

Sacramento City
Unified School District

Findings and Recommendations
from the
**Central Office Review for
Results & Equity**

conducted in partnership with the
Annenberg Institute for School Reform

with support from
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prepared by the
 **Annenberg
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AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

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Central Office Review for Results and Equity

In March 2004, the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) had an early conversation with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University about conducting a Central Office Review for Results and Equity, or CORRE – a five-step process developed by the Annenberg Institute’s School Communities that Work Task Force on the Future of Urban Districts. To conduct the review, SCUSD formed a partnership last summer with the Annenberg Institute, supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York, already a funding partner in the district’s high school reform efforts.

The goal of CORRE is to help a school district transform itself into what the Task Force described as a “smart district” – one that ensures results and equity for all children in all its schools. The Task Force identified three essential functions of a smart district:

- Provide schools, students, and teachers with needed supports and timely interventions.
- Ensure that schools have the power and resources to make good decisions.
- Make decisions and hold people throughout the system accountable by using indicators of school and district performance and practices.

Building on the work of the Task Force, the Annenberg Institute has continued to expand understanding of key central office roles in supporting the functions of a smart district such as promoting a service orientation and a data orientation, as well as brokering community partnerships.

CORRE was designed to help a district community evaluate how well it carries out these essential functions and to develop an action plan for improvement. As part of this process, CORRE helps the district to determine the current state of student results, assess the effectiveness of district policies and practices that deal with those results, and develop action steps to strengthen the district’s capacity for supporting schools.

The process is also intended to build the capacity of a team of district stakeholders to work together collaboratively and effectively as they gather and examine data needed to improve policies and practices across the district. A more detailed description of the CORRE process appears in Appendix A.

The CORRE Process in Sacramento City

In August 2004, Superintendent Magdalena Carrillo Mejia introduced the CORRE process and its potential at the Leadership Institute for all administrators and principals within the district. During the early fall, plans were finalized and a CORRE Team was assembled, consisting of central office, school, parent, community, higher education, and

Annenberg Institute members (see Appendix B for a full list). The CORRE Team met for an orientation session in October 2004.

The CORRE Team's first task was to gather data and develop a shared understanding of what instruction looks like in SCUSD. Team members visited schools and identified priorities for close review. From a number of different lenses through which team members might view the practices of central office, the team chose instructional and professional development supports.

To deepen its understanding of the priority areas, during November and December the team conducted interviews and focus groups involving 370 participants from the district and the wider Sacramento City community. CORRE Team members held focus groups with students, teachers, principals, parents, community members, union representatives, business leaders, and central office staff. Annenberg Institute staff conducted interviews with senior district leaders, managers, and board members.

Following the conclusion of the focus groups and interviews, staff at the Annenberg Institute compiled and analyzed the data during February and March from these sessions and prepared a preliminary draft of the findings. The CORRE Team met twice in April 2005 to analyze the findings and discuss their implications for central office policy and practice. There will be a separate response by the SCUSD leadership to the Institute's recommendations (see the Recommendations section later in this report).

A detailed timeline of the CORRE process in Sacramento City appears in Appendix C.

This report will not repeat data on Sacramento City's district and student performance that the state of California already provides as part of its ongoing accountability system. Rather, CORRE has focused on how central office practices can more deeply support schools in their understanding and use of that data in their daily work.

At this time, CORRE, as an inquiry review, has taken place in a very small number of school districts across the country. The Sacramento City Unified School District is commended for having the courage to undertake this review, which essentially forces the central office to hold a mirror up to its own work. Through CORRE, a district looks at its practice not only from many different perspectives, but in a far more revealing way than what the visible boxes of the organizational chart show. This self-examination is a step toward a deep commitment to a culture of continuous improvement and change in practice that will lead to more sustainable reform and, ultimately, improved results and outcomes for all students.

Summary of Recommendations and Key Findings

The Sacramento City Unified School District undertook this central office review of its own work in the spirit of self-reflection and continuous improvement, understanding that the findings would touch on both strengths and areas in need of improvement. The district's willingness to receive and act on the recommendations based on these findings reflects a commitment to conducting business differently and more effectively for the benefit of the students and families SCUSD serves.

Recommendations

- Define, mobilize, and communicate clearly a laser-like focus on increasing quality instruction for all students in Sacramento City schools as a key district priority.
- Address and ensure equity related to the distribution of power and resources.
- Define and develop central office accountability to schools for inclusive, transparent, and timely decision making.
- Develop and communicate a central office service orientation.
- Reenergize, activate, and sustain deeper involvement of partners and the larger Sacramento City community in the vision and work of the district.

Key Findings

- Though there is a sincere desire to improve supports and services for Sacramento City's students and families, effective communication between central office and schools and a strong service orientation on the part of central office are lacking.
- Differing views on the priorities of the district and an absence of inclusive and timely decision making contribute to a lack of clear focus on quality instruction for all students as a key district priority.
- Central office does a good job of providing curriculum tools and training that describe *what* should be taught in some areas, but respondents saw a need for support in *how* to teach students who are not proficient on state grade-level standards; principals and teachers seek ongoing, instructionally relevant professional development opportunities to improve their daily practice.
- Respondents credited central office for actively seeking and finding programs and resources to meet the needs of some students, but the current process of allocating resources is not perceived as fair and equitable and does not address the customized needs of individual schools and students.
- Central office does not capitalize on the strengths of school-based partnerships and does not have a collaborative infrastructure that sends the message that the district is willing, eager, and committed to work with partners and the community.
- Central office has made efforts to use data as a way of understanding and improving achievement but needs to expand use of data in daily decision making.

Findings from the CORRE Team

The findings begin with a group of “big picture” perceptions about central office that cut across roles and functions. The remaining findings are organized around the three key functions of a smart district identified by the School Communities that Work Task Force and the key role of central office’s work culture in promoting a service orientation and a data orientation, as well as in brokering relationships, based on the Annenberg Institute’s work in districts and the work of Patricia Burch and James Spillane for the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform.* (Note: The order of the findings does not reflect priority.)

A. Big Picture Perceptions about SCUSD

1. Respondents from inside and outside the district share a strong desire to improve supports and services for Sacramento City’s public school students.
2. There are differing views on what the priorities of the district are. Principals and central office staff at all levels reported that closing the achievement gap is the main priority. Teachers and parents stated that test scores are the primary priority.
3. Little consensus was found among respondents as to who was well served or underserved by SCUSD, with some respondents basing their responses on how well students perform on standardized tests and others referring to the quantity of services or other resources they receive.
4. Respondents from inside and outside the district described an absence of timely decision making and follow-through at various levels throughout SCUSD. This was attributed to a number of reasons:
 - Across several respondent groups, fear of making decisions was a common theme. In general, those respondents described a climate that did not encourage them to be proactive in offering solutions or to take risks.
 - Central office staff at the Cabinet level and below expressed a general sense of disempowerment that has resulted in a reluctance to make decisions or take definitive action.
 - Several central office staff below the Cabinet level, as well as some external partners, described few avenues for those staff members to be involved in decision making. With decision making centered at the Cabinet level, school-level staff often experienced slow or unsatisfactory responses to their needs. A few attributed this situation, in part, to vacancies in key leadership roles.

* An executive summary of the 2004 report *Leading from the Middle: Mid-Level District Staff and Instructional Improvement* is available at www.crosscity.org/downloads/exec_summary_final.pdf

- Principals and teachers did not feel engaged in making decisions that affect them. Their overall view is that there is little two-way communication on matters that impact their work or working conditions.
- Parents did not feel authentically engaged in school planning or governance. For example, they described the school-site councils as a “rubber stamp” for the school administration.

B. Ensuring Accountability

5. Routes for getting problems addressed or questions answered were not clear and were perceived, at times, as requiring respondents to “jump through hoops.”
6. Communication was a widely shared concern among most respondents.
 - Central office staff cited both vertical and horizontal communication challenges within and across departments and senior leadership. In particular, how connections were being made across the new Learning Support Units was not understood by, nor evident to, many staff.
 - Principals and teachers described trouble reaching a person at central office when they needed to, as well as getting inconsistent responses to questions asked of central office staff.
 - Parents noted difficulties in obtaining basic school and event information, as well as difficulties in engaging in a dialogue about their child’s assets and needs.
 - Community partners expressed frustration in not being part of the conversation to support the district’s efforts more effectively.

C. Distributing Power and Resources

7. Respondents from across the community described a school district that actively seeks and finds programs and resources to meet student needs.
8. However, many respondents from across the stakeholder groups suggested that resources and supports are distributed to the individuals who are best at making their voices heard.
9. The teacher hiring process is experienced as cumbersome and slow, and the pool lacks the cultural or ethnic diversity some would like to see.

D. Providing Supports and Interventions

Underserved Students

10. Respondents described “being well served” with different definitions for different student subgroups, at times equating “well served” with receiving special services and resources, regardless of actual outcomes for students.
 - Students labeled as “Gifted and Talented” were the most frequently cited as well served.

- Students who receive special education services were the most frequently cited as being underserved.
 - Various groups of students of color and certain ethnic backgrounds, including African American males and Hmong students, were also frequently cited as “most underserved.”
11. Many respondents acknowledged that English-language learners now, as opposed to in previous years, are receiving more focus and attention and are being provided more resources to improve services.
 12. Respondents were concerned that translation services are limited and that the hours of the Newcomers’ center have been reduced. Several respondents were under the impression that the Newcomers’ center had been closed.

Instruction

13. Central office does a good job of providing curriculum tools (e.g., curriculum models, programs of study, the materials lab) and trainings that describe *what* should be taught, particularly for English/Language Arts and Mathematics.
14. Teachers and principals reported a need, however, for support in instructional methods – *how* to reach students not proficient on state grade-level standards. For example, there is wide concern among principals that instructional methods embedded in curricular programs such as Open Court and Saxon Math are not effective for all students. School-based staff expressed a need for supports that help them tailor instruction for the particular needs of subgroups of students.
15. Several respondents praised the targeted efforts to improve high schools in the district, noting this as a positive change from previous efforts that had focused most of the attention on elementary schools.
16. Parents and students in the larger high schools expressed a need for stronger support for new students and more assistance for students and their families to explore college options.
17. Respondents representing all stakeholder groups expressed a desire for more school-to-career education and more overall career options for students at the high school level who may or may not intend to pursue a postsecondary, four-year college path.
18. Parents said that the level of community engagement in the development and operation of small schools was inadequate.
19. Parents, along with students, described inequities apparent among small schools, between small schools and large schools, and between schools-within-a-school and their host schools.

Professional Development

20. Respondents' perceptions of professional development opportunities offered by the district varied, and the overall plan for professional development is not well understood.
- Principals and teachers turn to each other and rely on personal relationships as a primary source of professional development.
 - Principals specifically stated that they miss formal opportunities to network and learn from each other. They expressed a desire for support from colleagues who have had experience as principals at the same school level as their own.
 - Principals and teachers view the professional development provided by the central office as "hit or miss," and thus insufficient.
 - Principals reported that the mentoring program is helpful and effective.
 - Supports for new teachers, however, were seen as inadequate, and their situation was viewed as "sink or swim."

E. Attending to Work Culture Expectations

Service Orientation

21. There is a disconnect between central office staff perspectives on the level of service they give and the rest of the district's perceptions of the level of service they receive.
- While central office staff members feel they are improving their service orientation, school-based staff report that it remains difficult to get service or to know who to talk to.
 - Comments made by several central office staff reflect an emphasis on compliance and mandates, sometimes at the expense of providing supports to schools.
 - Central office leaders are not well known and visible to school staff, parents, and community partners.
22. Many individuals in central office and other district leadership positions describe an organization in which departments typically function as separate units. These respondents described efforts that were uncoordinated, "crisis oriented," and understaffed. Internal collaboration was described as difficult because of competitiveness among and within units.

Data Use

23. When asked what primary strategies central office was promoting to address achievement issues, central office staff responded with particular functions and projects of their own departments.
24. Discussion of achievement data and student outcomes was noticeably absent in sharing views on which student groups were well served or underserved.

25. SCUSD is demonstrating efforts to use data as a way of understanding and improving achievement. Several central office staff and a few principals mentioned the *Just for the Kids* data as extremely useful and as an easy-to-use diagnostic tool. Others noted that greater efforts to disaggregate and share data with school-level staff have been made. Additionally, central office staff and school-level staff are working to understand how to apply such information to their daily practice.

Relationships with Partners

26. There is widespread agreement that the relationship between the Superintendent and the Cabinet and the teachers union is much improved under the current administration.
27. Community partners described collaboration with individual school sites as strong, but relationships with the central office were described as temporary, changing from year to year and dependent on “who you know.”
- Partners reported that they have assets that the district underutilizes.
 - Partners often felt that their relationships with central office were not as equal as they would like. Rather than work *with* them, central office often treated partners as though the partners worked *for* them.

Recommendations from the Annenberg Institute Based on the CORRE Team Findings

The CORRE recommendations, like the findings, are not presented in order of importance. Rather, they are organized around the three key functions of a smart district and the key roles of central office in promoting a focus on instruction, a service-oriented work culture, and nurturance of community relationships.

1. Define, mobilize, and communicate clearly a laser-like focus on increasing quality instruction for all students as a key district priority.

This recommendation aims to help the district provide schools, students, and teachers with needed supports and timely interventions – a key function of a smart district and key role of central office.

The goal of high student achievement is in the mind and on the lips of nearly all Sacramento City stakeholders. Over the past four years, SCUSD has worked to select *curriculum* supports – the *what* of teaching – to help reach those achievement goals. Now, equally ardent efforts are needed to strengthen *instruction* – the *how* of teaching – in order to build on recent gains. Instructional efforts were reported to be diffuse and scattered. As a result, academic progress across different student groups is uneven and the achievement gap points to inequitable gains. The district has many plans, ideas, and “good talk” about instruction, but few instructional methods or initiatives are understood to the point that they are pervasively practiced across the district.

Central office needs to set a few key instructional priorities and communicate those priorities clearly and repeatedly, so that all students will accelerate their learning and those needing the most support will make considerable achievement gains. The Superintendent’s Cabinet, with input from other district staff and partners, should lead this effort and monitor its implementation. This practice will enable the district to focus on doing a few things very well, rather than being involved in too many projects that only touch the surface.

SCUSD should consider such practices as:

- Map, align, and connect the Strategic Plan, CORRE, and the Process Management System (ISO 9000) into one work plan, embedding common themes and showing how every action is related to or supports instructional improvement. Simultaneously, review the concerns expressed by principals and teachers through CORRE and other venues, asking for more central office support in meeting the needs of the district’s schools and students. If the combined work plan does not address these concerns, revise the work plan to incorporate the actions needed to address their concerns.
- Establish a timeline to revisit the combined work plan, perhaps in annual or semiannual board meetings and/or Cabinet meetings to set and communicate district priorities widely and consistently and monitor action steps of their implementation.

- Analyze the gaps in professional development for principals and teachers and identify the content and strategies that must fill those gaps. Customize, as much as possible, professional development by segment and school by providing opportunities for building professional learning communities for principals and teachers.
 - ✧ Continue and expand capacity building in curriculum benchmarking and instructional leadership.
 - ✧ Extend and adapt principal mentoring and coaching efforts, currently only available for new hires, to all principals in order to improve their practice.
 - ✧ Review and, if necessary, reinvent the support system for new teachers.
- Identify the gaps in the adopted core curriculum/instructional programs currently in place (e.g., Saxon Math, Open Court) in meeting the needs of English-language learners, students with disabilities, and students who are not proficient on state grade-level standards. Identify and put into place supplemental materials and adaptations to address these gaps and help students reach the standards. Develop strategies for monitoring the success of these materials and adaptations and encourage wide use of those which are leading to strong student results.
- Continue using *Just for the Kids* data and document the ways it has been applied in schools by principals and teachers. Develop professional development modules led by SCUSD principals and teachers on best practices and application of this data.
- Consider additional indicators of student progress besides test scores (for example, attendance, suspensions, special education referrals, etc.).
- Work with the teachers union to come to agreement on the role and function of advisories in the high schools as well as the need for additional mechanisms to support student transition from middle to high schools.

AREAS FOR ACTION

- *Advocate for underserved students.*
- *Mobilize and focus attention on instruction.*
- *Provide professional development opportunities to improve practice.*

2. Address and ensure equity related to the distribution of power and resources.

This recommendation aims to help the district ensure that schools have the power and resources to make good decisions – a key function of a smart district.

There is a widely shared view that more resources are required to meet the increasing demands placed on the district to educate Sacramento City’s students. However, there is not consistent agreement that the district, essentially, must do two things: provide targeted – and, at times, additional – differentiated supports for underperforming groups of stu-

dents, while simultaneously raising the total achievement of all students. Inevitably, this causes tension in an environment of insufficient resources. This concern about the adequacy of resources is compounded by the sense that more resources go to those who advocate with the loudest and most persistent voices, as well as to those who use politics and pressure to work around the system. Resources and supports should be differentiated to meet school and student needs – an approach that requires careful targeting and tough decisions. Central office should model the strategic targeting of resources – human, fiscal, social, and technical – to student groups exhibiting the greatest unmet needs and to the schools and school staff (both classified and nonclassified) that support them.

SCUSD should consider such practices as:

- Integrate the collection, organization, analysis, and use of data into decisions about where and to whom resources are targeted.
- Acknowledge existing assets and expertise at all levels of the system.
- Attend to inequities that exist *within* schools as well as those *between* schools and monitor those resources accordingly, intervening when necessary.
- Revise existing resource decision-making structures and processes, giving special attention to transparency and consistency of efforts, delegating appropriately, and including those who will be directly impacted by decisions as well as those with technical expertise who work in schools.
- Identify, utilize, and collaborate strategically with organizations that have resources – human, fiscal, social, and technical – that can help schools and/or central office staff meet the diverse and unique needs of SCUSD students so that the larger community will champion the benefits of all students’ success.

AREA FOR ACTION

Provide schools, fairly and equitably, with the tools and resources to make good decisions.

3. Define and develop central office accountability to schools for inclusive, transparent, and timely decision making.

This recommendation aims to help the district make decisions and hold people throughout the system accountable by using indicators of school and district performance and practices – a key function of a smart district.

Nearly all those interviewed expressed concern and confusion about how decisions are currently made in the district and the pace, inclusiveness, and communication regarding those decisions. Favoritism is perceived as to who is now part of making certain decisions, how these individuals are invited to participate in the decision-making loop, and how much value is placed on their input. Being transparent in sharing information needed to make decisions, as well as communicating final outcomes of decisions, will empower central office and school-level staff to contribute to, understand, and own decisions that are made.

However, for these efforts to take root and grow, staff members must feel truly included, validated, and invested in decision making at a deep level. Central office and building-level leadership also should commit to a standard of professional accountability for making informed decisions within a reasonable period of time and challenge prevalent “wait and see” attitudes.

SCUSD should consider such practices as:

- Establish a district decision-making process that is agreed to by central office leadership, including those serving at the Cabinet level and those serving immediately below the Cabinet level. The decision-making process should acknowledge that some decisions will require full leadership participation and others will be made by smaller subgroups. Communicate and make public the “*what, how, and when*” of the district’s decision-making process.
- Reassign responsibilities among senior leadership to allow for one individual with authority to focus, coordinate, and “traffic” the Cabinet-level work of central office.
- Provide regular update briefs to central office and school-based staff on material covered at Cabinet meetings.
- Model and practice active listening between and within central office units and between central office and schools. This might involve formal methods of data collection, such as surveys, but also requires that central office leadership develop new habits of mind: consistently seeking out and incorporating feedback from principals, teachers, and other school-based staff in its planning and decision making. It also requires building more time in for feedback so school-based staff have adequate time to respond.
- Act on the critical issues that emerge from such active listening. For example, the timeliness and diversity of the pool of candidates in the teacher hiring process is an issue often raised by principals.

AREAS FOR ACTION

- *Communicate decisions and key messages and ensure follow-through on “big ideas” expressed as SCUSD’s vision.*
- *Use data in daily decision making.*

4. Develop and communicate a central office service orientation.

This recommendation aims to help central office ensure that its work culture is service oriented – a key role of central office.

A “smart district” manages a diverse portfolio of successful schools and school networks and recognizes the need for a strong service orientation toward schools, students, parents, and the larger community as well as among units, departments, and people in the central office itself. Service may be differentiated and specialized based on school needs. Contact with and support from central office must reflect a commitment of service throughout

all levels of central office – from the administrator’s door through the receptionist who answers the phone call from a troubled parent. This attitude should be evident in all interactions and communications and continually discussed within and outside of central office as well as considered in performance evaluations.

SCUSD should consider such practices as:

- Build on the customer service survey already in place to reflect the new organizational structure and provide more specific information related to the specific functions of each department/unit. Consider making the survey Web based to increase response rate and assure confidentiality.
- Adopt as a central office policy a “good faith” effort to return phone calls within twenty-four hours.
- Request periodically from central office units a brief activity log of district constituents recently assisted and their specific issues that emerged. This will not only capture service efforts, but inform changes needed in district policy and practice.
- Recognize exceptional service of departments and units based on school/community feedback. Provide training and support for central office staff, particularly those who are on the front line to the public.

AREA FOR ACTION

Develop a service orientation toward schools, staff, and families.

5. Reenergize, activate, and sustain deeper involvement of partners and the larger Sacramento City community in the vision and work of the district.

This recommendation aims to help the district broker and nurture relationships to involve a broad spectrum of community partners – a key role of central office.

The communication issues cited in this report go beyond the internal structure of central office. Several strategies are already in place for communication with the larger community, but they do not address the need for reciprocal and ongoing discussions that will have a serious and lasting impact on the district. Though better communication is a promising start, true engagement goes beyond communication. SCUSD must be cautious not to use these findings, as well as the strategic planning process, as rallying points for dialogue and change and then let those conversations evaporate until the next time rallying the community becomes a need. These episodic forays have the effect of demonstrating disrespect to community members, even when that is not the intention. The lack of follow-through also has the effect of undermining the credibility of the central office and breeding cynicism and negativity. Partnerships demand time, energy, a clear set of indicators of progress and success, and a sustainable partnering infrastructure. SCUSD needs to work with partners on an ongoing basis and commit the presence and efforts of senior

central office staff to make this happen. Working purposefully and collaboratively with key partners such as Linking Education and Economic Development (LEED) will position the district to capitalize on strategic alliances that will move the district's vision forward.

SCUSD should consider such practices as:

- Build and expand on the success of current engagement efforts (Parent University, Passport to Success, Parent Power Tool Kit, Home Visiting Project, TV parent programming, etc.). Commit to not only “hear” but act on parent concerns for their children and how schools can better communicate about the teaching and learning agenda.
- Unify parent/school district efforts by developing three to four points around which all schools in the district will engage parents. Literacy standards, understanding new curriculum standards, promoting good behavioral choices, and forming home/school goals are all possibilities that can be adapted according to the level and age of students.
- Identify what authentic engagement for school site councils “looks like” and where it is taking place. Develop standards and rubrics for this governance structure, support schools in this work, and intervene when it is not happening.
- Inventory all current partnerships with schools and assess where entrepreneurial principals have garnered durable and productive partnerships. Build partnering capacity by assisting schools where partnerships have not been brokered – perhaps by matching school leaders to assist one another.
- Designate key senior central office leaders to develop and jointly chair ongoing workgroups. The workgroups will identify and address the needs and goals of the district and the partner organizations. The workgroups should include:
 - ✧ a roundtable of support service partners, including community-based partners, articulating the alignment of the roundtable's work with academic success;
 - ✧ a business leaders' group that will assist schools in developing strategies to ensure that SCUSD graduates have the skills to be successful members of the twenty-first-century workforce and in constructing meaningful internship and mentoring opportunities as important components of the academic curriculum and enrichment;
 - ✧ a higher education group that will inform postsecondary learning issues and serve as a pipeline for teacher recruitment.
- Inform and be informed by partners to develop healthy working relationships. Set jointly focused, targeted goals for the partnership to reach during the year and continually assess the trajectory toward those goals.

AREA FOR ACTION

Broker and nurture relationships with partners.

Toward Action Steps

The CORRE findings and recommendations have been discussed in depth with CORRE Team members and the Superintendent. Though there is much work to be done ahead, the team and the Superintendent have embraced three key priorities with which to begin this work: adopting and developing an inclusive, transparent process for decision making; using data systematically to address equity issues in the district; and providing professional development more comprehensively to improve practice. These priority areas will be aligned and embedded within the District's Strategic Plan and the Process Management System (ISO 9000), both of which have been under construction for a considerable period of time before and during the CORRE inquiry.

While many action steps to follow up on CORRE are management prerogatives, the Annenberg Institute believes that the collaborative team approach has already been demonstrated and should be deepened to include other members of the SCUSD staff and the wider community. The district and community members who have participated in CORRE demonstrated the capacity for hard work as well as the courage to ask the hard questions. The team has already begun developing a shared understanding of what it will take to bridge the gap between findings and proposed solutions for the priority areas listed above.

The Learning Support Unit (LSU) structure, where elementary, middle, and high schools are clustered in one reporting unit (LSU A, B, C, or D) with an associate superintendent as its head, was a frequent reference and discussion point during focus groups and interviews. Since the K–12 structure is relatively new for SCUSD, it was not talked about consistently as a wholly positive or negative factor in central office practice. The Annenberg Institute, as a rule, does not endorse one particular district structure but, rather, studies the factors surrounding the structure, such as communication, decision making, a focus on teaching and learning, etc. Therefore, this report neither endorses nor challenges the LSU structure.

However, the Cabinet, with central office leaders, must address the issues expressed by many participants for assistance in meeting the individualized needs of each segment (elementary, middle, and high). It is strongly recommended that the administration build on the LSU structure to meet these needs. There is no question that the K–12 structure promotes important articulation between segments in working toward an understanding of curriculum demands and expectations at each juncture. At the same time, it is equally important to provide support for specific age/segment issues. For example, elementary schools may need specific support with students who have not developed reading fluency by grade 3, middle schools may need assistance in dealing with the increased demands of content-area text, and high schools may require targeted support in the ongoing work of the *e21* initiative regarding relationships between small schools, their host schools, and the larger high schools.

SCUSD has tremendous potential to continue the work begun with the CORRE process. With the dialogue focused on teaching and learning as the heart of its mission, Sacramento City's schools are poised for meeting the challenge of achievement progress and outcomes for each student. Powerful assets exist within SCUSD and the larger community. Validating and unifying those assets and keeping all stakeholders at the table will produce continued and sustainable change that will long benefit the district and the community, bringing them closer to the ideal of results and equity for all of Sacramento City's children.

What Is CORRE?

The Central Office Review for Results and Equity (CORRE) is a five-step process to help school districts evaluate the capacity of the central office to support high academic performance for all students in all the district's schools. Participants in CORRE identify high-priority issues in the district, examine quantitative and qualitative data about it, and develop plans and propose action for improvement.

CORRE is not an audit, a consultant report, an external review, or any other practice commonly done *to* districts. The CORRE process is facilitated by Annenberg Institute staff and consultants *in collaboration with* a district and its community. Districts that participate do so voluntarily, motivated by a strong desire to look closely at their central office practices and improve their work with schools.

CORRE was developed by School Communities that Work: A National Task Force on the Future of Urban Districts, created by the Annenberg Institute in 2000. The Task Force developed a vision for “smart districts” – urban education systems that have the capacity to achieve both results and equity for all their students, with no significant differences in achievement based on race, ethnicity, or family income. The Task Force concluded that there are three things a “smart” school system must do:

- Provide schools, students, and teachers with needed supports and timely interventions.
- Ensure that schools have the power and resources to make good decisions.
- Make decisions and hold people accountable, using indicators of school and district performance and practice.

The Task Force concluded its work with the publication in 2002 of the *Portfolio for District Redesign* – a series of tools, including CORRE, to help districts perform these three key functions. Building on the work of the Task Force, Institute staff have continued to expand understanding of key central office roles as part of these functions, including communicating big ideas, promoting a service orientation and a data orientation, increasing capacity, brokering partnerships, advocating for and supporting underserved students, and addressing inequities.

CORRE brings together a team of leaders from the district (central office staff, board members, teachers, principals), the community (community-based organization leaders, parent leaders, foundation officers), and consultants from outside the district who are experienced in content areas, systems and culture change, and leadership for learning. The team goes through the following steps.

Step 1. Preparation

CORRE Team members are chosen and receive an orientation facilitated by the Annenberg Institute team members. Meetings are scheduled. Institute and district liaisons prepare background information about the district for the team and begin to identify issues that CORRE might address.

Step 2. Developing Shared Understanding of the District and a Plan for Inquiry

The team discusses the background information about the district and visits schools to develop a shared experience of the district. The team then identifies and prioritizes key issues, sequences the inquiry, creates questions related to central office support of teaching and learning, and identifies key informants – usually including students, teachers, parents, principals, and community partners.

Step 3. Deepening Understanding

The team deepens its understanding of the key issue(s) by collecting data, which may include school visits, classroom observations, surveys, focus groups, shadowing of students, and interviews with central office, parents, community members, school staff, or students.

Step 4. Compiling and Analyzing Data

The data is compiled, categorized, and analyzed by Institute staff. The team vets the findings – testing them, based on their own experience in the district – and draws conclusions about implications for central office practice and policy.

Step 5. Developing Action Steps

CORRE shifts from inquiry to action. Based on the feedback from the team in Step 4, Institute staff develop recommendations for action steps, drawing on a framework developed by the Institute that translates the functions of a smart district into key central office roles. These are presented to the team and the superintendent and, eventually, at a public meeting with the board of education. The recommendations may consist of next steps for the district as a whole or specific recommendations for the leadership of the district.

To review progress on the implementation of the action steps, the Institute conducts follow-ups two, four, and six months after the public report is issued. In some cases, the district deepens the post-CORRE relationship with the Institute by requesting support for implementation of one or more of the action steps.

CORRE as a Research Study

CORRE shares many of the qualities of a comprehensive research study. It is based on a conceptual framework; uses research tools – mainly interviews and focus groups – to collect data; and adheres to the strictest research ethics for dealing with human subjects.

CORRE differs from a comprehensive research study primarily with respect to sampling. Rather than basing focus group and interview lists on randomized sampling or related statistical methods, the CORRE Team (also not a statistically representative sample of the district/community, but representing many perspectives) draws upon its collective knowledge to identify participants. Furthermore, all the participants are volunteers, and thus the sampling of groups such as parents is often limited because their participation is usually subject to their availability.

The findings report perceptions across individuals and groups, such as teachers, parents, or principals, noting similar themes relevant to the roles/functions of central office. The subsequent recommendations for improvement build upon those themes.

The data derived from both interviews and the focus groups represent those individuals' perceptions about the focus area. These perceptions may or may not align with quantitative data. But making perceptions explicit is vital, both to convince the district of the need for change and to indicate the areas in which the district may need to improve its policies and practices.

CORRE Team Members

Sacramento City Public Schools Community

Martin Bazua, Teacher, *Woodbine Elementary School*
 Joan Butt, *Deputy Superintendent, Chief Financial Officer (retired December 2004)*
 Linda Carey, *Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent*
 Magdalena Carrillo Mejia, *Superintendent*
 Paul Heckman, *Professor, University of California at Davis*
 Betsy Kean, *Professor, California State University, Sacramento*
 Marcie Launey, *President, Sacramento City Teachers Association*
 Howard Lawrence, *Executive Board President, Area Congregations Together (ACT)*
 Daisy Lee, *Principal, C. K. McClatchy High School*
 May Lee, *Executive Director, Asian Resources*
 Evan Lum, *Associate Superintendent*
 Ulysses Madison, *Staff Manager, Service Employees International Union, Local 790*
 Irma Marquez, *Principal, Peter Burnett Elementary School*
 Susan Miller, *Associate Superintendent*
 Lois Peterson, *Principal, Albert Einstein Middle School*
 Juanita Reynolds, *Teacher, Bret Harte Elementary School*
 Jay Schenirer, *Board Member (until January 2005)*
 Jerry Seid, *Parent, John F. Kennedy High School*
 Suzanne Taylor, *Parent, Sutter Middle School*
 Manuel Villarreal, *Executive Director, Sacramento City Teachers Association*
 John Wong, *Teacher, C. K. McClatchy High School*
 Harriet Young, *Principal, Goethe Middle School; President, United Professional Educators*

Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Pia Durkin, *Principal Associate*
 Frank Barnes, *Senior Associate*
 Tamara Miele, *Research Associate*
 Hal Smith, *Senior Research Associate*
with support from Marla Ucelli, *Director, District Redesign*
 Ellen Foley, *Principal Associate*
 Carol Walker, *Program Coordinator*

Appendix C **Timeline for the Central Office Review for Results and Equity by the Sacramento City Unified School District**

Introduction

March 2004 Staff from the Annenberg Institute met with SCUSD leadership and key partners.

I. Preparing for the Review

August 2004 The SCUSD superintendent introduced the CORRE review process at the Leadership Institute.

September 2004 Arrangements for conducting the review and a framework for naming members of the CORRE Team were agreed upon.

Twenty-five people were subsequently named to the CORRE Team, including four from the Annenberg Institute.

II. Developing a Shared Understanding of the District

October 26–29, 2004 Orientation meeting for the CORRE Team members was facilitated by Annenberg Institute staff.

The CORRE Team visited schools to develop a common understanding of schools and instruction in SCUSD.

Following the visits, the team examined and analyzed issues and selected instructional and professional development supports as a priority area for their collective inquiry.

III. Deepening Understanding of the Priority Issues

November 2004 through January 2005 Members of the CORRE Team and Annenberg Institute staff conducted interviews and focus groups that included a total of 370 people.

Focus groups involved teachers, principals, parents, community members, students, business leaders, and central office staff.

Interviews involved SCUSD leadership, managers, and board members.

IV. Compiling and Analyzing Data

February–March 2005 Annenberg Institute CORRE members, with support from additional Institute staff, compiled and categorized the data from the interviews and the focus groups, reviewed key SCUSD documents and plans, and completed a preliminary analysis of the CORRE Team’s findings.

April 7, 2005 Institute staff presented its preliminary analysis, and the CORRE Team collectively agreed upon the key findings of the review.

V. Developing Action Steps

April 25, 2005 Institute staff facilitated a discussion by the CORRE Team on the implications of the findings for central office policy and practice. The CORRE Team selected three priority areas on which to begin next steps: decision making, using data to address equity issues, and providing comprehensive models of professional development to improve practice.

June 16, 2005 Public release of the final CORRE report with recommendations.

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The Annenberg Institute wishes to thank Carnegie Corporation of New York, the School Board, and the Superintendent for the opportunity to work with the Sacramento City Unified School District community. We thank and commend the CORRE Team for their hard work, their fortitude, and their candor in addressing difficult and challenging issues within central office and their impact on schools. In particular, we have appreciated the leadership of the Superintendent and the work of the lead liaison, Linda Carey, who provided ongoing support and momentum during the inquiry.



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