs are meeting their primary goal of improving student outcomes, they have also had other, more nuanced positive effects:

I think one of the biggest things that we’ve seen is how students are leaving school. For one, they graduate at higher rates, and two, they leave prepared for the adult world. I think they feel that they are prepared for the next step, and that is clearly the goal of these approaches, preparing them for college and career.

Although there have been gains associated with MBLT activities in the state and LAUSD, Rivera pointed out that there is still work to be done. “I question whether we’re engaging [Linked Learning] enough and driving the pilot school movement to push and expand,” he said. He continued:

I wish the community schools were stronger and robust because when you look at LA and the communities and the needs...We have populations that need a lot of support, and I feel like we haven’t necessarily integrated the student support service with the instructional practices as well as we should.

Teachers have also been impacted by the implementation of the three education reform programs. A recent study by the AISR (2016) surveyed Los Angeles teachers working in a Linked Learning school, community school, or Promise Neighborhood school to identify how teachers can take ownership of school reform efforts in LA. They found that teachers working in these three education reform programs had opportunities to co-construct student-centered knowledge, lead school improvement opportunities,
and establish practices that create the conditions and climate for continuous teacher input in the future of the school’s mission, vision, and purpose. The combination of these factors led to high levels of teacher ownership of the reform implemented in their school. Teacher ownership has multiple benefits for teachers, including increased teacher collaboration, positive teacher relationships, greater teacher satisfaction where teachers have a voice, the study said.

Saunders also talked about how teachers in schools with Linked Learning, community schools, or Promise Neighborhood programs have more opportunities for collaboration and are better able to meet their students’ needs than other schools in LAUSD:

*The experiences of the adults at these school sites are very different than those at a traditional high school. The teachers we’ve had the opportunity to speak with say they couldn’t imagine teaching any other way. They couldn’t imagine working in an environment where they were isolated in classrooms, where their voice wasn’t heard, where they didn’t have the opportunity to really get to know their students and then work to meet the needs of those students.*

**Challenges**

Although each of the three education reform programs in LAUSD has its own unique challenges, interviewees reported two challenges that affected all three programs. First, the weight of the existing culture, or status quo, in a large school district can impede change. Second, inadequate or unstable funding has made it difficult to expand and sustain MBLT activities.

**Status quo**

Three of the interviewees mentioned the difficulty of leading change in large school districts. Brenes characterized the bureaucracy of LAUSD as “very challenging and impacted by fluctuating dynamics, with the status quo difficult to break through.” Interviewees discussed the difficulty of changing the culture at the district and school levels. At the district level, the challenges are more about politics and the priorities of the many actors that have invested time and effort into the educational system. At the school level, bringing about change was less about bureaucracy and more about understanding the connections between Linked Learning, community schools, or Promise Neighborhoods and the ongoing work of principals, teachers, and students in that school.

*District (Rattray):* LAUSD is a politically run organization so they are affected by the politics around them, school board politics and the teachers’ union and other major stakeholders and reformers...That is certainly a challenge. LAUSD is a challenge just because of its own size and its own kind of entrenched bureaucracy and the stakeholder groups around it.

*School (Saunders):* So all three of these approaches really require a cultural shift to take place for there to be successful implementation. Each school experiences the approach differently...based how it aligns to the school’s mission, goals, and purpose to begin with and the extent to which teachers can come together around that purpose. These approaches require transformation, and that doesn’t happen so easily.
Funding

MLBT activities, such as extended school hours and expanded program offerings, cost money. While there is often a pot of funds that help districts and schools start reform initiatives, those funds are provided for limited periods of time. For example, the Linked Learning Pilot Program in California provided almost $100,000 to each of 20 school districts in the state over a span of two years. Planning funds have been effective for getting Linked Learning started in LAUSD, but some interviewees expressed the need for more stable public support for education reforms.

According to Rivera, the biggest challenge is maintaining a public funding stream for MBLT reform efforts. As an example, he cited the upcoming expiration of one part of California’s Proposition 30, which temporarily increased taxes to fund education. With portions of Prop 30 scheduled to lapse, “people are wondering if they’re going to renew an effort to continue that pact,” said Rivera.

The funding challenge has created an environment in LAUSD where some groups might not work together because they are competing for the same scarce resources. Saunders explained that such divisions are disruptive to education reforms, especially because many of the organizations “have the same goal, and how great [it would be if they] could all work together.”

The Future of MBLT in Los Angeles

Regarding the future of MBLT in LAUSD, interviewees said they foresee a continuation of the success around the three education reform programs, but also see a need to continue working to further embed MBLT activities into LAUSD’s culture.

Many of the interviewees reflected on the successes of the work done around MBLT, Linked Learning, community schools, and Promise Neighborhoods before considering the work that remains ahead. “There’s a future certainly around Linked Learning,” said Rivera. “That is an embedded district strategy, and that’ll be one of the legacies of the Ford Foundation, the Irvine Foundation, and a number of community partners.” But, he continued, more work was needed for community schools to have the same lasting power as Linked Learning: “The future, I hope, is really building a movement around community school efforts and people just recognizing that there is a piece that we all overlap on, and we just need to coordinate those services that are for youngsters.”

Rattray: What do I think the prospects are? I think they are outstanding...I am bullish on [the] California context helping the local context in LA have a better environment for teachers, teacher leaders, principals, and school community members to really own their own school, and get help and support and good data that I think is going to be very conducive to expanding and deepening more and better learning.

Brenes: We are going to continue to advocate and uplift youth and parent voices to shape policy and practice in LAUSD to ensure the wins are sustained and advanced. The

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6 The 2012 California General Election Official Voter Information Guide said that Prop 30 would increase “taxes on earnings over $250,000 for seven years and sales taxes by ¼ cent for four years” (California Secretary of State, 2012, p. 5).
agenda will include the pillars of MBLT that uphold educational justice for the highest need students. There is so much opportunity and urgency to build on the success achieved.

Saunders: It is part of the vernacular now. I will go to a non-MBLT meeting, with a whole new set of folks, and somebody will bring up Linked Learning. It is part of the language here so I don’t think that any of these approaches are going to go away. I think what needs to happen is, it needs to become part of the everyday practice of teachers in classrooms and out of classrooms, and it’s happening at some schools.
References


Coalition for Community Schools. (2016). *Preliminary highlights from the community schools directory.* Retrieved from [http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/Page/Preliminary%20Highlights%20March%202016.pdf](http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/Page/Preliminary%20Highlights%20March%202016.pdf)


