

**Smaller Learning Communities
2006-07 Evaluation Report
Los Angeles Unified School District**

Executive Summary

Research conducted by:

**Michael Butler
Noemi Donoso
Patty O'Driscoll
Mikala Rahn, Ph.D.
Jia Wang, Ph.D.
Albert Chen
P. Marcell Gilmore
Scott Phelps
Hoky Lin**

**Public Works, Inc.
90 N. Daisy Avenue
Pasadena, CA 91107
(626) 564-9890
(626) 564-0657 fax**

Smaller Learning Communities Context

Since 2000, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) has provided Smaller Learning Community (SLC) planning and implementation grants to high schools with 1,000 or more students in order to plan, implement or expand SLCs. The grants are driving efforts to restructuring the traditional high school in order to augment the focus on academic rigor with strengthened adult-student relationships (personalization) and increased relevancy (interdisciplinary and project-based learning). The goal of SLC implementation is to create a more personalized high school experience for students in smaller schools within schools and thereby improve student achievement and overall school performance.

This report provides the evaluation results from 2006-07 for the 28 comprehensive high schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) that received USDE SLC implementation grants. LAUSD hired Public Works, Inc., a non-profit headquartered in Pasadena, California, to conduct a third-party evaluation of SLC grantees in 2006-07, which included:

- ❖ Year 4 SLC efforts of the five Cohort III schools—Banning, Cleveland, Monroe, Polytechnic, and Roosevelt high schools (\$2,399,710 in USDE grant funds beginning implementation in the 2003-04 school year);
- ❖ Year 3 SLC efforts at seven Cohort IV schools—Birmingham, Carson, Fremont, Garfield, Narbonne, North Hollywood, and San Fernando high schools (\$3,850,000 in USDE funds beginning in 2004-05);
- ❖ Year 2 SLC efforts at ten Cohort V schools —Canoga Park, Grant, Huntington Park, Lincoln, Los Angeles, Manual Arts, Marshall, San Pedro, Sylmar, and Washington Preparatory high schools (\$10,625,000 in USDE funds beginning in 2005-06); and
- ❖ Year 1 SLC efforts at nine Cohort VI schools— Bell, Chatsworth, Franklin, Locke, Monroe, Polytechnic, Roosevelt, Van Nuys, and Westchester (\$6,068,191 in USDE funding beginning in 2006-07).¹

Smaller Learning Communities Grant Overview

Due in part to the focus on standards-based instructional reforms, elementary student achievement within LAUSD has improved for the last five to six years. Unfortunately, these improvements have not been replicated at the secondary level. Therefore, LAUSD has moved into a second stage of the standards-based reform. As stated in LAUSD's 2005 position paper on SLCs, LAUSD recognized that "we cannot reach new heights of equity and excellence while confined by a bureaucracy with a tendency to conserve customs or practices that work only for a small fraction of the student body." Therefore, LAUSD is currently engaged in a variety of reforms to address the size and constraints of large comprehensive high schools, including creating SLCs within existing high schools and establishing new small schools.

¹ Three of the schools in Cohort III (Monroe, Roosevelt, and Polytechnic) were refunded as Cohort VI schools with an additional three-year grant.

Growing research on the potential for SLCs to enact substantive instructional reform at the secondary level combined with the availability of funding for SLCs from the sources such as the USDE and the Gates Foundation prompted LAUSD to develop a list of essential attributes that will guide the implementation of SLCs at both new secondary schools in the district and large, urban schools engaged in transformation efforts. Finalized in Summer 2004, these eight attribute areas include the following:

1. Unifying Vision
2. SLC Identity
3. Rigorous, Standards-Based Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment
4. Professional Development
5. Equity & Access
6. Personalization
7. Accountability & Distributed Leadership
8. Collaboration, Parent & Community Engagement

The implementation grants received by the 28 comprehensive high schools included in this evaluation can be used to support a variety of SLC structures and strategies. Structures include academies, houses (grouping students in semi-autonomous structures—for instance, freshmen houses), schools-within-schools (with a higher degree of autonomy than a house structure) and magnet programs. Strategies supported by the grant include freshmen transition programs, multi-year groupings, alternative scheduling, adult advocate systems (such as formal mentoring programs) and teacher advisory systems (in which small groups of students are paired with a teacher during an advisory period to support individualized attention and personalization of the counseling function).

Despite the variety of ways in which the grants can be used to support SLCs, it is expected that SLCs will be available to students “wall-to-wall” by the end of the grant period. It is essential to recognize that SLCs have existed in LAUSD at the secondary level for more than two decades. School-within-a-school programs such as magnet schools, academies (including California Partnership academies), and Humanitas programs have provided a *subset* of students with rigorous, personalized, thematic and interdisciplinary instruction. The challenge now is to scale up these existing specialized programs so that all students benefit from participation in SLCs.

District support for the implementation of SLCs was coordinated through the Office of School Redesign in the period 2003-2006. In 2006, direct oversight and support for SLCs shifted to the eight local districts in LAUSD, provided by high school directors and School Improvement Facilitators (SIFs) in each local district. Office of School Redesign continued to offer professional development on selected SLC topics to grantee schools, fulfill compliance and reporting requirements for USDE, and coordinate annual conferences and retreats devoted to sharing SLC accomplishments and challenges.

Public Works, Inc. Evaluation and Report

As required by the USDE, districts receiving SLC implementation grants were required to hire a third-party evaluator. In 2003, LAUSD hired Public *Works*, Inc., a 501c(3) corporation headquartered in Pasadena with a wide range of experience conducting evaluations in the area of Public Education and School Reform.

The research questions which form the basis for the evaluation focus on the extent to which the implementation of SLCs has...

- ❖ Modified the delivery of curriculum and instruction
- ❖ Personalized instruction in ways that benefit students
- ❖ Improved school climate/safety
- ❖ Engaged and involved parents, business, and community members
- ❖ Improved student achievement and increased student eligibility and preparation for postsecondary education and careers

In addition, the evaluation examined the kinds of technical assistance and/or support needed to effectively implement SLCs at large, urban high schools.

Research Methods

To collect data on the progress of the SLC grantee high schools in 2006-07, the evaluation collected data from multiple sources including:

- ❖ Review of relevant research literature
- ❖ Surveys of school staff
- ❖ Surveys of all 10th and 12th grade students
- ❖ Follow-up surveys with 12th grade graduates 3-4 months after graduation²
- ❖ Focus groups, interviews, and observations during site visits to all schools
- ❖ Rating all sites against the LAUSD SLC Attributes on a six-point scale where 1=No evidence of implementation and 6=Full implementation

In order to examine student achievement and school performance at the 28 grantee schools, statistical analyses were performed on multiple achievement indicators including:

- ❖ California Standards Test (CST), English Language Arts and Mathematics;
- ❖ California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), English Language Arts and Mathematics;
- ❖ Pupil attendance;
- ❖ Dropout/Graduation rate data;
- ❖ Student transience;
- ❖ A-G course enrollment and completion rate;
- ❖ Course grades;
- ❖ Advanced Placement course enrollment and exam pass rate; and
- ❖ College entrance exams.

² Required for federal reporting to determine postsecondary enrollment and employment status after high school graduation.

In general, results are reported overall (i.e., across all schools) and by cohort, comparing SLC and non-SLC students. The report also highlights the differences between pre-existing and newly emerging SLCs. In this way, the analyses take into account pre-existing achievement differences among students in SLCs that existed prior to the USDE grants (i.e. magnet and academy programs). In particular, these pre-existing SLC programs were more likely to contain higher achieving students.³

Key Findings

Conversion of high schools to SLCs is an on-going initiative taking place at high schools across the nation. Although the examples of SLCs around the country provide some lessons, there is simply not enough information on “proven” strategies that will ensure its success, particularly for the kind of large urban high schools in LAUSD. In light of this, the efforts of the LAUSD schools in Cohorts III-VI must be viewed as pioneering. However, evidence is coming together that provides crucial lessons learned to help steer the schools and LAUSD in a direction that will result in meeting student achievement goals. This Executive Summary highlights key findings from both the qualitative and quantitative reports completed as part of this evaluation.⁴

SLC Enrollment

The proportion of students enrolled in SLCs has increased exponentially, with three-quarters of all 9th graders and a majority of 10th and 11th graders enrolled in SLCs in 2006-07. At the same time, the demographics of SLC students either match or increasingly mirror that of the entire school population. In other words, SLC students now represent the typical or average student at these high schools.

The percentage of students involved in SLCs has increased more than five-fold at Cohort III and Cohort IV schools. Cohort III schools increased SLC participation from 13% at baseline to 70% of total student enrollment after four years. Cohort IV schools increased SLC enrollment from 14% to 76% after three years of grant implementation. Student enrollment in SLCs has also shown large increases at more recent grantees. Cohort V schools increased SLC enrollment from 20% to 58% of all students within two years. After only one year of grant implementation, 61% of the students at Cohort VI schools were enrolled in a SLC. Nonetheless, these rates fall short of the goal for 100% (wall-to-wall) SLC penetration by the end of the three-year grant for Cohort III⁵ and Cohort IV schools. It is worth noting that the Cohort V and Cohort VI schools have been given two

³ Public Works, Inc. “Transforming Large Comprehensive High Schools into Smaller Learning Communities: Year One Evaluation Report” (2004).

⁴ For qualitative evaluation findings, please see Public Works, Inc. *Smaller Learning Communities, 2006-07 Evaluation Report, Los Angeles Unified School District*. For quantitative evaluation findings, refer to Public Works, Inc. *Smaller Learning Communities, 2006-07 Evaluation Report—Quantitative Outcomes, Los Angeles Unified School District*.

⁵ The five schools in Cohort III received a one-year, no-cost extension for a total of four years of participation in the USDE grant.

additional years (for a total of five years) to meet the wall-to-wall SLC involvement goal.⁶ This suggests that the U.S. Department of Education has recognized the need for a longer timeframe for SLC conversions.

Developing Equitable SLCs

Data from this report demonstrate that schools receiving the USDE SLC grants have made significant strides in the area of equity and access. The tendency of pre-existing SLCs to be unrepresentative compared to their “host” schools has given way to SLCs that increasingly mirror the student demographics and prior academic achievement patterns of the larger schools in which they reside. The newly created (emergent) SLCs created since the USDE grants have been drawn from the ranks of typical students at these schools. In sum, there is no evidence to support the notion that SLC reforms are “tracking” or “creaming” students at the aggregate level.

Achievement of SLC Compared to Non-SLC Students

There is a clear quantitative impact linked to student participation in SLCs. Comparing SLC students to students uninvolved in SLCs, SLC students were more likely to:

- ❖ *Attend school (higher attendance rates)*
- ❖ *Stay in school (significantly lower levels of student transience AND large reductions in the 9th and 10th grade dropout rates).*
- ❖ *Pass both the English/Language Arts and the Mathematics sections of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) as 10th graders (i.e., first time test takers).*

The impact of SLC involvement on student outcomes was less definitive for the California Standards Tests (CST). While 9th grade achievement improved at Cohort III and Cohort IV schools among students enrolled in the SLCs created following the receipt of the USDE SLC grants, these gains were not sustained into 10th or 11th grade in any consistent fashion. This may be due to the retention of 9th grade students who would have dropped out of high school prior to the personalization reforms enacted as part of SLC implementation.

Other outcome measures such as course grades, AP enrollment and AP exam pass rates, UC/CSU eligibility, and high school graduation rates have yet to show significant improvement in the years following implementation of SLC reforms.

The difference in student outcomes favoring students involved in SLCs was clearest at those sites with the longest tenure under the grant (i.e., the five Cohort III and seven Cohort IV schools with 3-4 years of grant implementation through 2006-07). Schools with less time in the grant showed less impact on measurable outcomes.

⁶ Three of the schools in Cohort VI are Cohort III schools who reapplied and received additional funding. These three schools (Monroe, Polytechnic, and Roosevelt) will receive three additional years of Cohort VI funding not five like the other six schools.

Achievement of Students in Pre-Existing SLCs

Students enrolled in pre-existing SLC (i.e., magnets and academies) have the highest levels of achievement. These SLC are long-term entities with a proven track record in delivering interdisciplinary instruction that yields high levels of achievement among diverse student populations. As such, they continually show higher levels of student achievement when compared to students in newly emerging SLC and non-SLC students. It is important to remember that the magnet and academy students classified as “pre-existing SLC students” were demographically different compared to the “typical” student at their high schools at baseline in all cohorts. In general, pre-existing SLC students were less likely to be male, Hispanic, English Learners, or Special Education students compared to school-wide averages.

California Standards Tests

Students enrolled in pre-existing SLCs outperformed non-SLC students on both the CST for both English/Language Arts and Mathematics *regardless of cohort*. Under more rigorous statistical testing using matched samples of similar non-SLC students, the results differed by cohort:

- Cohort III: a higher percentage of students in pre-existing SLCs scored at least Proficient on the ELA and Mathematics CSTs in 2007 compared to the non-SLC students controlling for prior ELA or mathematics achievement in 2005 and key demographic characteristics.
- Cohort IV: students in pre-existing SLCs outperformed a matched sample of non-SLC students by being more likely to score Proficient or Advanced in both the English/Language arts (ELA) CST and Mathematics CSTs. However, these results were not statistically significant when controlling for prior ELA or mathematics achievement and key demographic characteristics.
- Cohort V: pre-existing SLC students were more likely to score Proficient or Advanced in ELA (but not Mathematics) in 2007 compared to similar “control groups” of non-SLC students. However, these achievement differences were not statistically significant.

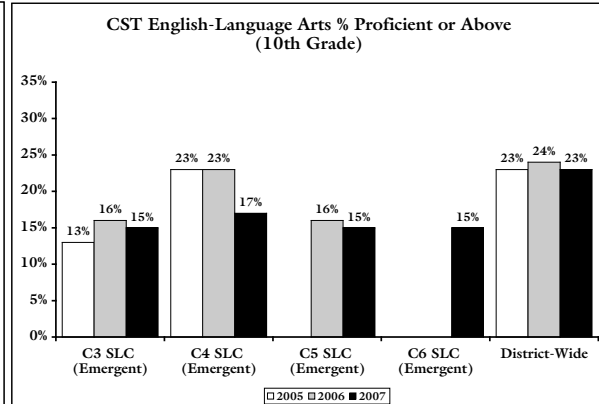
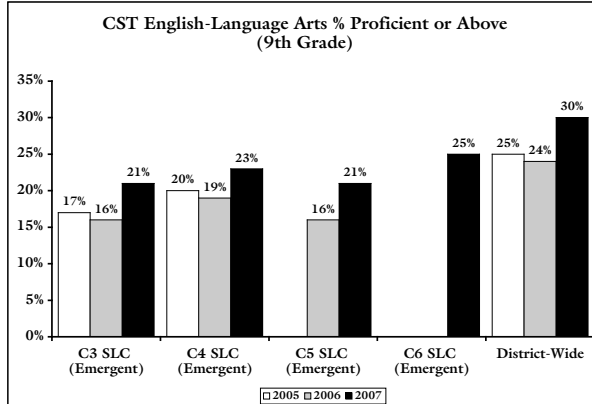
California High School Exit Exam

Students enrolled in pre-existing SLCs outperformed non-SLC students on both the CAHSEE for both English/Language Arts and Mathematics *regardless of cohort*. This study did not compare the CAHSEE achievement of pre-existing SLC students to that of a matched control group of students.

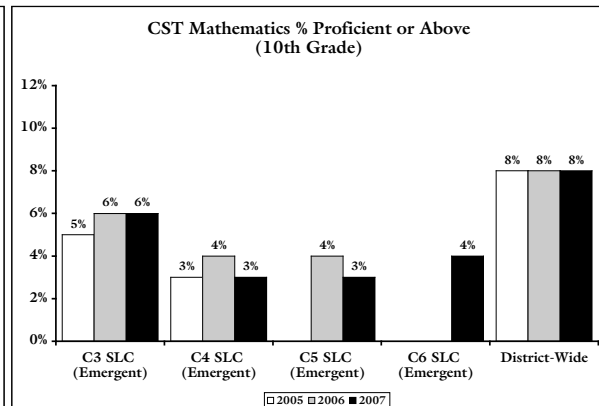
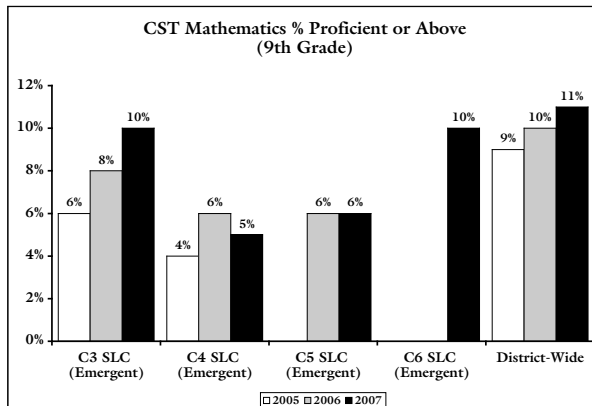
Achievement of Students in Newer, Emergent SLCs

Students enrolled into the new SLC structures have shown improvement on the CSTs in English/Language Arts in the three-year period 2005-2007. However, gains have been confined primarily to 9th grade students. As shown below, the proportion of 9th graders scoring Proficient increased in all cohorts in 9th grade English/Language Arts. Gains were not seen among 10th graders in newly emergent SLC structures.

California Standards Tests



Students enrolled into the new SLC structures also showed improvement on the CSTs in Mathematics in the three-year period 2005-2007. However, gains have been confined primarily to 9th grade students. As shown below, the proportion of 9th graders scoring Proficient increased in 9th grade Mathematics, particularly at Cohort III schools. Gains were less pronounced in other cohorts and among 10th graders in newly emergent SLC structures. Regardless of improvement, very few students achieved proficiency in Mathematics at SLC schools or across LAUSD.



When matching a sample of students enrolled in the newly emergent SLCs (i.e., SLCs created as part of grant implementation) to those of a similar, non-SLC group of students, SLC students either performed at lower levels of achievement or very little difference was found in CST scores over time.

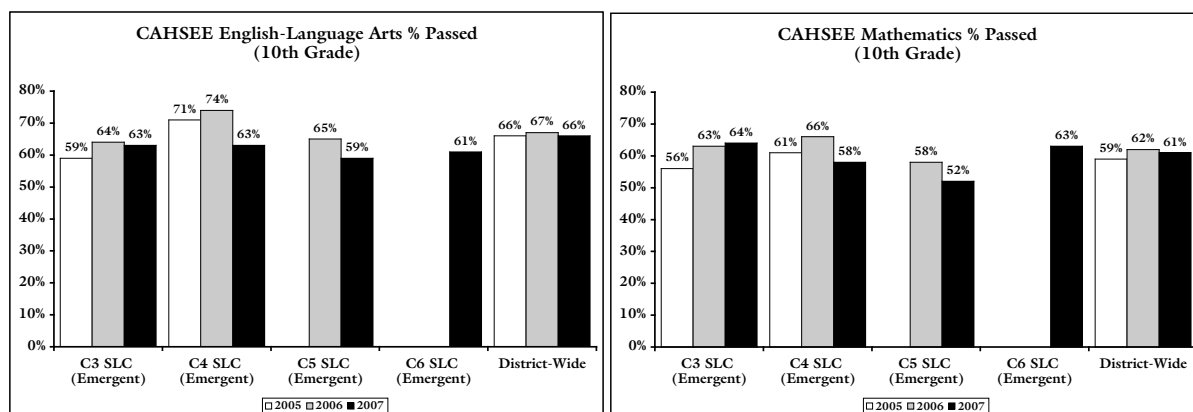
- Cohort III: Emerging SLC students were statistically less likely than the control group of non-SLC students to score Proficient or Advanced in both ELA CST (grades 9-11) and Mathematics CSTs (Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II). No statistical differences in CST scores were found between 10th grade students in 2005 (i.e., class of 2007) enrolled in emergent SLCs and their matched non-SLC students in either ELA or Mathematics.
- Cohort IV: Students enrolled in emergent SLCs were statistically less likely than the control group of non-SLC students to score Proficient or Advanced in both ELA

CST (grades 9-11) and Mathematics CSTs (Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II). No statistical differences in CST scores were found between 10th grade students in 2005 (i.e., class of 2007) enrolled in emerging SLCs and their matched non-SLC students in either ELA or Mathematics.

- Cohort V: Emerging SLC students were outperformed by the control group of non-SLC students on the ELA and Mathematics CSTs, but the difference was only statistically significant for the class of 2008 for English/Language Arts. In sum, there were almost no statistically significant differences in the achievement of SLC and Non-SLC students on the ELA or Mathematics CSTs.

California High School Exit Exam

As shown below, CAHSEE pass rates increased among students enrolled in emergent SLCs at the Cohort III schools in both English/Language Arts and Mathematics toward district averages. After two years of increases, students in newly emergent SLCs at Cohort IV schools decreased in 2007 to slightly below district averages. The CAHSEE pass rates of emergent students at Cohort V schools decreased in both English/Language Arts and Math from 2006 to 2007.



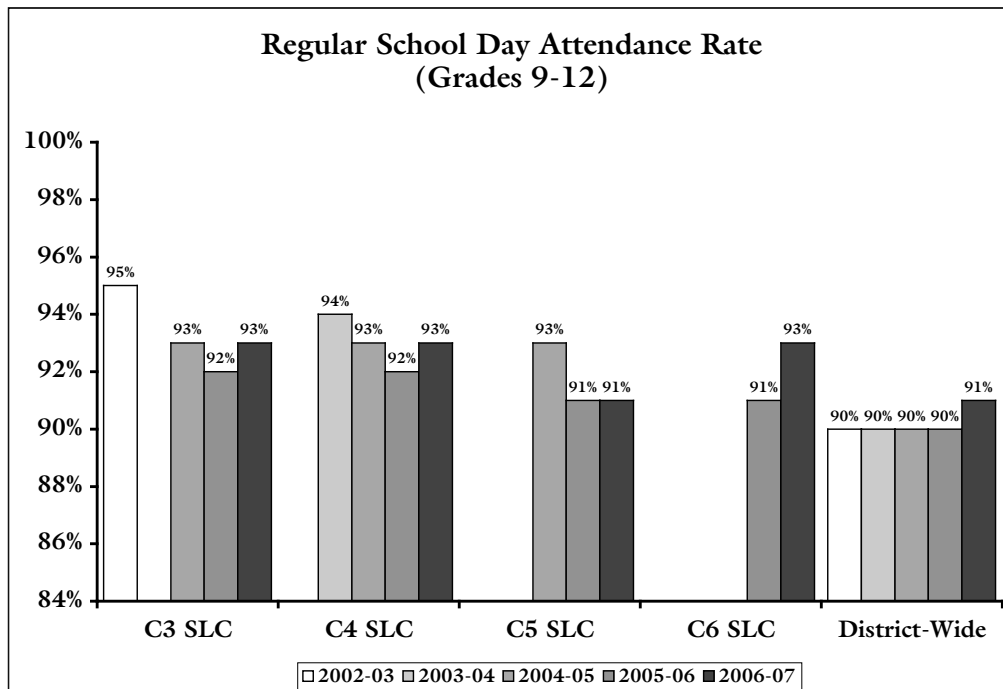
Compared to non-SLC students, students in the emergent SLCs were more likely to pass the CAHSEE in English/Language Arts as 10th graders (i.e., first time test takers). The differential in the percentage of CAHSEE pass rates varied by cohort but consistently favored emergent SLC students over their non-SLC peers except at Cohort V schools (5% more at Cohort III schools, 17% more at Cohort IV schools, 4% fewer at Cohort V schools, and 2% more at Cohort VI schools).

Data also showed that students in the emergent SLCs were more likely to pass the CAHSEE in Mathematics as 10th graders (i.e., first time test takers) compared to non-SLC students. The differential in the percentage of CAHSEE pass rates favored emergent SLC students over their non-SLC peers at all but Cohort V schools (4% more at Cohort III schools, 15% more at Cohort IV schools, 8% fewer at Cohort V schools, and 6% more at Cohort VI schools).

Comparisons on Other Achievement Indicators

The impact of SLC implementation on student achievement and school performance at the schools with three to four years of participation in the SLC grants (i.e., Cohort III and Cohort IV schools) is clearest in the following indicators:

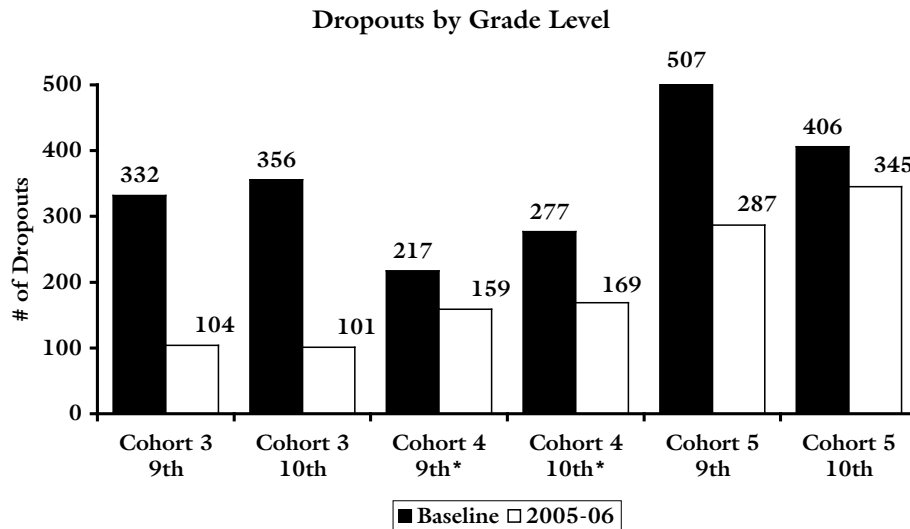
- ❖ **Attendance:** Pupil attendance rates of SLC students (pre-existing and emergent) exceeded those of non-SLC students at schools by 1%-5%.



- ❖ **Student Transience:** SLC implementation has coincided with reduced levels of student transience. Transience was defined as the inability to account for a student at their school or at any other LAUSD or other California high school after three years (2004-05 to 2006-07). SLCs at both Cohort III and Cohort IV schools have been much more successful in keeping students at their schools and in the district compared to both non-SLC and district-wide averages.

Student Transience	Class of 2009 (9 th grade cohort over three years)	Class of 2008 (10 th grade cohort over three years)
Cohort III		
SLC	8%	16%
Non-SLC	41%	39%
District	20%	26%
Cohort IV		
SLC	11%	10%
Non-SLC	35%	39%
District	24%	27%

- ❖ **Dropout Rate:** SLC implementation has coincided with reduced dropout rates at the 9th and 10th grade levels (i.e., those grade levels where schools have focused most of their SLC efforts). In 2005-06⁷, Cohort III schools (i.e. those schools with the longest tenure as SLC grantee sites) show the largest reductions in 9th and 10th grade student dropout.



*Data received from LAUSD did not include all students in Cohort 4
 Source: LAUSD Planning, Assessment and Research Branch

Implementing SLCs

As shown below, Cohort III schools, on average, ranged from early to developmental levels of SLC implementation at the end of their fourth year (2006-07). Cohort IV schools were at the early implementation stage of deepened SLC implementation. Cohort V schools continued to score within the planning rating after two years. Cohort VI schools were moving from planning to early implementation.

Cohorts rated highest in terms of implementing reforms in the areas of Unifying Vision, Equity & Access, and Personalization. Cohorts scored in the middle ranges for SLC Identity, Rigorous Standards-Based Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment, and Accountability and Distributed Leadership. Cohorts tended to achieve the lowest implementation ratings in the areas of Parent & Community Engagement and Professional Development.

In examining these ratings of SLC implementation, it is important to note that the table above represents cohort averages. School scores ranged from 1.0-5.0 depending on the attribute. In addition, for the evaluation, the school is the unit of analysis. In other words, the aggregate school rating may or may not reflect what is occurring within particular SLCs. Indeed, certain SLCs were found to more closely mirror the attributes, but their level of implementation was not necessarily reflected on the school-wide implementation scale.

⁷ Dropout data for 2006-07 was not available at the time this report was written.

Status of SLC Implementation in 2006-07 by Attribute

SLC Attribute	Rating (1-6 scale)			
	Cohort III (4 years)	Cohort IV (3 years)	Cohort V (2 years)	Cohort VI (1 year)
Unifying Vision	4.0	3.7	2.2	2.7
SLC Identity	3.4	3.1	2.0	2.4
Rigorous Standards Based Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	3.8	2.7	2.2	2.4
Professional Development	3.4	2.6	2.1	2.3
Equity & Access	3.6	3.0	2.3	2.6
Personalization	3.6	3.3	2.1	2.8
Accountability & Distributed Leadership	3.4	3.3	2.1	2.4
Parent and Community Engagement	3.0	2.3	1.7	2.0
Overall Implementation	3.5 (Early/ Developmental)	3.0 (Early)	2.1 (Planning)	2.5 (Planning/ Early)
Percentage of SLC enrollment	70%	76%	58%	61%

Source: Public Works, Inc.

Key Accomplishments Linked to SLC Implementation

Distributed Leadership

The schools in this evaluation have demonstrated success in terms of empowering teachers to establish SLCs with clear identities. SLC implementation has provided many more opportunities for teachers to assume leadership. Teachers (and to a lesser degree counselors) have played pivotal roles on SLC steering committees responsible for creating the foundation of the SLC design process and informing teachers about different SLC options. At most sites, SLC lead teachers have led the way in transforming SLCs from ideas into reality. Increasingly, these newly emergent SLCs are developing concrete identities manifest as a distinctive educational experience for the students who participate in them.

At some schools, SLC teacher teams have begun to take on a larger decision-making role with regard to master schedule and student programming, as well as the selection of new staff. At the same time, leadership of SLCs has not translated into greater autonomy for SLCs in key areas such as curriculum, assessment, or control over discretionary fiscal resources. The lack of clear SLC autonomy is a consequence of district mandates tied to instructional guides and formative assessment, which have been interpreted by many as a *de facto* limitation on the flexibility of SLCs. Put more forcefully, there continues to be a widespread perception among school staff that the district directive to move forward with

SLCs is at odds with the kind of top-down management of curriculum and instruction tied to LAUSD's interpretation of standards-based instruction and academic rigor.

Personalization

The grantee sites have been quite successful in developing strategies for adult-student interactions and enhanced personalization. Relationship building manifest as activities for “bonding” between school staff and students, as well as “branding” activities designed to connect students to their SLCs are increasingly successful in connecting students to school and providing them with access to a more personalized educational experience. Students who reported belonging to SLCs were more positive about all aspects of schooling including personalization, postsecondary preparation, quality of instruction, and school safety. These comparisons between SLC and non-SLC students were statistically significant for nearly all survey items. In sum, there is strong evidence to suggest that participation in a SLC is beneficial to students. Indeed, the evaluation found evidence that students in SLCs were more likely to feel connected to school and to view their teachers as advocates and mentors. Students in SLCs were also more likely to feel adequately prepared for postsecondary education and, significantly, SLC students were more likely to be exposed to extracurricular activities conducive to college (and to a lesser extent career) preparation.

Master Schedule Alignment to SLC

The grantee schools are making headway in terms of adapting their school master schedules to accommodate SLCs while also maintaining equity and access for all students. Some schools (particularly in Cohort III and Cohort IV) have begun to work collaboratively to devise schedules that place more priority on heterogeneous grouping based on student interests and needs. As part of this process, these schools have had to balance the needs of SLCs (i.e., common coring of students in multiple academic and elective course offerings and common planning time for teachers) with mandates related to standards-based instruction, intervention courses for students, equity and compliance issues for special populations, etc.

9th Grade Transition

Approximately one-in-five schools has implemented a 9th grade/Freshmen house structure as a key aspect of SLC restructuring. In the 9th grade house model, freshmen receive a personalized educational experience aimed at easing the transition to high school and addressing the academic intervention needs of incoming high school students. As 10th graders, these students then select from a menu of 10th-12th grade theme-based SLCs. It is important to note that school with this structure achieved higher ratings in terms of personalization, parent outreach/involvement, and focus on dropout prevention/credit recovery. At the risk of oversimplification, the success of the 9th grade/Freshmen house model may be revealing the structural weakness of middle to high school articulation throughout the district. In other words, 9th grade houses address the lack of healthy articulation by providing an interim step for students in transitioning to high school. As such, schools with 9th-12th grade SLCs could do a better job by emulating pieces of the 9th grade house model *if articulation with feeder middle schools is also pursued aggressively.*

Key SLC Implementation Issues and Challenges

The key challenge for schools implementing SLC restructuring hinges on the extent to which SLCs will become a significant unifying and organizing force *for instructional change* at each high school. Put another way, schools have been more successful in developing the infrastructure to support SLCs, but have not systematically infused SLC reforms into classroom teaching and learning. For example:

- ***SLC Identity.*** While many schools are actively engaged in “branding” activities to promote SLCs, it has taken SLCs 3-4 years to develop a recognizable, distinctive presence on campus. In general, SLC identity has focused strengthened adult-student relationships and unique activities and events, which constitute personalization, rather than an identity based on an academic or curricular emphasis that is evident in the classroom.
- ***Curriculum & Instruction.*** Most SLCs have not yet focused a significant amount of time and effort effectively integrating ongoing demands for delivery of rigorous standards-based instruction with SLC-driven personalization and curricular relevance.
- ***Professional Development.*** Although collaboration has increased, particularly within SLCs, the majority of professional development within SLC teams focused on structural issues about how SLCs function and personalization activities rather than helping teachers deliver classroom instruction linked to the thematic orientation of their SLC or common instructional practices that unite all SLC teachers on a team. School-wide (whole faculty meetings) professional development often lacked sufficient focus and/or was not sequenced sufficiently to impart a coherent blueprint for increasing rigor and improving student achievement results.

Recommendations for Schools

In order to provide concrete guidance to schools involved in SLC restructuring, Public Works, Inc. makes the following key recommendations for schools to implement in each of the eight LAUSD SLC attribute areas:

Unified Vision

- Continue to communicate school-wide vision for SLC implementation to all staff.
- Improve transparency and the inclusionary aspects of school decision-making.
- Accelerate the implementation of SLC reforms.

SLC Identity

- Continue to focus on establishing a strong academic identity for each SLC that is evident in what students are learning in the classroom.
- Define autonomy locally while district struggles to balance centralized and decentralized functions.

Rigorous, Standards-based Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

- Focus SLC efforts on changing classroom instruction; move from structure to instruction.

- Integrate SLC implementation with school efforts to improve Mathematics achievement (the content area currently least likely to be integrated in SLC teams).
- Place greater emphasis on increasing A-G enrollment and postsecondary preparation through SLCs.
- Consider employing SLCs as a vehicle for the delivery of academic intervention.

Professional Development

- Reorient school-based professional development to highlight the instructional component of SLC reforms.
- Support SLCs with set-aside time for collaboration (e.g., common planning and common conferences).

Equity and Access

- Prioritize articulation with feeder middle schools to improve SLC recruitment and placement.
- Monitor and balance SLC placement in terms of both student demographics and staffing characteristics.

Personalization

- Move beyond relationship building to personalized instruction.
- Connect the SLC initiative's emphasis on personalized instruction to a broader delivery of counseling and guidance services.

Accountability and Distributed Leadership

- Reinforce the commitment to distributed leadership through better definition of and opportunities for SLC lead teachers, counselors, and assistant principals.
- Make better use of available data, disaggregated by SLC, to drive school improvement decisions.

Parent & Community Engagement

- Commit planning time and resources to outreach to parents and incoming students.
- Leverage partnerships with local community, higher education and/or business organizations.

Recommendations to Local Districts

Our evaluation results highlight a need for greater clarity in terms of how Local District offices should provide oversight and support schools in addressing SLC implementation challenges. In this context, Public Works, Inc. makes the following key recommendations for local districts to implement:

- Continue to monitor and provide oversight of school master schedules to ensure “purity” of SLC rosters, as well as heterogeneous and equitable grouping of students.
- Set specific goals for high school schools tied to interim measures (e.g., 9th grade dropout rate, percentage of 9th graders on-target for graduation, etc.) of school performance and student outcomes.

- Assist schools in the alignment of school improvement plans; help schools integrate SLCs into Single School Plans, High Priority Action Plans, WASC, SAIT, etc.
- Minimize site administrative turnover to ensure more stable SLC implementation.
- Assist schools in designing and allocating professional development time to support school improvement priorities.
- Support schools and teachers by helping schools access and regularly use data disaggregated by SLC.
- Publicize the achievements of schools implementing SLCs in order to disseminate lessons learned to staff throughout the district.

Recommendations to LAUSD (Central District)

The evaluation findings conclusively demonstrate that many schools are confused by what they perceive as a “mixed message” regarding expectations for modifying and improving instruction thru SLCs. District direction is needed on bringing together the focus on academic rigor at the heart of standards-based instruction with SLC efforts to augment rigor with curricular relevance and personalized instruction. In addition, it is critically important for LAUSD to reiterate the central role of SLCs as an umbrella reform for high school restructuring, indeed one which brings together district directives on standards-based instruction, dropout prevention, and school-wide accountability. In lieu of a strong district policy and supportive actions for SLCs, many in the field will interpret district silence as proof that SLCs are one in a long line of well-intentioned district initiatives which were begun in earnest and then faded in predictable fashion as attention shifted to the next set of mandates for schools to implement. In this context, Public *Works*, Inc. makes the following key recommendations for LAUSD to consider:

- Recommit the district to SLCs as an umbrella restructuring effort that encompasses standards-based instructional reform and other key district initiatives.
- Define the extent of allowable SLC autonomy, particularly in regard to curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
- Provide off-norm positions as an incentive for schools once they are approved through the district’s central SLC committee.
- Ensure that schools are staffed with highly qualified teachers in all core academic areas so that teacher quality is equitable across SLCs.
- Provide leadership development on the roles and responsibilities of SLC Lead Teachers, Department Chairs and Assistant Principals in supporting and facilitating SLC restructuring.
- Monitor the longitudinal performance of students at schools implementing SLC reforms.

Evaluation of Smaller Learning Communities in LAUSD

Presentation to the
Los Angeles Board of Education
2006-07 Evaluation Findings

September 11, 2008

Michael Butler
(626) 564-9890
www.publicworksinc.org



Evaluation Context

- Public Works, Inc. hired as external evaluator for Cohort III (five schools) beginning in 2003-04
- Evaluation in 2006-07 covered 28 high schools in Cohorts III-VI
- Los Angeles Board of Education adopted Eight Attributes in 2005 for SLC Implementation which augment federal grant requirements



The Schools in Our Evaluation

28 Large, Urban Comprehensive High Schools with median of:

- 3,553 students
- 79% Hispanic/Latino
- 71% Free/Reduced Meals
- 28% English Learner
- 11% Special Education



LAUSD Grantee Schools

Cohort III (funded 2003-04)

- Banning Cleveland Monroe
- Poly Roosevelt

Cohort IV (funded 2004-05)

- Birmingham Carson Fremont
- Garfield Narbonne
- N. Hollywood San Fernando



LAUSD Grantee Schools

Cohort V (funded 2005-06)

- Canoga ParkHuntington Park
- Lincoln Los Angeles Manual Arts
- Marshall San Pedro Sylmar
- Washington Prep Grant

Cohort VI (funded 2006-07)

- Bell Chatsworth Franklin
- Locke Monroe Poly
- Roosevelt Van Nuys Westchester



SLCs are Intended To...

- Increase student engagement and connection to schools
- Improve equity and access to high academic expectations and standards
- Program ALL students toward college success (A-G as default curriculum)
- Eliminate the “forgotten half”
- Decrease 9th grade repeats (9Rs) and increase high school graduation rates
- Provide safe schools where students are attached to adults who care about and monitor student progress toward post-high school goals

LAUSD's SLC Expectations

- Submit a proposal and school impact report (Bulletin 1600) that outlines how the school will be restructured into SLCs of 300-500 students
- Move toward full implementation of eight LAUSD SLC attributes within 3-5 years
- Implement the Superintendent's priorities as referenced in *Closing the Achievement Gap: Improving Educational Outcomes for Under-Achieving Students*

The key research question

To what extent has LAUSD's SLC initiative resulted in structures and strategies that...

- Create personalization?
- Achieve equity and access?
- Help students master rigorous academic content?
- Help students transition to postsecondary education and careers?

Evaluation Methods

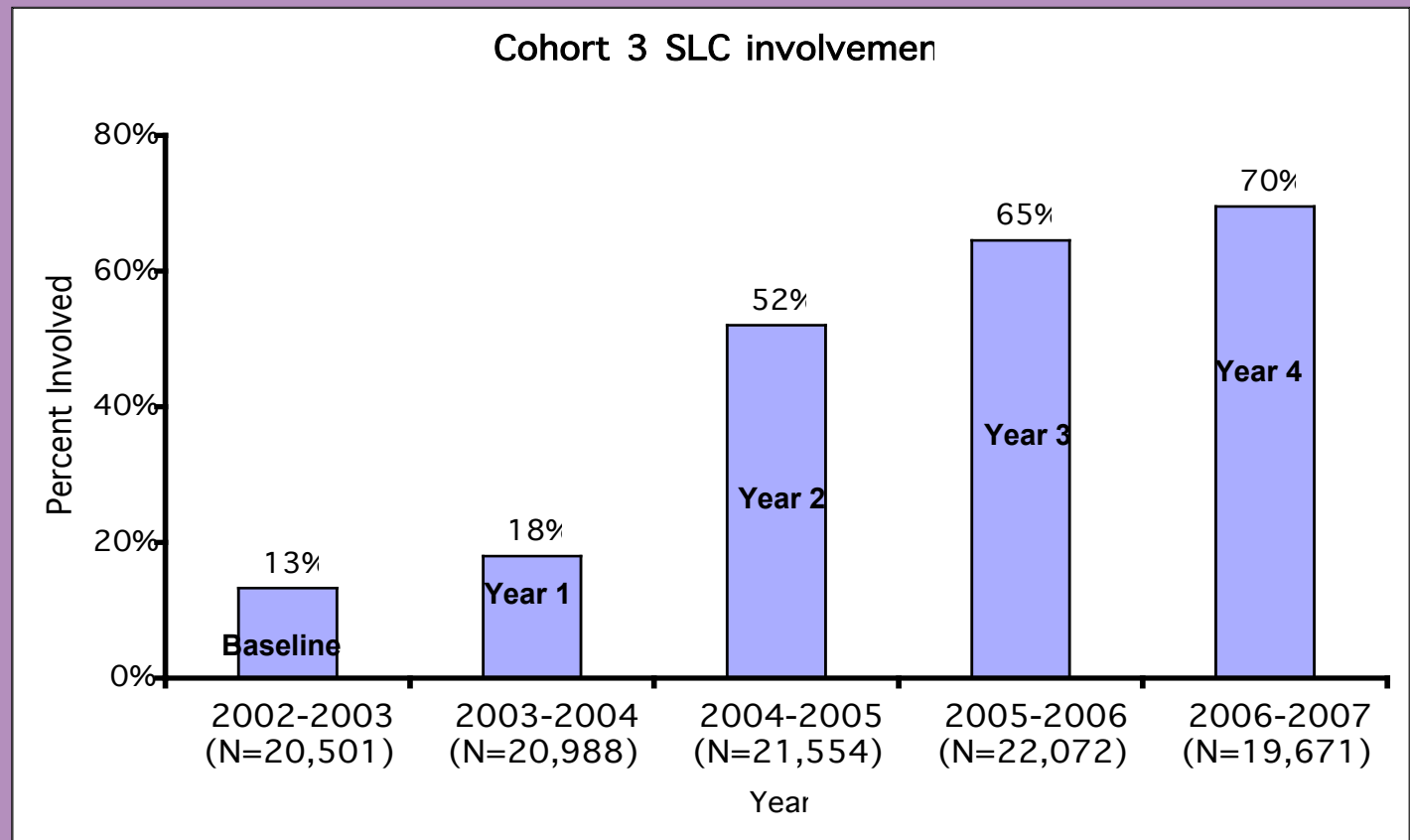
- Quantitative student outcome and school performance measures
- Surveys of all 10th and 12th grade students
- Surveys of all school staff
- Follow-up survey of 12th graders 3-4 months after graduation
- Annual site visit to evaluate SLC implementation in relation to 8 LAUSD Attributes



Key Quantitative Findings

- SLC enrollment has increased exponentially
- SLCs have become more demographically representative

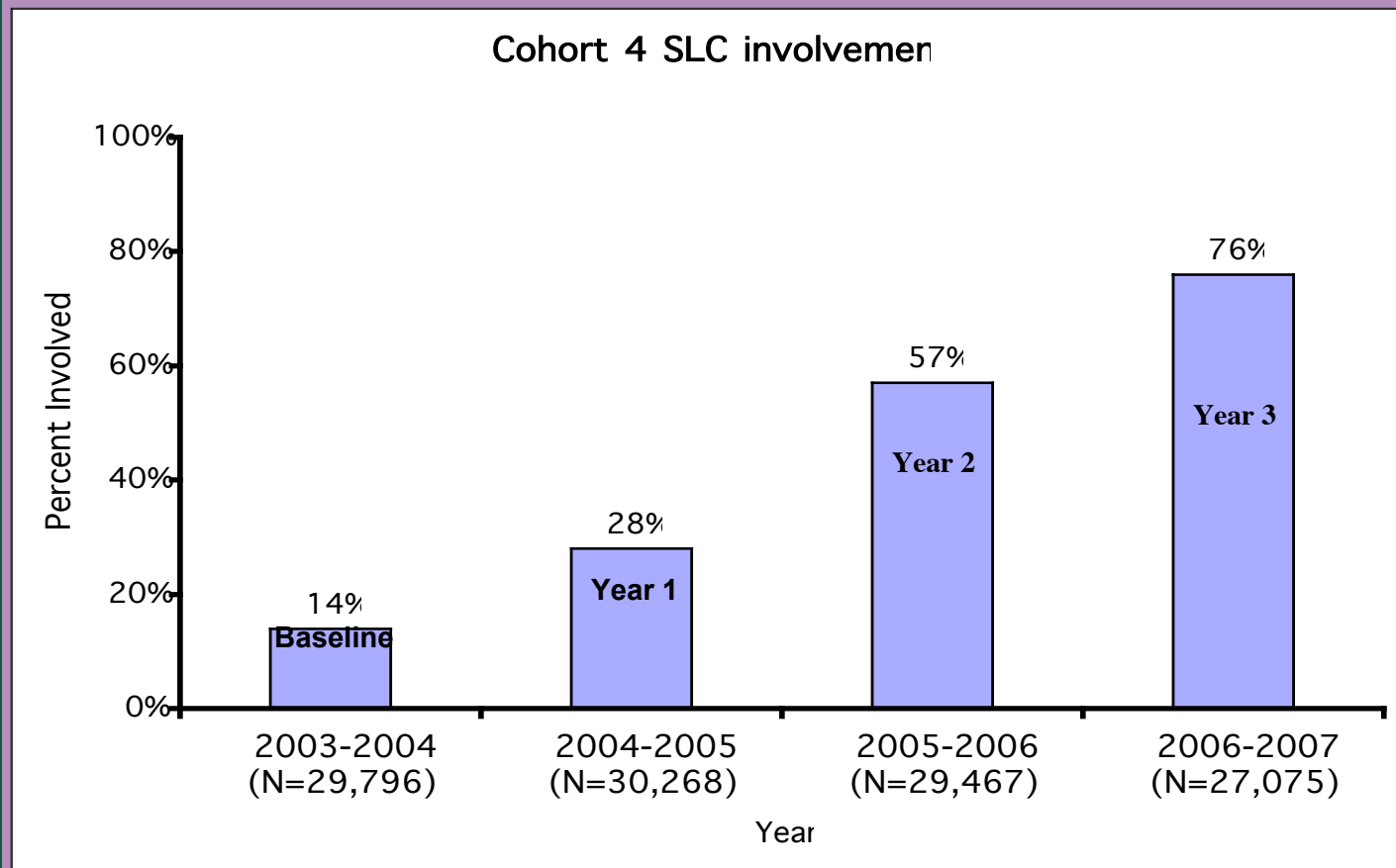
Student Involvement in SLCs: Cohort III



83% of SLC students in 9th or 10th grade



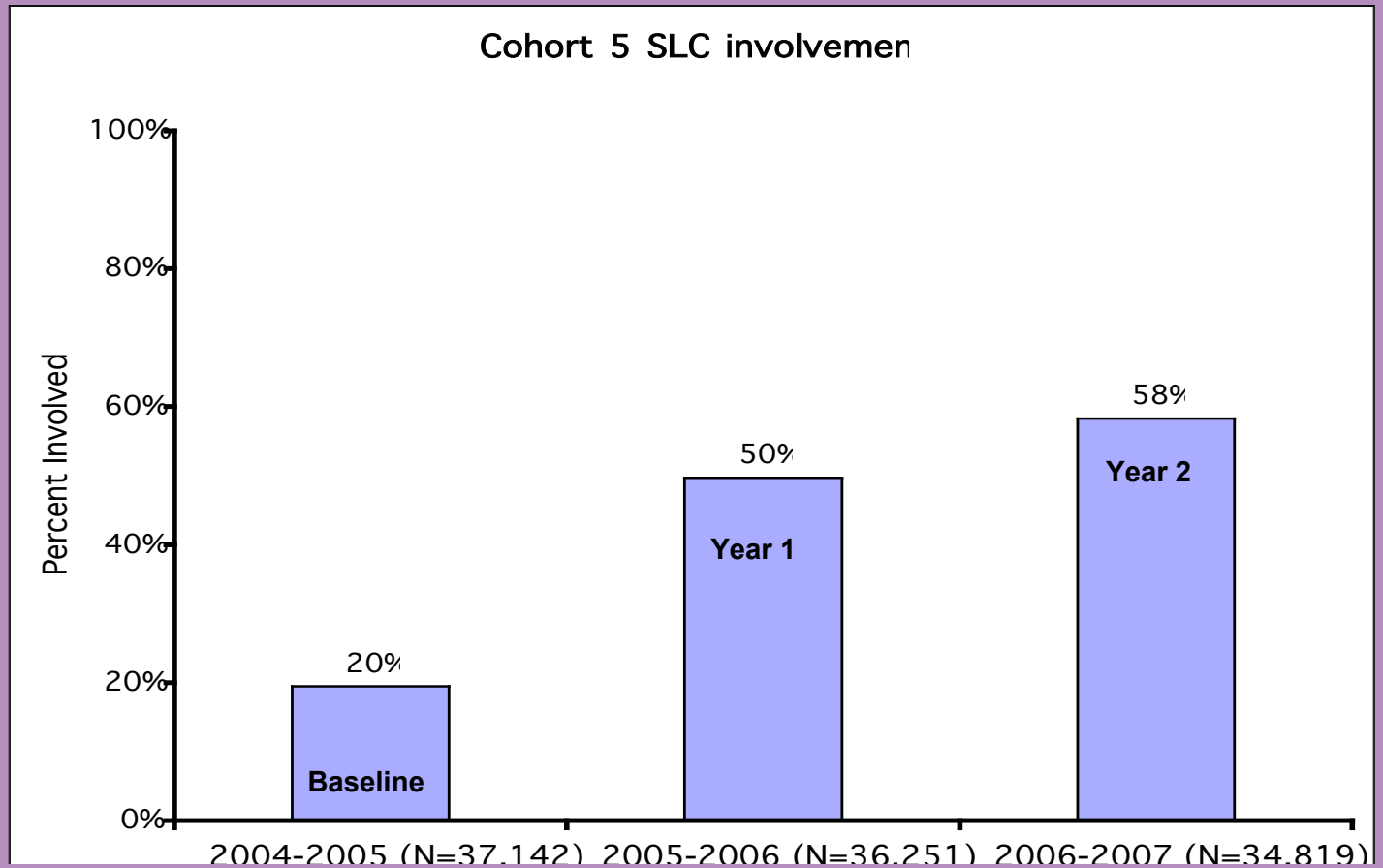
Student Involvement in SLCs: Cohort IV



63% of SLC students in 9th or 10th grade



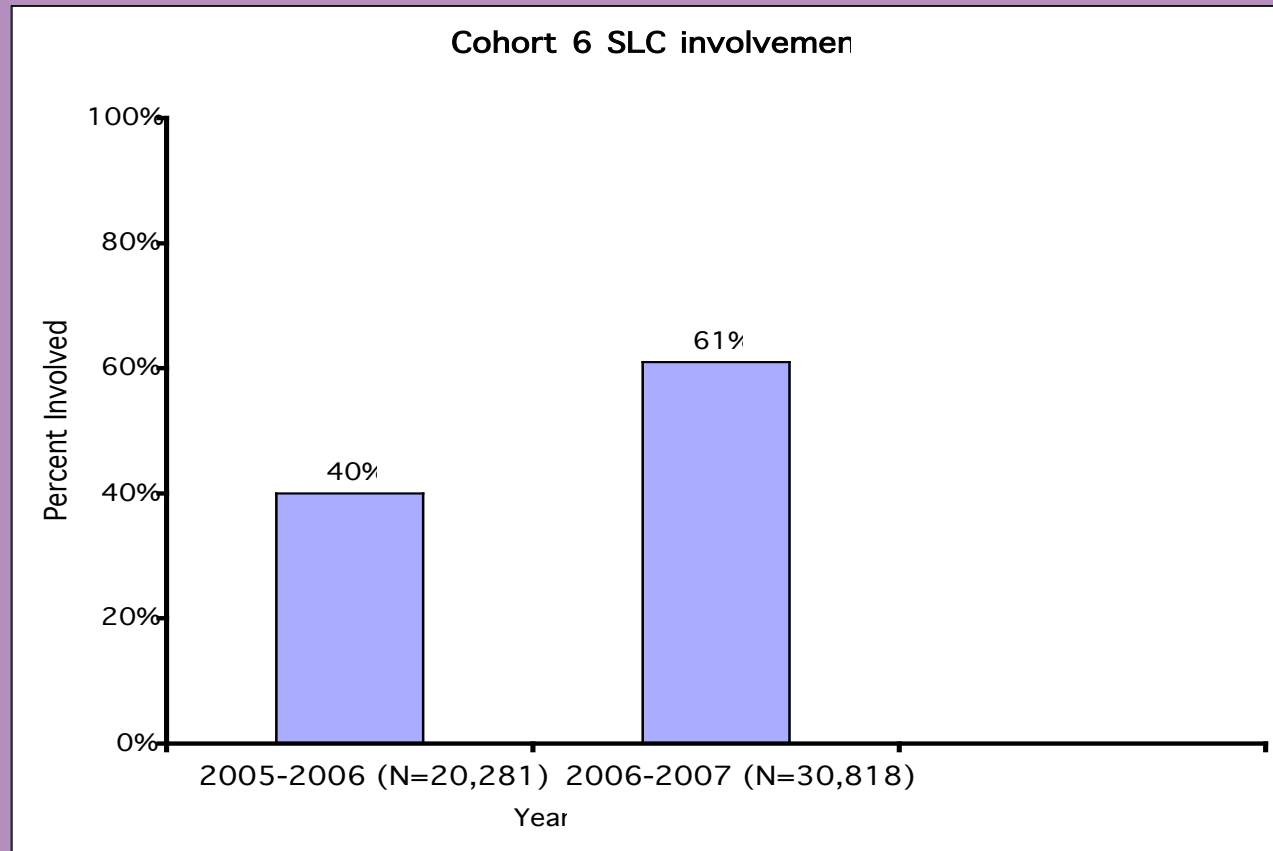
Student Involvement in SLCs: Cohort V



67% of SLC students in 9th or 10th grade



Student Involvement in SLCs: Cohort VI



61% of SLC students in 9th or 10th grade



Key Quantitative Findings

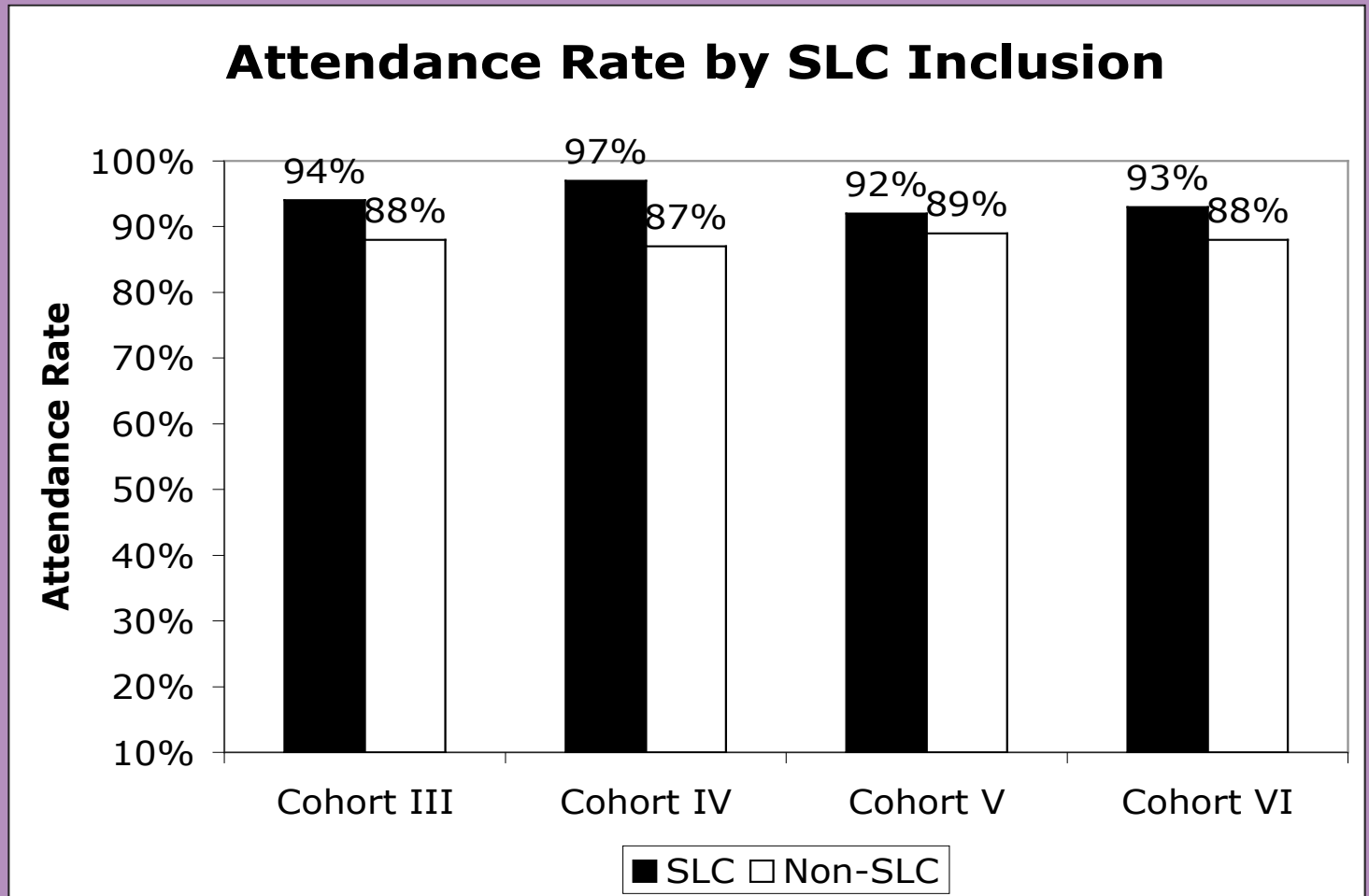
Benefits of SLC involvement clearest in terms of

- Higher average school attendance
- Fewer 9th and 10th grade dropouts
- Lower transience rate
- More likely to pass CAHSEE ELA and Math as 10th graders

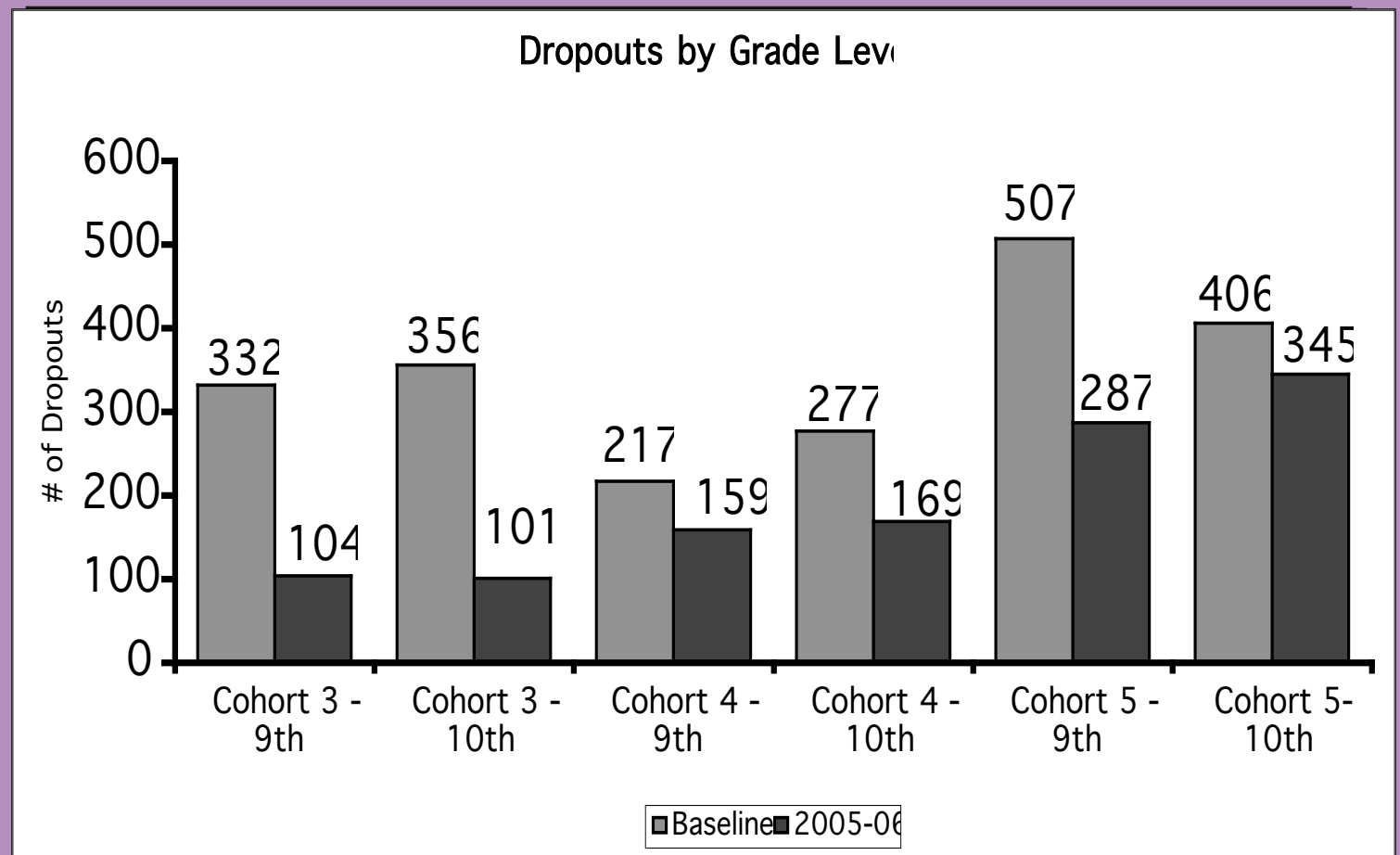
*Schools with longest tenure in grant (Cohorts 3 and 4) show most definitive outcomes

Student Outcomes

Attendance Rate by SLC Inclusion

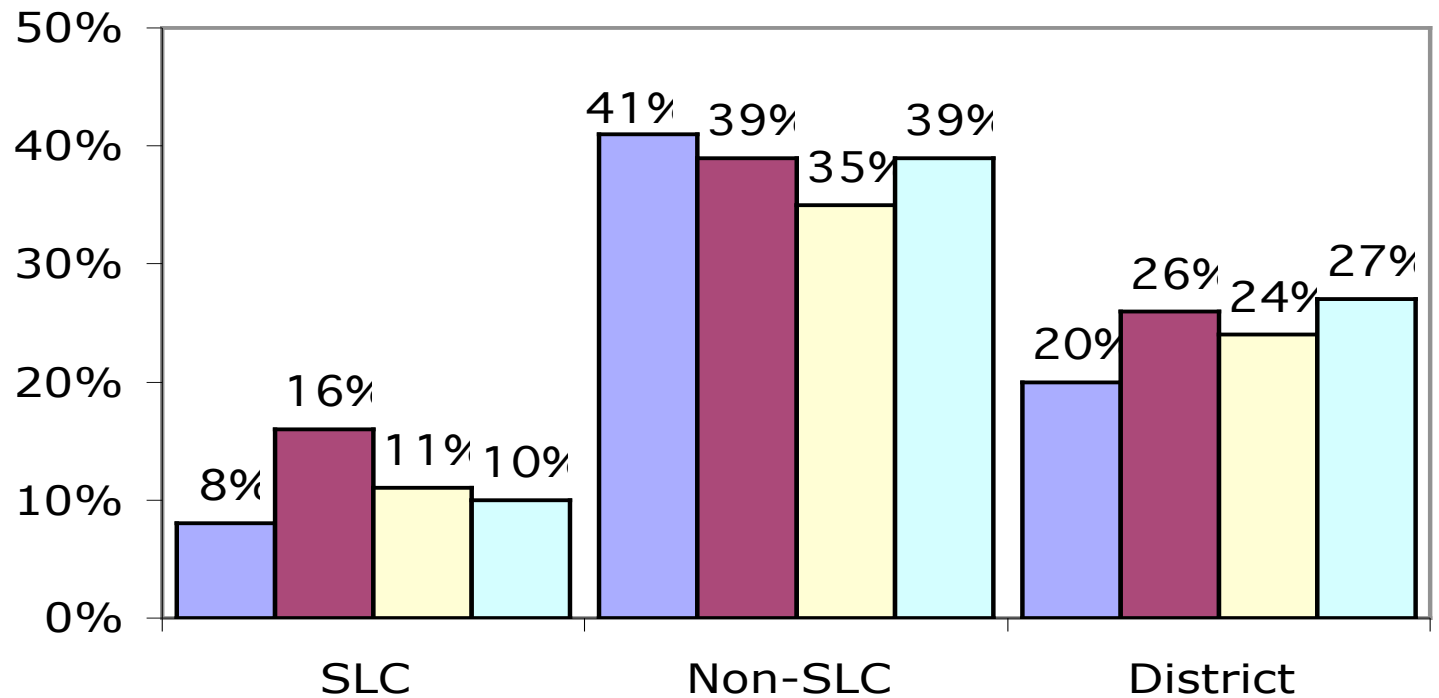


Student Outcomes



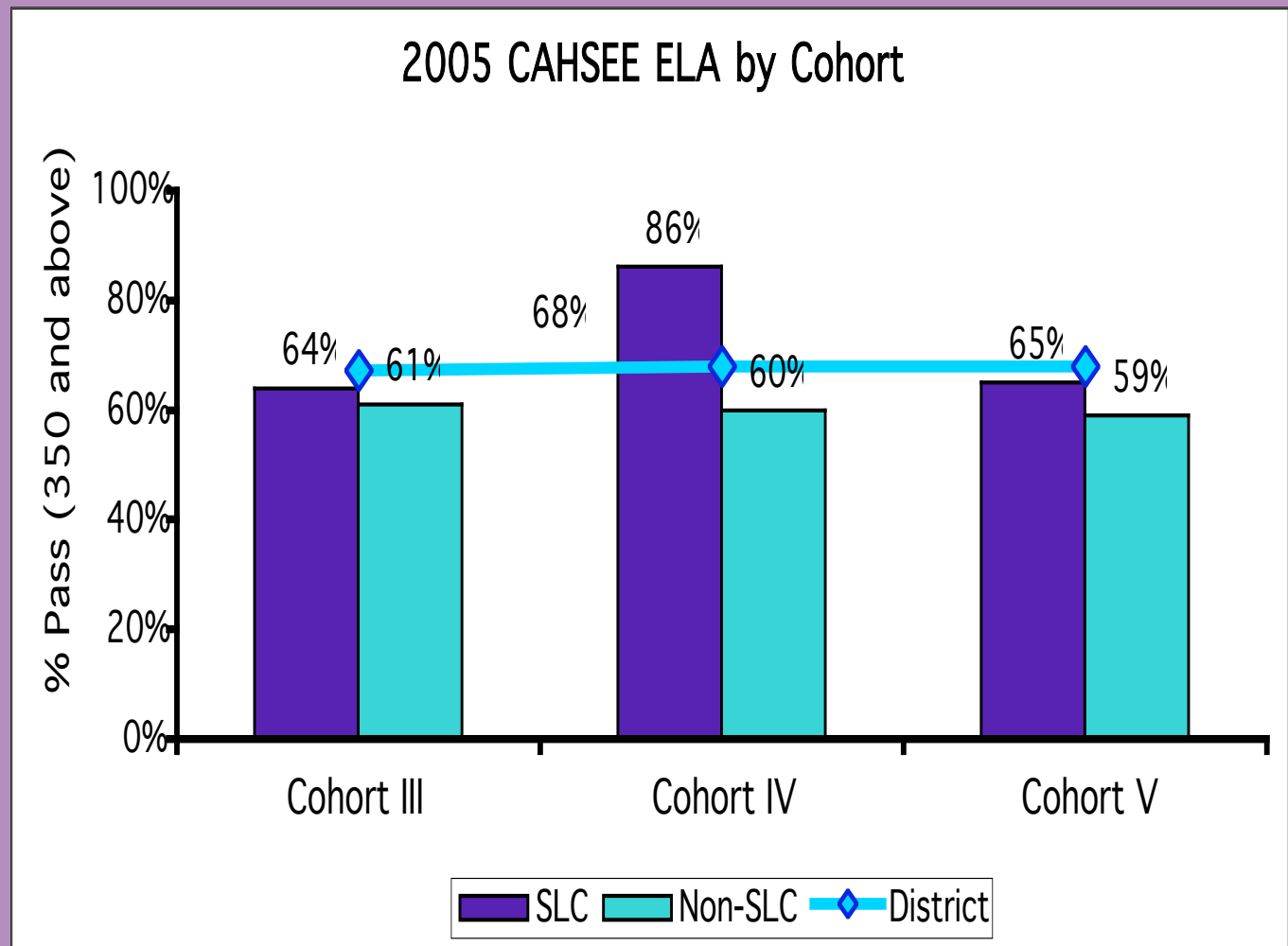
Cohort III & IV Student Transience Rate

Student Transience Rate

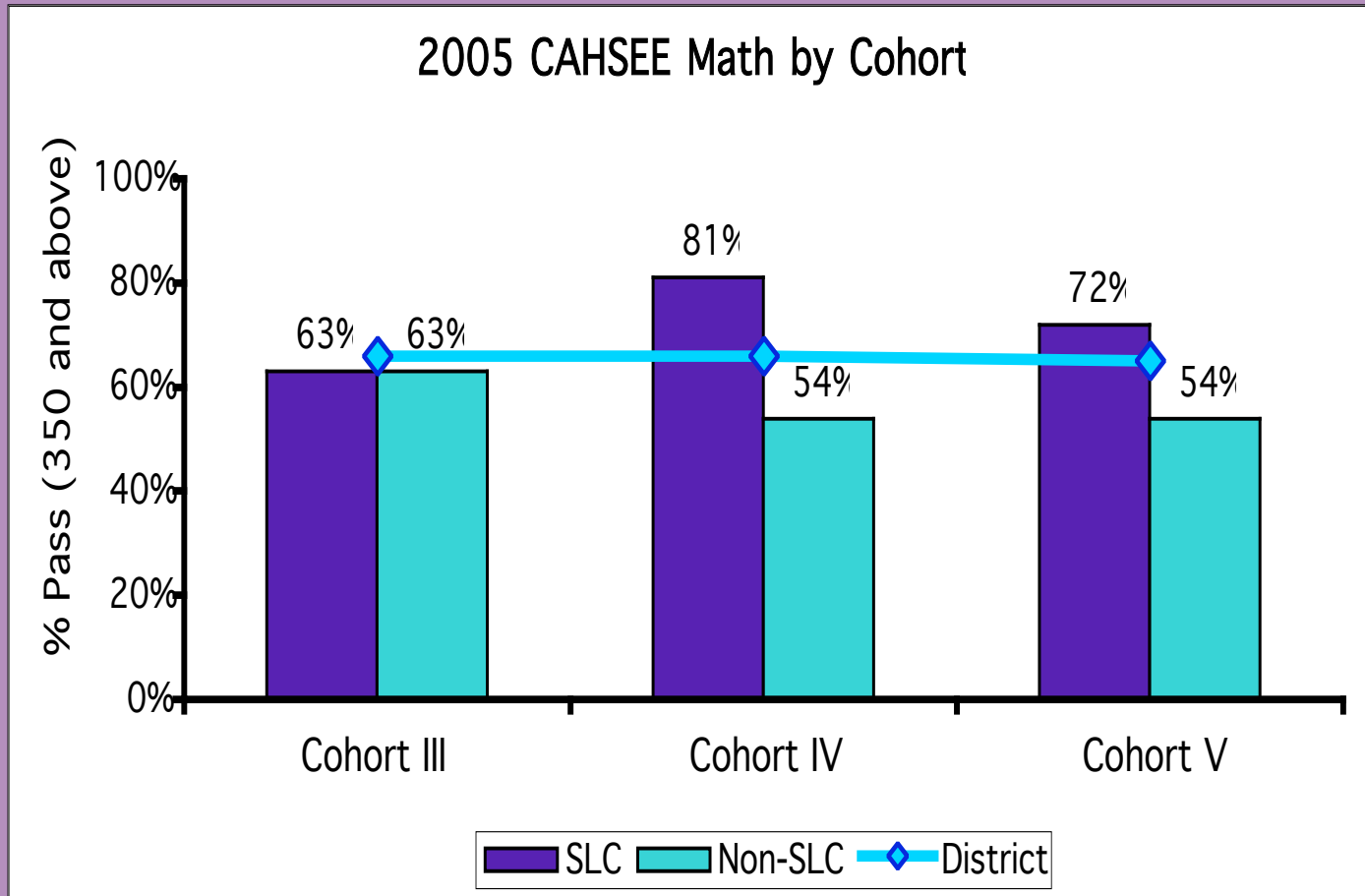


■ 9th Grade Cohort III ■ 10th Grade Cohort III
■ 9th Grade Cohort IV ■ 10th Grade Cohort IV

2006 CAHSEE ELA Pass Rate (10th Grade - First Time Test Takers)



2006 CAHSEE Math Pass Rate (10th Grade - First Time Test Takers)



Key Quantitative Findings

- SLC involvement not linked to
 - Higher CST scores (mixed impact)
 - UC/CSU eligibility
 - High School Graduation Rate
 - AP enrollment and AP exam pass rates

Note: only 5 schools have graduated a cohort of students who were exposed to SLCs for 4 years)

Student Survey - Key Findings

Classroom Experiences

SLC students more likely to agree that:

- Classes are interesting and challenging.
- Been exposed to interesting assignments and projects.
- Encouraged by teachers/admin to challenge themselves.
- Teachers communicate clear expectations.
- Teachers teach subject matter at a high level.
- Teachers are fair in grading practices.

* All survey responses statistically significant comparing SLC and Non-SLC students

Student Survey - Key Findings

Personalization

SLC students more likely to agree that:

- Have an adult on campus to go to for personal support
- Feel part of a school community
- Have been encouraged to consider postsecondary education
- Will be prepared to enter college after HS graduation
- Have prepared a written plan tied to post-HS goals and discussed this with counselor and/or teacher
- Feel safe in school

* All survey responses statistically significant comparing SLC and Non-SLC students



Staff Survey - Key Findings

Top areas cited as barriers to SLC implementation:

1. Adequacy of facilities (31%)
2. Staff resistance to change (31%)
3. Adapting Master Schedule (30%)
4. Parent/Community Involvement (29%)
5. Staff Collaboration (24%)



Rating School Progress in terms of SLC Attributes

SLC Implementation Rubric

- 1= No Evidence of Implementation
- 2= Planning for Implementation
- 3= Early Implementation
- 4= Developmental Implementation
- 5= Solid Implementation
- 6= Full Implementation



2007 SLC Implementation Ratings by Cohort

		C3	C4	C5	C6
Unifying Vision	4.0	3.7	2.2	2.7	
SLC Identity		3.4	3.1	2.0	2.4
Curric/Instruct	3.8	2.7	2.2	2.4	
Equity/Access		3.6	3.0	2.3	2.6
Personalization		3.6	3.3	2.1	2.8
Leadership/Acct	3.4	3.3	2.1	2.4	
Parent/Community		3.0	2.3	1.7	2.0
Prof Develop		3.4	2.6	2.1	2.3
OVERALL		3.5	3.0	2.1	2.5



Key Accomplishments

- ❖ More staff and students are involved/enrolled in SLCs
- ❖ SLC implementation has gone hand-in-hand with more distributed leadership
- ❖ Personalization is taking hold in schools implementing SLCs
- ❖ Master Schedule alignment to SLC has improved
- ❖ Schools with 9th grade house structures did better in terms of Personalization, Parent Outreach, and Dropout Prevention.

Key Challenges

- ❖ The academic identity of SLCs has been slow to emerge
- ❖ The drive to improve standards-based rigor has not been well integrated with SLC efforts to deliver a personalized and relevant high school education
- ❖ SLCs have not received sufficient professional development time at many schools
- ❖ Professional development by SLC teams has not been adequately focused on improving instructional practices (i.e., infusing instructional delivery with SLC themes or developing common instructional approaches within SLCs)

Recommendations to Schools

Vision and Leadership

- Continue to communicate the school-wide vision for SLC implementation to all staff
- Improve transparency and the inclusionary aspects of school decision-making\
- Accelerate the implementation of SLC reforms

Recommendations to Schools

SLC Identity

- Focus on establishing a clear academic identity for each SLC
- Define SLC autonomy locally while the district struggles to balance centralized and decentralized functions

Recommendations to Schools

Standards-based Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

- Focus SLC efforts on changing classroom instruction
- Consider employing SLCs as a vehicle for academic intervention

Recommendations to Schools

Professional Development

- Support SLCs with set aside time for collaboration
- Reorient school-based professional development to highlight the instructional component of SLC reforms



Recommendations to Schools

Equity & Access

- Prioritize articulation with feeder middle schools to improve SLC recruitment
- Monitor and balance SLC placement



Recommendations to Schools

Personalization

- Move beyond relationship-building to personalized instruction
- Connect personalized instruction to guidance and counseling services

Recommendations to Schools

Accountability & Distributed Leadership

- Reinforce the commitment to distributed leadership
- Make better use of data, disaggregated by SLC, to drive school improvement



Recommendations to Schools

Parent & Community Engagement

- Commit planning time and resources to parent outreach
- Leverage partnerships with local community, higher education, and business organizations

Recommendations to Local Districts

- Continue to monitor and provide oversight of school master schedules
- Assist schools in the alignment of school improvement plans (WASC, PI, HPSG, SAIT, SLC, etc.)
- Minimize site administrative turnover
- Assist schools in designing professional development
- Support schools in use of data, disaggregated by SLC

Recommendations for LAUSD

Recommit to SLCs as an “umbrella” restructuring effort that encompasses standards-based instructional reforms

- Provide guidance on how to integrate SLC Identity with accountability and curricular mandates (i.e., pacing guides and formative assessments).
- Translate district instructional mandates for SLCs (importance of all three R's - rigor, relevance, relationships)

Recommendations for LAUSD

- Define the extent of allowable school autonomy in instruction(especially SLC and Departmental autonomy); Consider phase in of “earned autonomy”
- Provide off-norm position incentive for schools once SLC Plan is approved
- Ensure that SLCs are staffed with highly qualified teachers in all core academic areas and assigned to a specific SLC
- Provide leadership training for SLC leads, Department Chairs, and Assistant Principals