

**Celebrating
America's
most improved
public school
districts.**

The 2013 Broad Prize

About the Finalist

Corona-Norco Unified School District *California*

DISTRICT PROFILE

Superintendent Kent Bechler served as superintendent of Corona-Norco Unified School District from July 2007 until his retirement in June 2012. Prior to joining CNUSD, Bechler was superintendent of Walnut Valley Unified School District and Duarte Unified School District, both in California. Michael Lin was appointed superintendent of Corona-Norco in June 2012. Previously, Lin was deputy superintendent and joined the district in July 2008 as the assistant superintendent of human resources.

Governance Five-member school board, elected at large to serve staggered four-year terms.

Teachers Union Corona-Norco Teachers Association

\$392 million
Annual Budget

\$7,009
Per Pupil Expenditures

85
Rank Among U.S. School Districts

53,437
Number of Students

2,118
Number of Teachers

49
Number of Schools

13%
Students Designated as English Language Learners

44%
Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch

Student Demographics

6%
African-American

8%
Asian / Pacific Islander

1%
Multi-ethnic

3%
Other

51%
Hispanic

30%
White

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A greater percentage of Hispanic and African-American students are reaching advanced academic levels in Corona-Norco Unified School District (CNUSD) than in other districts in California.

For example, in 2012, the percentage of CNUSD's Hispanic elementary school students performing at the advanced level in reading, math and science ranked in the top 30 percent in California when compared to other Hispanic students across the state. The percentage of African-American elementary and middle school students performing at the advanced level in reading and math ranked in the top 20 percent compared to the proportion of African-American students performing at the advanced level in all districts across the state.

Corona-Norco narrowed achievement gaps between Hispanic and white students.

In recent years, CNUSD narrowed achievement gaps between Hispanic and white students in the district overall and between its Hispanic students in the district and the state's white students in elementary, middle and high school reading, math and science as measured by state assessments.

Corona-Norco students outperform students in other California districts with similar demographics.

In 2012, CNUSD students performed better on state assessments than those in other California districts that serve students with similar family incomes in elementary and high school reading, math and science, according to The Broad Prize methodology.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICES RELATED TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Corona-Norco invests in relationships to build a strong, student-focused district and school culture.

District leaders promote a strong sense of community and collaboration, which has led to a great deal of stability in the schools and the district. Building collegial relationships among district staff and teachers helped CNUSD persevere through a severe fiscal crisis, with a 25 percent drop in the district's anticipated budget since the 2008-09 school year. CNUSD used the crisis to rally stakeholders around a "kids first" focus. By keeping student interests at the fore, the district in 2010 was able to negotiate a nearly 5 percent pay cut and then freeze salaries for five years for teachers and classified staff—all of whom overwhelmingly voted in favor of the reduction. Despite the pay cut, CNUSD's teachers on average are paid more than those in surrounding districts, leading to low teacher turnover.

CNUSD officials are adept at studying a problem—typically with plenty of stakeholder input—and then coming up with innovative solutions. To generate more funding, the district analyzed attendance patterns and put practices into place to increase attendance on days when students were typically more likely to miss school, such as having teachers test students on Fridays. Meanwhile, CNUSD secured more federal, state and local grants, saved \$3 million a year by reducing bus service, purchased energy directly from suppliers to save at least \$2.5 million annually, and renegotiated its waste removal contract, saving over a half million dollars. CNUSD also introduced more financial controls: the superintendent's cabinet reviews any expense exceeding \$10,000, and the district develops a multi-year budget to minimize surprises. It also employs a range of strategies for financial planning and trend forecasting.

The district has a cohesive, comprehensive assessment system that is easy for teachers to use to monitor student performance and tailor instruction to better meet individual student needs.

Corona-Norco has a comprehensive and cohesive assessment system with summative, benchmark and formative or classroom assessments in nearly every content area. CNUSD offers multiple types of in-depth professional development to help teachers master how to access, interpret and use data. CNUSD has four systems that house its data—Data Director, Zangle, Online Assessment Reporting System (OARS) and Longitudinal

Assessment Reporting System (LARS)—which educators can access. Multiple years of school-level, classroom-level and individual student-level assessment information is available with DataDirector, while Zangle stores student demographic information, attendance, scheduling, course grades, transcripts, English proficiency and other records. OARS is an online academic content standards-based diagnostic tool for teachers, and LARS can be used by administrators to customize reports for each school.

Leadership teams at all high schools receive training on using data to analyze achievement gaps. They also use the detailed information to assess the impact of current practices and systems on high school graduation and college- and career-readiness. Using the OARS and DataDirector tools, teachers and administrators can generate site-level assessments, use the software to conduct item analysis to identify specific skills students have not mastered and generate follow-up assessments to be used after re-teaching the target concepts. Kindergarten and first-grade teachers have been provided with professional development to use running records—a method of assessing a child's reading level by examining both accuracy and the types of errors made—to monitor students' reading levels. The district's instructional technology department provides training on how to input behavior incidents, run reports and analyze site behavior trends.

In 2009, all intermediate and high school professional learning community leadership teams received training in the analysis and use of data. Each team received data reports on their students in aggregated and disaggregated formats, including academic performance index, comparisons of the California Standards Test, student data from year-to-year and an analysis of the academic performance of past eighth-grade students based on how well they did on the 10th-grade California High School Exit exam.

The district evaluates its professional development offerings and tailors its training to better meet the needs of individual schools. For example, some teams received additional training on using results of benchmark assessments to predict results on the state standards tests and based on those results, they develop strategies to adjust instruction.

Corona-Norco's curriculum is aligned to state standards, and in 2010 the district began to align to the Common Core State Standards. Writing standards are higher than

those in the state to better prepare students for college. Pacing guides, developed by groups of district teachers working in committees, are available for all core content areas.

The district develops and supports effective instructional leaders by encouraging collaboration and providing significant supports.

The district's focus on strong relationships extends to how principals work together. The district has developed a strong principal network, providing them with regular information about issues facing schools and support to build strong school teams. CNUSD provides intensive and targeted professional development for its principals and assistant administrators. For example, the district holds principal meetings twice a month, primarily for professional development, and in recent years addressed data analysis, walkthrough tools, college- and career-readiness, teacher evaluation, 21st-century skills and technology. Principals also participate in a four-year series of workshops designed to improve student learning and eliminate achievement gaps. This training, for example, helped district leaders and principals focus on the relationship between leadership and student achievement, and how to create a collegial learning environment that promotes rigor and equity through establishing expectations for teachers.

Administrators also participate in training programs that teach them how to support and implement student instructional programs, instructional improvement and instruction-oriented technology. The district has an Assistant Principal Academy, which serves as a professional leadership community that meets monthly for professional development on topics ranging from the Common Core State Standards to suspension and expulsion issues.

As a result of union negotiations, the district provides training for teachers to become instructional leaders. Teachers as Team Leaders is a three-part training session offered annually that gives teacher leaders the tools to effectively lead grade-level and department collaborative groups. Instructional leadership development culminates with annual visits to the Gettysburg Leadership Academy in Pennsylvania so current and aspiring leaders can learn how to apply leadership lessons from the military to the school context.

Meanwhile, CNUSD provides collaboration time for district and school leaders. For example, principals meet twice a month for three hours in feeder pattern teams.

The district also offers a monthly leadership seminar for teachers who are interested in developing their leadership abilities. Principals visit each other's schools or send teachers to visit schools with certain effective practices.

The district places a priority on supporting teachers and ensuring they work together to improve teaching and learning. Five years ago, CNUSD and the teachers union modified the teacher work schedule to allow for weekly common planning time, or "professional teaching time," so that teachers did not have to do so on their own time. Students in kindergarten through eighth-grade go home early on Wednesdays so teachers have common planning time to work collectively on lesson plans and share ideas about how to teach concepts, while high school students arrive late once a week so teachers have time to collaborate. Half of these sessions are planned by teachers, and the other half are developed together by teachers and administrators. Teacher committees develop curriculum-related pacing guidelines that are then presented to teachers for further input.

The district focuses on the "whole child" to improve each student's educational experience.

The district places a strong emphasis on meeting every student's academic and social needs by taking a "whole-child" approach to education.

The district provides special support for groups of students, depending on their needs. For example, teachers have been certified in using Sheltered Observation Instructional Protocols to help English language learners gain academic proficiency while improving their language skills. The Puente Program—offered at Corona-Norco high schools—is designed to help motivate Hispanic students to go on to college and then consider returning to the community as mentors and leaders. In addition to four years of academic counseling, the program also offers ninth- and 10th-graders a rigorous college-preparatory English class using multicultural literature. The district supports a father mentoring program for African-American boys.

To ensure a safe, nurturing school environment for all students, the district encourages each school to use the approach that best fits its needs. Numerous programs in district elementary schools promote a respectful and caring environment. Many primary schools use character education programs to teach such values as integrity and honesty. Some middle and high schools implement programs that have older students welcoming incoming

students. Some elementary schools implement the Capturing Kids' Hearts program, with events that encourage friendships, mutual respect and bonding. Students help design social contracts, which are displayed where classmates, staff and parents can easily refer to them. CNUSD works collaboratively with community resources to reduce the incidence and impact of bullying. Fourth-grade students throughout the district participate in the World Kindness Youth Conference, which shows them how simple acts of care and kindness can be integrated into their daily lives. Sixth-grade students, for example, have anti-bullying lessons to help them recognize their responsibilities to help each other and speak up if they witness bullying or other disruptive behaviors.

Corona-Norco focuses on preparing students for life after high school.

In 2011, the district launched Passport to Success, an initiative that focuses on college- and career-readiness for all students. To better prepare students for college and career, the district offers numerous programs, including career technical education courses, International Baccalaureate, Honors, Advanced Placement, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and dual enrollment with community colleges. Starting in 2011-12, all students were required to take the sequence of courses needed to gain entry into California state colleges and universities.

CNUSD partners with local colleges and universities so students can take dual-enrollment courses that provide them concurrent credit for high school and community college. For example, John F. Kennedy Middle College High School students attend classes on the Norco College campus, where they can take up to two years of college courses and graduate with both a high school diploma and an Associate of Arts degree.

As part of Passport to Success, CNUSD promotes college- and career-readiness skills for eighth-grade students, including a required "Success for High School, College, and Careers Course," developed in 2010 to introduce them to fundamentals of researching and selecting a future career and to help determine the courses they must take in high school and college to meet their academic and professional goals. CNUSD also offers multiple advanced course and career pathways for high school students, such as the one with Norco College, and provides a "no excuses university" for elementary students.