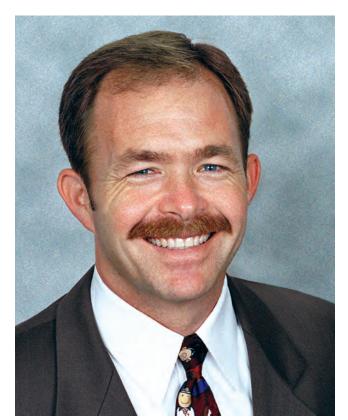Chris
Steinhauser

As superintendent of schools for the Long Beach Unified School District in Long Beach, Calif., Chris Steinhauser leads a system that serves 87,000 students in 93 public schools. The district employs more than 8,000 people.

The schools in Long Beach are widely lauded for their success. This year, the district was recognized for a record-tying fifth time as a finalist for the prestigious Board Prize, which the district won in 2003. *Newsweek's* national ranking of "America's Best High Schools" included six of Long Beach's high schools.

Steinhauser has long stressed the importance of professional development in achieving districtwide success. With the system's deep commitment to professional learning and widespread use of data, Steinhauser provides a unique lens on what it means for a district to exemplify NSDC's definition of professional development.

LET DATA DO THE TALKING

ASSESSMENT IS AN EVERYDAY ACTIVITY
FOR HIGH-ACHIEVING LONG BEACH

BY TRACY CROW

JSD: What role has effective professional development played in your district's success?

Steinhauser: It's No. 1. When you have highly trained individuals both on the certificated and classified sides of the house, you're able to really push looking at student data, finding out what your holes are, and aligning your professional development to whatever those proficiencies are. You can then attack whatever the issue is and use the data to see if whatever you identified as the problem and the solution are working.

Determining the right solution is like the scientific method: You have a hypothesis, you look at data, you train folks, they go out in the field and deliver on what they've learned.

Along the way, you hone your methods: If your solution is not meeting the identified needs, then you can make immediate changes. When you have a robust data system and professional development system working hand in hand, there is total alignment for the kids.

JSD: So you're looking at data at a variety of levels, right?

Steinhauser: All levels. Looking at assessments is something we do every day. So it happens in grade-level meetings, it happens in department meetings, it happens in professional development meetings, it happens in principal-teacher meetings. It happens with the assistant superintendents who are in charge of the different levels with their principals, it happens with me with my executive team, and it happens with all of us with our board of education. For example, next week we have a board workshop, and one of the agenda items will be looking at our test data that just came in. What successes did we have, what areas of need do we still have, and then how are we going to address those areas of need? This is where professional development comes in, interventions come in, and sometimes realignment of people and resources.

People at all levels are looking at data, and they're doing it all the time. We look at the statewide data and then eventually drill all the way down to the individual class level. Now, I'm not going to drill down to the individual class level. That's going to be the principal and the teachers, and, in some cases, the assistant superintendent. I'm looking at system-level questions. For example, we have a new program that we just implemented at our middle schools for math. So I'm looking at the fact that we spent a lot of money on training teachers, we

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Long Beach Unified School District

Long Beach, Calif.

Number of schools: 93
Enrollment: 87,499
Staff: 8,000
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	16%
Black:	17%
Hispanic:	52%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	14%
Other:	1%

Limited English proficient: 24%
Languages spoken: 26
Free/reduced lunch: 68%
Special education: 9.5%
Contact: Chris Eftychiou, public information director
E-mail: eftychiou@lbschools.net

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have math coaches to continue that training — now we need to know, what did the assessments say at the end of the year? We knew what the assessments told us along the way because we had our own district assessments aligned with the professional development we were doing. We saw some good progress there. Now I need to know, did that progress show up in the state testing? And it has.

You identify your problem, and then you work backwards to find all the areas of support. That's where you have professional development, data analysis, and interventions that are all linked together, they're not isolated. Where some people make mistakes is that they may do a lot of professional development, but they don't know why they're doing it — it's not connected to anything.

If we're asking teachers to change the way they teach mathematics, then we also need to ask how do we know that what they are doing is working or not working, how do we know whether we need to adjust the student interventions? And that's why we need to have the triangulation of all this data and resources on an ongoing basis.

JSD: With all this data in front of you, who is making the determination about what type of professional development is needed at any given time?

Steinhauser: It's a hybrid process. In some cases, the teachers will tell us what they need. We do a lot of piloting in the district. With this math program, for example, we piloted the program at four schools last year. The teachers told us what was working and what wasn't working based on data. That's how we adjusted the program before we rolled it out to the entire content-level group.

All teachers new to this district are trained in a two-year program — what we call essential elements of effective instruction. Then they also receive content training where data is brought in on a regular basis. So when a teacher is in a meeting with the principal to discuss data, it's not a surprise because they were already exposed to it in their very beginning days as an educator in this district.

JSD: How long has the district used this data-intensive approach to determining what to learn and how to go about it?

Steinhauser: It started in about 1994, when the district under Carl Cohn launched three improvement initiatives. One was to end social promotion. All kids had to read at a certain level by 3rd grade. Another was that kids who had two Fs couldn't go on to high school from the 8th grade. The third was the use of uniforms in our K-8 schools. At the same time, we were developing our own standards — California didn't have standards at the time. We had identified common standards across each content area at all grade levels, we needed to know what was an acceptable level of proficiency, and then we had to know how

> **People at all levels are looking at data, and they're doing it all the time.**

we were going to assess those. And that's where our data system came in.

At the very beginning, the teachers were not allowed to access the data system from anywhere but the sites. The teachers said, "If we're going to really use this, we need to have access to this 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. " The program has grown over the years based on the needs of our teachers. Now it's so much more sophisticated than it was when we first started.

Our data system has been successful because it is a tool to help teachers become better at their craft. When teachers give an assessment, they can immediately see the test data, and if they want to regroup their kids by a certain strand or certain skill, they can do that right away and reteach. For us as a school district, I can look at the first trimester of mathematics and say, "Wow, our kids have failed on these three standards. We need to provide support to those kids districtwide." If it's a districtwide problem, we need to meet with our teachers and figure out what that is. We were never able to do that in the past. At the same time, we've gotten rid of programs because we could see that they aren't working.

Our biggest challenge has always been to figure out how much can we do in a given year and do it really well.

JSD: You were working in the district at the time. Was the culture of the district ready for this?

Steinhauser: I was a principal. We had come from a system that was very top-down and had a superintendent before Cohn who decentralized everything. The idea was that everything would bubble up from the bottom. But what happened was that the parents and the teachers all

To learn more about the Long Beach Unified School District, see **www.lbusd.k12.ca.us.**

demanded consistency. At that time, we had 23 different report cards. Teachers were unhappy. They had to know that if they said something was meeting a high standard that it was the same across the district for every program. So that's where the need for the standards came in. They were developed with our partners in the higher education and business communities as well as with our teachers and parents.

At that time, we didn't have a data system. We started with common end-of-course exams in mathematics and benchmark reading exams because of the social promotion initiative. Once the other content teachers saw the power of this assessment data, they demanded it, too. Now we have more than 211 common end-of-course exams. You know you're on to something good when the art and foreign language teachers say they want common exams.

Our biggest challenge has always been to figure out how much can we do in a given year and do it really well. At the central office level, we're playing catch-up because the list of what teachers want is longer than we can give right now due to resource issues. It is a good challenge to have, but also a problem. You want your teachers to be the best trained and to do the best job possible; when you can't deliver on all of those things, you don't want them to be discouraged.

JSD: Are you finding that a particular challenge with budget crises?

Steinhauser: Yes. We have to choose those projects that are most aligned to our strategic plan as our highest priorities. We just launched new end-of-course exams in language arts in grades 2-5. We expanded in that direction because those exams are in alignment with our dashboard. We

have a dashboard aligned to our strategic plan that says by 2013, our kids will meet certain proficiency standards at different levels.

JSD: How prevalent are coaches in your district?

Steinhauser: Not every building has a coach, and some have more than one. It's all based on the data at the school site. When we roll out a new focus for the district, those schools with the greatest need will get the greatest amount of support. Then as the data show that they're progressing, we'll gradually release that support. A school might be doing really well in language arts and terrible in math, so they'll get math coaches and not language arts coaches. On the flip side, people get upset when you take coaches away because they really bond with them well. That is a down side.

JSD: Would you say you have a sense of collective responsibility among all your teachers for all students? How does professional development feed that?

Steinhauser: I would say that as a community, we have a collective responsibility for all kids. When you have a highly trained workforce, everyone in the community knows what your mission is and what you're there for. This vision raises the level of professionalism for everyone. We're always saying we're not going to blame the kids for any issues. We have to look at ourselves and how we can become better at what we're doing because we are the professionals. If you communicate and you open up about what's working well and what's not working well, then everybody in the system sees that. There's a sense of trust there, and everyone knows we're in this together, that this is for kids, for our kids.

JSD: What challenges are you seeing in the coming year or two

that you expect professional development will help you address?

Steinhauser: We have a huge focus on our English language learners, particularly those who have been with us for four to five years. We're doing some pilots in the district K-12 on why these students who have been with us now for four or five years are not proficient. We're offering a couple of different services to our kids and looking at how we support our teachers on that.

We're also working on our resource specialist program (RSP). We need to know how we can make sure that our special population is getting the best program possible and how to ensure that the teachers delivering that program are the most highly trained possible.

We are using some of our best coaches in the different content areas to give support to our RSP teachers, concentrating on common learning strategies and the use of data. At least for the next two to three years, this will be how we enhance our special education program and how we provide services to our English language learners.

A big concern I have right now in this economic crisis is that there are two areas that people will cut first. One is professional development. They'll just get rid of that money, because people will say you really don't need that, or I've been professional development-ed to death. The second one is research. They'll get rid of their research department. Both of those are huge mistakes. Yes, you have to work within your budget. Sometimes as educators we're not always as creative as we could be. People need to be as creative as possible to ensure that they provide ongoing professional development based on the data that shows what kids and teachers need. That's the critical piece. If you abandon this altogether, you will lose all the ground that you have achieved.

I advocate for the greatest flexibility possible. In education, you have too many pots where money can only go for certain things, and in reality, we need to spend money where the need is. Maybe I don't need to buy a bunch of new textbooks, I need it for my teachers in grade 6 in English language learner support. We need to advocate for a system that holds us accountable for the outcomes of our kids, but gives us the greatest flexibility possible to assure that we can do that.

Once you have a highly trained workforce, you can't take that away. But if teachers don't continue to hone their skills, they won't continue to improve. Good teachers will always remain good teachers, but they could become great teachers with better support.

JSD: What would it take for this — cutting professional development and research — not to be the default reaction when times are tough?

Steinhauser: It takes strong leaders — teachers, principals, board members, superintendents — to say to their communities that we need to spend this money. If we don't, we're going to set kids back even further, which then becomes an economic development problem. If we don't produce a workforce that is able to go out and get the jobs they need, then we're in serious trouble, because we're going to have higher unemployment or more remediation at the college level. People forget that sometimes you have to spend money to make money. ■