



Evaluation of the California Subject Matter Project

California Reading and Literature Project
Case Study

Nancy Kamprath Bier and Liberty Greene
SRI International
August 31, 2009

The California Reading and Literature Project and National School District

Approximately 20 years ago a partnership began between the California Reading and Literature Project (CRLP) and National School District (National). What became a

Exhibit 1 The California Reading and Literature Project

The California Reading and Literature Project (CRLP) is one of nine California Subject Matter Projects. Governed by the University of California's Office of the President, the mission of the CRLP is twofold; to improve student achievement and to develop teacher leadership. The CRLP provides high-quality, standards-based professional development and productive leadership training that deepens the content knowledge of teachers, improves their pedagogical skills in reading and language instruction, and develops teacher leadership.

district wide partnership started with two teachers from a small district in San Diego participating in a CRLP summer institute. Fostered by bottom-up teacher initiative and top-down administrative support, the partnership established supports to train and assist teachers and schools throughout the district in improving student performance. What is notable is that during the time of the partnership, this improvement has occurred not only in reading, the focus of the professional

development, but also in other academic areas. In addition, the work of the partnership advanced and deepened CRLP's work both locally and across the state. The partnership provided many teachers opportunities for leadership roles in CRLP and offered CRLP opportunities to refine the content of its institutes and to change the way it worked, moving from interacting primarily with individual teachers to partnerships with entire districts. We share here the story of how this partnership evolved, some of the impacts it had on the teachers and administrators involved and the students they served, and a few of the challenges they continue to address now, more than 20 years later, in a very different context from the one in which the partnership began.

National and CRLP Create a Foundation for Partnership (1989–1995)

The partnership between CLRP (Exhibit 1) and National School District (Exhibit 2) formed somewhat organically both through grassroots involvement of teachers in CRLP institutes and through strong support top down from the superintendent and district office. As increasing numbers of teachers submitted requests to participate in CRLP professional development, the administration provided the necessary approval and funding. As National teachers began evolving into leadership roles at CRLP, and with

Exhibit 2 National School District

Located just south of San Diego, National School District serves more than 6,000 elementary school students in 10 neighborhood schools. With students from diverse, multi-cultural backgrounds, more than 80% qualify for free and reduced-price lunch and 64% are English learners. The districts' goal is to create successful learners by providing a safe, nurturing environment and a foundation in reading, writing, and problem solving through a focus on individual student achievement and an active partnership with parents and the community. The belief that student success is everyone's responsibility has taken the district a long way toward helping every student achieve.

strong support from district leadership for this work, a foundation for partnering was established with the goal of creating a capacity-based paradigm in which teachers could build their professional capacity to identify and meet the needs of their diverse student population.

Teacher initiative grows support for CRLP programs (bottom up)

Since San Diego became a CRLP site National teachers have been deeply involved in its programs. Initially, two teachers from National began participating in various CRLP professional development activities and began to take on leadership roles both in National and with the CRLP organization. One of these teachers, Clarissa Rojas, was designated a teacher-on-special assignment by the district and became the half-time regional director of CRLP at San Diego State. She then began to recruit a number of National teachers to participate in the first RESULTS institute (Exhibit 3). This early version of RESULTS included the three basic components that became the ultimate foundational pillars of not only the RESULTS program, but also a number of other professional development institutes that CRLP provided for the National teachers: assessment aligned with state framework for reading, research-based instructional practices, and structures and protocols for team building and data analysis. Her vision, at the time, was to have these initial teachers bring back their learning and new ways of doing things in order to create, as she described it, ‘ripples’ throughout the schools to which they returned. In these intensive programs, many National teachers found the professional development they needed to support their students and they in turn championed the programs at their home schools. This growing endorsement eventually led to the participation of a cohort of teachers from a couple of schools to participate as a group in a CRLP RESULTS institute.

Exhibit 3 RESULTS

RESULTS is a research-based, teacher-designed professional development program based on the idea that having knowledgeable classroom teachers diagnose the reading skills of their students and use the assessment data to inform their instructional strategies are essential to the successful teaching of reading. Over the years RESULTS has evolved to include a theoretical framework of literacy acquisition and literacy instruction, assessments and instructional strategies, data analyses, and training for effective teamwork. In RESULTS Institutes, CRLP teacher-leaders demonstrate how to (1) set goals based on the California Language Arts Content Standards, (2) assess students' reading skills against grade-level standards, (3) work in school-site teams to look at assessment data (4) use the most effective research-based instructional strategies in their daily instruction. Initially RESULTS was conceived as a 4-week (120-hour) summer institute with 2 to 3 years of monthly follow-up. Today training in RESULTS is delivered in a 5-day, 40-hour institute.

District-wide priorities for changes to instruction (top down)

Strong, consistent leadership at National also helped to foster the long-term partnership with the CRLP. When Dr. Cameron took over as superintendent of National in 1991 he worked strategically to make structural and cultural changes to “raise the understanding of literacy among all staff.” Dr. Cameron describes “earnestly collecting and analyzing data” to address the challenges National’s students were having in reading and literacy. What he described were relatively “eclectic approaches” across the district’s schools. In many cases reading specialists (i.e., credentialed teachers assigned to conduct pull-out

reading instruction) assumed the responsibility for those students struggling the most.¹ In a district with a relatively large number of struggling readers he recognized this model simply did not work.

Dr. Cameron believed the district needed strong central leadership focused on a shared vision of improved literacy. He built buy-in for the vision among school principals and reassigned and brought in new principals as needed to ensure a leadership team with a strong commitment to literacy. At National, principals were expected to serve as the instructional leaders in addition to the more managerial roles that define the position for some. Perhaps because he had already been in the district for many years as an educator, Dr. Cameron was able to identify areas for improvement, replace key staff members, and work quickly to implement the changes he wanted to take place.

Before the partnership with CRLP, opportunities for professional development in National, although valued, were at best quasi-systematic in that professional development was centralized (offered at the district office) and revolved around professional development themes aligned with the then-current prevalent educational trends (e.g., cooperative learning, 6-step lesson planning, etc.). It did not, however, include assessments or data analysis aligned with the new frameworks and standards, nor did it specifically address the research-based practices that were being identified by the field. Prior to the partnership, regular meetings between district leadership, the principals, and reading teachers from the National schools occurred. However, the data brought to these meetings were described as “soup to nuts,” without common metrics, rubrics, or assessments, which led to challenges in looking across the district.

At about the same time as administrators began looking to make changes in teacher professional development, the teachers involved in RESULTS at one school in the district began to attract attention. Dr. Cameron remembers seeing really different and exciting things happening here including what were really “coordinated approaches to guiding reading focused on teaching a specific comprehension skill and reading strategy.” Teachers participating in RESULTS also had a common language and attacked reading with more of a team approach; reading teachers were involved more integrally in what was going on in the classrooms and with all students, rather than pulling a small number of students out of the classroom for specialized work (as is typically done in other reading programs). What Dr. Cameron saw with RESULTS was a way to reach a significantly higher number of students in each classroom through a coordinated comprehensive approach to planning and delivering literacy instruction. Dr. Cameron decided to expand the district’s participation in RESULTS because he saw it as a powerful vehicle for achieving his vision in which growing readers (bringing up and supporting struggling readers) is the responsibility of all staff (not simply reading specialists).

¹ One program that a number of schools in National were implementing was Reading Recovery. Dr. Cameron acknowledged that Reading Recovery was highly effective for the students it served, who got daily one-on-one instruction from a specially trained certified teacher. However, because it is resource intensive, this model could only reach a small number of students a year (frequently 8 per reading specialist). Due to National’s demographics, the district had approximately 200 students who needed extensive additional support.

Continuing the Work—Scaling Up to a District-wide Partnership (1995–2002)

From approximately 1995–2002, CRLP staff and National teachers—some of whom had a role in both organizations—were using the RESULTS training to help teachers develop the skills to intentionally use assessment data to improve instruction. After making the partnership official in 1997, each of the organizations worked to nurture and expand the RESULTS training as well as the overall approach – collaborating in teams to collect and use individual student data to guide instruction – throughout the district.

At the same time, the introduction of new state standards and frameworks for reading were pushing teachers in a new direction, one they did not necessarily feel prepared for. The California Content Standards and the associated frameworks, introduced in 1997, brought about a significant reconceptualization of what students—particularly K–1 students—should be expected to do in reading. For example, for many teachers at the time, a traditional kindergarten curriculum was more thematic (e.g., “the plants and seeds unit”) and there was not an expectation students would be reading at this age. The CRLP provided the theoretical background and techniques and strategies to support the necessary shift in instruction to meet the new expectations of the California Content Standards. The need to help teachers learn to teach to these new standards was also at the forefront of the work of the partnership as it collaborated to establish this new way of doing things throughout the district.

With the on-going work of Ms. Rojas and other CRLP teacher-leaders from National, the CRLP had established itself as a resource for teachers. The CRLP was highly regarded throughout the district by a wide range of stakeholders—bilingual teachers, union leadership, and district administrators—and was responsive to the needs of the individual teachers and district. In addition, there was substantial financial support from the state for teacher professional development. For example, the Governor’s Reading Professional Development Institutes began in the summer of 1999 and provided significant funding for schools and districts to participate in training that was consistent with state-adopted content standards. Through this as well as other funding opportunities in the next few years, the CRLP was able to expand its offerings both at National and across the state for participation in the summer invitational institute as well as the ongoing professional development throughout the year.

The increased state focus on professional development, along with the associated funding opportunities, converged with the establishment of the content standards to create a need, a need that the partnership was perhaps uniquely situated to address. Dr. Cameron worked with CRLP to figure out the best way to expand the RESULTS model throughout the district. He did this by: sponsoring teachers to attend the summer institutes, providing district professional development days for those teachers unable (or unwilling) to attend sessions in the summer, requiring all administrators to participate with their staffs, and creating a data collection system that was more efficient and could handle the increasingly complex data that teachers were collecting.

Teacher buy-in

CRLP and National felt that one of the best ways to spread RESULTS throughout the district was to let the training prove itself. They therefore had as many teachers as would

participate go through RESULTS. And over a period of approximately 5 years, the district trained nearly 100% of teachers, a proportion high enough to substantially alter the instruction all students received.

CRLP's professional development program provided teachers with tools to collect individual student data, systems to use the data, and a common language to work collaboratively to raise student learning and achievement in National School District. The idea was that the program would prove itself to the participants through the data they were themselves collecting. The strategy worked. Teachers could see that tailoring their instruction on the basis of what they learned from their assessments enabled them to teach more effectively than they had been able to previously. Teachers also described the professional development that they participated in through the CRLP as giving them tools that were immediately useful in the classroom. As one teacher described the CRLP training,

It was very useful in what to do in the classroom with the students. If we went to PD on a Saturday I was able to implement things on Monday. This was in comparison to other PD that gave us a lot, but not necessarily things that were pertinent in the classroom.”

Creating data systems

Another way the partnership sought to expand its efforts throughout the district was through the development of a new data system. The early data collection tools and data collection system used in RESULTS were relatively unsophisticated. Teachers collected their own data and submitted hundreds of discs to the CRLP central office, where the data were manually collapsed into one database. Given the growing complexity of the data that was being collected, the district explored a number of private companies to help it more efficiently systematize the collection and reporting of the data. The data system created was customized to provide the teachers with user-friendly reporting and methods for getting out of the data all they need to support their students. Teachers began to rely on the system and became skilled at accessing their class information. This investment freed teachers from having to create their own systems so that they could focus instead on targeting their instruction and meeting the needs of their students.

Collaboration as a way of changing the conversations about students

Teachers pointed to the data component of the RESULTS training and the associated data culture of the district as being critical in changing the way they met and talked about students. Team meetings at every level evolved to look at the data to group students and plan for instruction based on the assessment data. The RESULTS model, in conjunction with the new data system, provided a common language. Now everyone could talk about the kids with the same language and use the same data. As a result, a culture of looking at data to plan student instruction began permeating the district. Grade levels that were able to take off with this process did so, and those who needed continued support in working with the data received it. Most people saw the value in the team meetings and being able to share instructional practices. As teachers described it, the team collaboration that was part of the RESULTS model provided a structure that could be used and built-upon and helped make meetings purposeful and goal driven. As collaborating to use data to help

teachers better support individual students became a way of life at National, the conversations shifted from a deficit-based paradigm of instruction – looking at what students cannot do – to a capacity-based paradigm of instruction – identifying areas where increased support would help improve student performance.

Staying the Course—Maintaining a Focus on the Principles of the Partnership (2002–2005)

What had started with a few teachers had become a way of life in the district. However, beginning around 2000, the state of California began to intensify its focus on getting teachers to use approved instructional materials. Although CRLP and National supported the adoption and use of the materials, both members of the partnership felt that the accompanying professional development needed to be broader in scope and support than what was being proposed and funded. For example, rather than learning about assessment and instruction only in their grade level, CRLP believed teachers needed to know about the wide range of reading skills, assessments, and practices across the board, recognizing that many students came into the classrooms with a wide range of skills and abilities. Another important difference in the emerging instructional materials was the requirement that teachers faithfully follow the grouping recommendations of the reading materials. CRLP felt that the teachers needed to guide their grouping decisions by analysis of assessment data to identify student need.

In 2002, Dr. Cameron chose to forgo the attached professional development funding associated with the new curriculum and instead had his district stay the course with the CRLP program of professional development. He acknowledged that the district could have used the additional funding, but made a strategic and thoughtful decision that the partnerships main concern was providing access to material for all learners. According to Dr. Cameron, the partnerships' concern with the professional development associated with some of the new curriculum was that teachers and the district would lose sight of their objective of assessing and meeting individual student needs in changing to a focus on pacing and a more “one size fits all” model of delivery.

Although RESULTS was the cornerstone of the partnership between National and the CRLP, it was not the only professional development provided by the partnership. After all teachers had participated in RESULTS, the district then began a new cycle of professional development built on the CRLP program model. One of the major concerns for both CRLP and National was the ability of teachers to meet the universal access needs of English learners. To address this, CRLP developed a supplementary professional development program called A Focused Approach to Frontloading Language (FAFL) for each of the two reading adoptions required by the state. This program included the essential components of RESULTS, but it concentrated on the language instruction necessary for students to successfully participate in the reading comprehension lessons of the materials. A third round of professional development was created for English Language Development instruction. National again had all of its teachers participate in a CRLP institute called A Focused Approach to Systematic ELD. In each of these efforts, CRLP worked with National to identify the district's need and created professional development that embedded the core components of the RESULTS model, thus continuing, despite outside pressure, to foster the original work of the partnership.

Partnership Outcomes and Next Steps (2005–present)

Seven years into the partnership, the teachers and staff at National reported that their decision to stay with the CRLP model of professional development had enabled them to make tremendous progress toward meeting key goals. The partnership had provided a series of professional development institutes over the years, each of which embedded the original components of RESULTS – assessments aligned with standards, research-based instructional practices, and team building and data analysis. The institutionalization of the use of data to inform instruction and the development of a culture of teamwork and collaboration had created a culture of high-expectations and shared accountability, increased teacher content knowledge and instructional strategies, and improved leadership development among teachers, all of which led to the broader goal of increasing student achievement.

Culture of high-expectations and shared accountability

Both National and CRLP staff members credit the professional development of the partnership as being critical in helping to develop a culture of high expectations and shared accountability throughout the district. The RESULTS model “forces teachers to look at their teaching and outcomes – and doesn’t allow deficit explanations,” explained a CRLP co-director. She continued, “in general there is an attitude that we expect everyone to learn and this is seen at National more than in surrounding districts.” With the RESULTS model, teachers saw benchmarks go up as they taught what their students needed and they learned to keep setting higher and higher standards. Dr. Cameron was also instrumental in setting this tone in the district and continually engaging everyone in the district in this effort, which led to higher expectations and a greater capacity based view of all students, particularly English learners.

It is also the case that the RESULTS model also became the backbone for district-wide accountability through the use of common assessments. These were, and continue to be, administered at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. The data then provide the focus for grade-level meetings, as well as meetings at the school and district level. According to one teacher, “We bring our data, bring printouts, look at what’s working and not and share what you’ll do with your class to address.” A shared sense of responsibility also developed at all levels. As another teacher explained, “We don’t talk about kids as ‘my kids or your kids or x’s kids’ we talk about the third graders and it is as a third grade team that we identify 50-60 students that we need to work with.” Teachers used their results to improve instruction in their own classrooms while the district looked at results to identify areas in need of support or additional professional development at the district level. This greater sense of shared accountability and responsibility among administrators and teachers was a key outcome of the partnership efforts over the years.

Increased teacher content knowledge and instructional strategies

The RESULTS program led to changes in teacher practice in three areas: providing assessment to identify areas of student need and strategies for addressing them, using data effectively to drive instruction, and devising techniques and structures for working collaboratively to improve student learning. Before RESULTS, a number of teachers remembered simply not having much insight into where students were, much less how to

move them forward. The assessments provided the diagnostic piece that enabled teachers to group students and then target instruction to bring up their skill levels. They no longer just grouped students into high, medium, and low skills, but figured out the specific areas where students needed help, and provided that help in a targeted way. As one teacher explained her own transition in response to their work with the CRLP, “I became more specific and intentional in my teaching. My lessons were more direct instruction based and I was able to be more systematic in my learning. RESULTS kind of helps you figure out where to start since it can be so overwhelming to teach a kid to learn!” And teachers believed in RESULTS because through the data they could see for themselves that their students were progressing far beyond their previous expectations. Teachers reported a sense of empowerment and greater self-efficacy because they knew what they could and needed to do for all of their students to become readers.

Leadership development among teachers

Another part of the CRLP model is to develop leaders to carry out the work. The knowledge and experience with RESULTS ran deep at National schools. One teacher recalled that a number of the teachers in her school were CRLP trainers and that many others had been through multiple trainings. As a result, if teachers had questions they knew someone they could go to for answers. The increase in teacher knowledge in terms of both content and diagnosing student needs was a result not just of having professional development providers come in for training, but also having so many teachers deeply involved in CRLP.

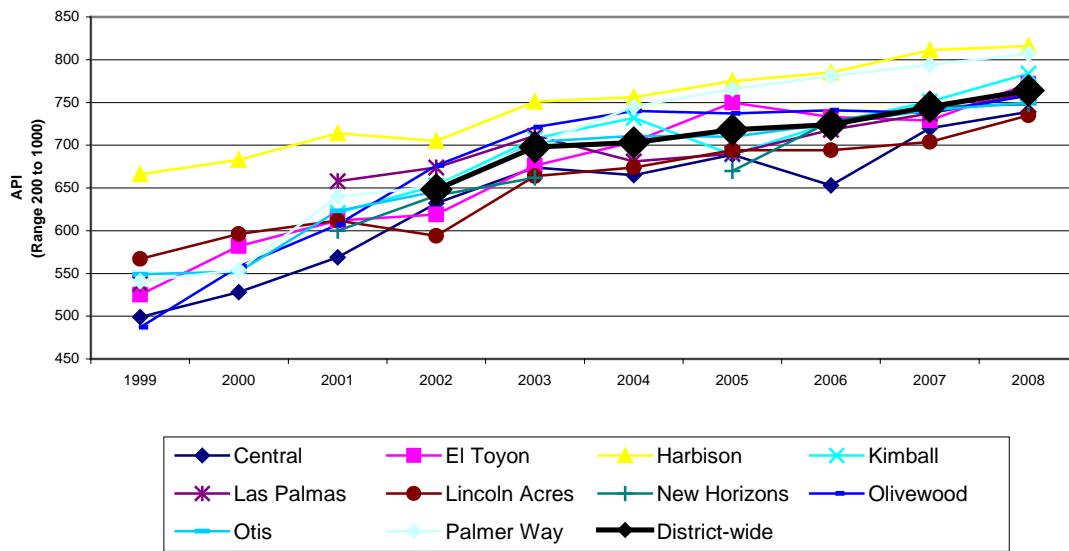
Many of the National teachers involved in the partnership took on leadership roles both within and outside the district. Many teachers became reading specialists, coaches, and CRLP presenters. The teachers at National were no longer working to improve reading just at their school or in their district, but also outside their district in the larger education community. The co-director of the CRLP recalled that most National teachers wanted to continue learning and this was the perfect catalyst for that work. In addition, because of their experience with RESULTS, National teachers became instrumental in the invitational summer institutes across the state. According to CRLP staff members, part of the strength of the partnership, besides providing RESULTS and other training, was having an infrastructure in place with opportunities for teachers to be involved in professional work outside of their school and district.

Increased student achievement

According to both National and CRLP staff, high expectations, increased teacher knowledge, and opportunities for teacher leadership were each a product of the decade-long participation in and engagement with the RESULTS model. They were also a catalyst for consistent growth in student achievement. Although student performance did not improve in radical leaps, the steady, gradual, incremental progress indicated that sustained effort can lead a district toward increasing student achievement. A number of sources of data indicate that student achievement improved over the past 10 years. We cannot definitively link this to the district’s participation in the CRLP trainings, but the degree to which the CRLP program was embedded in the district does suggest at least a strong association between the partnership work and the outcomes for students. As can be seen in the Exhibit 4, the data show a fairly steady increase in the Academic Performance

Index (API) for the district as a whole, with growth of 115 points in the past 5 years, as well as for individual schools in the district. This is matched by growth in the average API rankings, with an increase from 3.2 to 5.0 in the past 10 years.

Exhibit 4
API Ranking by School and by District (1999–2008)



An additional set of data that provides evidence of increased student achievement at National is California Standards Test (CST) scores. As Exhibit 5 shows, the percentage of students scoring proficient and above on the CST increased by 19.5 points for English language arts and by 20.9 points for mathematics over the period 2001 to 2007.

Exhibit 5
Percentage of Students Scoring Proficient and Above on California Standards Test

Subject	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Change
English-Language Arts Grades 2–6	17.6	19.4	26.2	27.1	31.7	34.7	37.2	+19.5
Mathematics Grades 2–6		29.6	39.0	40.7	47.3	47.5	50.5	+20.9

These scores and the growth over time are both laudable, but what sets National apart from many other districts is the demographic characteristics (e.g., poverty, English learner status) of the students who are learning. CRLP and National staff are proud that at the end of the 2006–07 school year they received a significant amount of press because national was the only district of its demographic characteristics that made every Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goal, for every school, in every subject. The 2008 Similar Schools

Rankings for API tell a similar story.² Four of the 11 schools achieved the highest possible ranking of 10; three received a 9, three received an 8, and the final school received a 7. This shows that all schools in National outperform other schools in the state which serve a similar student population.

Next Steps and Future Challenges

Throughout the district and CRLP there is an overwhelming belief that the reason they have been able to show so much success in improving student achievement is because of the work done through the partnership with CRLP. Teachers and administrators alike attribute their success in helping students achieve to the culture of working together to use data to inform instructional practices. According to Dr. Cameron,

We are convinced of the value of our participation in the California Reading and Literature project's professional development institutes to such a degree that we consider it the single greatest variable contributing to our students' success in reading proficiency. Not only has it deepened our teachers' content knowledge of reading, but [it has also] enriched the dialogue among our teachers regarding standards-aligned assessment, instruction, and curriculum.³

However, despite the testimony of both National and CRLP staff, events over the past couple of years have raised a number of challenges to the partnership's ability to continue the work. One of the greatest of these challenges is the competing demands for limited time and resources within the district. Although the pressures of a lack of financial resources is certainly not unique to National, indeed districts across California are struggling to find financial and personnel resources, the partnership has felt the pressures keenly. The resources needed to maintain, evolve, and extend the partnership to strengthen such aspects as coaching and leadership development have shrunk dramatically over the past few years. There are fewer stipends for teachers and a greater emphasis on fee for service from the districts. In addition, the time available for extended professional development efforts has declined dramatically. Teachers are no longer willing or able to do month-long, or even week-long courses. Many teachers work during the summer or have other demands on their time.

By 2005, nearly all the teachers and administrators in National had participated in CRLP training at some level – either just as a participant or also as a presenter. However, one growing concern is that many of the teachers originally involved in the partnership have retired or are approaching retirement. Since National has not been doing the RESULTS training over the past couple of years, fewer teachers have the kind of knowledge and experience with RESULTS to make it work, and many teachers do not see the need for additional training as they believe using data is just part of what they do. However, as fewer teachers are trained in RESULTS, the strength of the partnership work could be

² The similar schools rank compares performance at a given school to the 100 schools in the state with the most similar student population. A similar schools rank of 10 means that a school is in the top decile in the state of schools serving similar students; a rank of 9 means that it performed better than 81-90% of similar schools; a rank of 8 indicates better performance than 71-80% of schools, etc.

³ Orem, C., Forbes, C., & Rojas, C. (2007). *Addressing the achievement gap*. Presentation at the California Title 1 Conference.

diluted as pressures from outside make changes in the way teachers collaborate in teams or deliver instruction in the classroom.

One challenging personnel transition in particular occurred 3 years ago when Dr. Cameron, superintendent for 16 years, retired. The district has of yet been unable to find an appropriate replacement (the first replacement lasted only a couple of years), and district staff wonder what the effect will be when someone new comes into the position. Although the work of the partnership is protected somewhat both because it has permeated the district and because many of the leaders in the district have stayed in their positions, there are concerns that a new superintendent may not continue down the same path as Dr. Cameron. In fact, staff members from both organizations recognize that one of the reasons that this work has thrived even in the current context is that the CRLP leadership in San Diego has included National teachers since its inception as teachers on special assignment but still officially staff of the district. Having a strong ongoing relationship with National has enabled CRLP to nurture and maintain a partnership that has played such an important role for both National and CRLP over the years. An encouraging note is that National and CRLP are taking steps to continue the work. Over the past year discussions about implementing a new round of RESULTS training has resulted in a pilot effort in the fall of 2009 in which a redesigned RESULTS 2 will be done at one school in the district. On the bases of that work, it is hoped that additional schools will be involved in future years.

The CRLP and National have, over almost 20 years, maintained and expanded the work of the partnership – prioritizing the maintenance of a connection and acknowledging the important contributions this work has made to the teachers involved. An essential factor in changing student outcomes is to change what goes on in the classroom. The partnership between CRLP and National made it possible for the teachers to figure out what needed to be changed, acquire the expertise needed to change it, and receive supports in making those the changes.