



CAASPP in Action

Sharing Practices
in Implementing
the CAASPP System
to Improve Teaching
and Learning



California Assessment of
Student Performance and Progress

Using Interim Assessments FOR Learning
Sierra Sands Unified School District



Using Interim Assessments *FOR* Learning Sierra Sands Unified



Mission Statement

We are committed to providing the highest quality education in a safe environment to all K–12 students. We believe the school shares with the family, church, and community the responsibility for developing lifelong learners who are responsible, productive citizens.

School District

DISTRICT PROFILE

GRADES SERVED **K-12**

SCHOOLS **12**

TEACHERS **231**

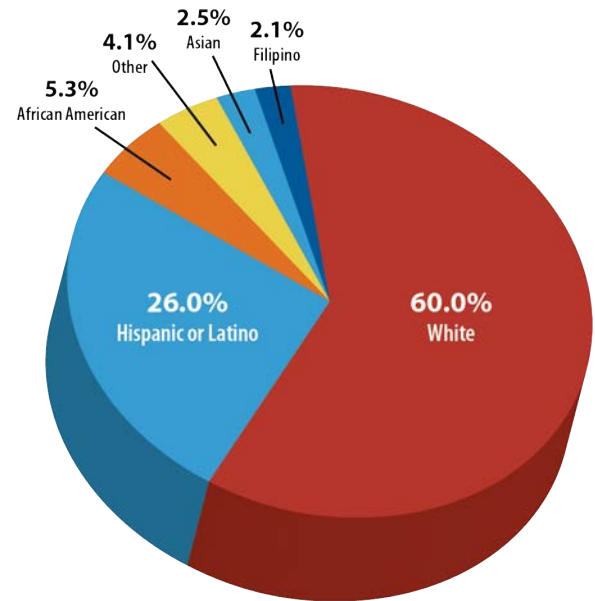
ENROLLMENT **4,963**

ENGLISH LEARNERS **8%**

LOW INCOME **52%**

SPECIAL EDUCATION **11%**

ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS



GOALS

- Increase awareness of the CAASPP System for all teachers, including special education teachers.
- Emphasize exploration of the interim assessments **FOR** learning (i.e., as a means to understand the rigor and expectations of the CAASPP System and the Common Core State Standards [CCSS]).
- Train all teachers about the availability and use of the universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations.

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

The district team that was key to implementing the goals outlined above was comprised of staff from the curriculum and instruction department at the district office as well as the local Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) Director and key SELPA staff. As teachers began administering IABs in their classrooms, technology coaches provided onsite support and also provided suggestions about how to integrate some of the technology features of the assessment (e.g., highlighting, strikethrough) into classroom practice. Coaches and coordinators for English-language arts, English Language Development, and mathematics were also key to implementing this work in Sierra Sands Unified.

APPROACH

Sierra Sands Unified is a data-driven, systems-oriented district. When the CCSS were released in 2010, the district implemented ongoing professional development for teachers and staff. Sierra Sands Unified also uses a local benchmark assessment to evaluate student learning outcomes. This benchmark assessment was in place prior to the introduction of the CAASPP System.

In 2014–15, Sierra Sands Unified was focused on the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments, as were most school districts in California. Some training was conducted that school year using the test blueprints that focused on the differences between the old California Standards Tests and the new Smarter Balanced assessments and on the rigor and expectations (i.e., greater Depth of Knowledge levels) of the new assessments, including an overview of the new question types, but in general teachers lacked awareness about the interim assessments and the Digital Library. Some teachers and some departments at the middle and high school levels were “early adopters” and administered the Interim Comprehensive Assessments (ICAs), but most did not. This was just the beginning of their CAASPP implementation journey.

One of the first ideas the team rolled out after returning from the CAASPP Institute¹ was the concept of “assessment **FOR** learning.” “Assessment **FOR** Learning,” or formative assessments, is a concept highlighted in Chapter 8 of the *English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/cf/elaeldfrmwrksbeadopted.asp>). Fear of the unknown (i.e., Smarter Balanced) had been a big barrier in Sierra Sands Unified, and initially the Smarter Balanced assessment system was viewed as abstract because teachers hadn’t really gotten into the system to explore. Because the district was data driven, teachers were also fearful that the focus of the interim assessments would be on outcomes, and not the learning process. During districtwide training as the idea of “assessment

FOR learning” was discussed, the training team could literally see the stress drain out of people’s faces. The training team told teachers that they wanted them to get in and explore, play, look, and learn. This was a huge “a-ha” moment for the district and a significant turning point in their work on CAASPP implementation and the CCSS.

¹ The CAASPP Institute was a training opportunity for teams from school districts and schools that focused on the three components of the Smarter Balanced assessment system. The CAASPP Institute training materials and online video modules are available on the California Department of Education’s CAASPP Institute Training Materials Web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/caasppinstitute.asp> [Invalid link removed]. All training materials can be downloaded and customized for use in school districts and schools.

“Attendance at the CAASPP Institute was pivotal and was a critical component to Sierra Sands’ plans and professional development... the team loved the concept of ‘assessment **FOR** learning’ and felt like the CAASPP Institute gave them freedom to explore the interim assessments and the Digital Library in a low-stakes environment. During districtwide training as the idea of ‘assessment **FOR** learning’ was discussed, the training team could literally see the stress drain out of people’s faces. This was a huge ‘a-ha’ moment for the district and a significant turning point in their work on CAASPP implementation!”

APPROACH, continued

The focus during the 2015–16 school year was on an awareness campaign for all components of the Smarter Balanced assessment system. The main goal of the awareness campaign was to allow teachers an opportunity to explore the various components of the Smarter Balanced assessment system and remove the fear of the unknown and the fear of consequences for outcomes. The awareness campaign kicked off in January in their planned professional development day for all teachers. Many of the resources and activities that were included

The freedom of choice in selecting interim assessments was very motivating for the teachers, and it encouraged ownership of the process.

in the CAASPP Institute were used. Information was provided about the two types of interim assessments available, the Digital Library, and the universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations and then teams were given time to process the information and plan.

Each teacher was asked to select and administer two Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs) and to do so keeping in mind the mantra of “assessment **FOR** learning.” One critical factor in the success of this approach was that teachers were free to choose which interim assessments they wanted to administer. The freedom of choice in selecting interim assessments was very motivating for the teachers, and it encouraged ownership of the process.

The California Department of Education (CDE) Interim Assessment Viewing System² was also critical to Sierra Sands Unified’s success because it allowed teachers an opportunity to go into the site, explore the assessments, and make informed decisions about which IABs they would administer to their students. Often, teachers at each grade level selected the same IABs which allowed for discussions during weekly collaboration time about teacher observations, particularly about what it will take in the classroom to match the level of rigor on the assessments. For example, teachers quickly observed that multi-level, multi-step math problems aren’t being practiced in regular classroom instruction the way they are presented to students on the summative assessment. Elementary teachers realized that their students aren’t being exposed regularly to the “bottom-of-the-page” questions on math worksheets—those that focus more on mathematical reasoning, problem solving and critical thinking skills. These conversations are the start to changing daily classroom practices and increasing success for students! These observations will also drive future professional development in helping teachers identify strategies for working with students on more rigorous concepts and procedures and problem solving skills.

Another key to Sierra Sands Unified’s implementation approach was to utilize the weekly districtwide collaboration time (late-start Wednesdays) for exploration, discussion, and planning around the CAASPP System. Teachers talk about not only student performance, but also what they observed about the impact of the questions on their own practices inside the classroom. One realization was that more oral questioning using the Socratic method and other strategies are needed in order to align classroom practices with the rigor and expectations of students described in the CCSS and evaluated through the Smarter Balanced assessment system. This collaboration time has allowed teachers to discuss best practices, share strategies, and develop new strategies for how to address learning gaps for students.

² The CDE’s Interim Assessment Viewing System can be found on the CAASPP Portal at www.caaspp.org by clicking on the “Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments” button and accessed by authorized users (i.e., users with login credentials for the Test Operation Management System—TOMS).

IMPACT OF EFFORTS TO DATE

- The “awareness” campaign demystified the CAASPP System for district staff and allowed them to engage in collaboration about and take ownership of the CAASPP System. Prior to this campaign, there was a lot of fear and anxiety about navigating the digital platform and the rigor of content. Sierra Sands Unified acknowledged their collective fears and embraced the concept of exploring the interim assessments **FOR** teacher/administrator/student learning.
- Using the assessments in an exploratory way allowed teachers to better understand use of the universal tools and ensure their use in teaching and learning. It also allowed for the exploration of appropriate designated supports and accommodations. In addition, it made teachers and students much more comfortable with the navigation of the CAASPP Test Administrator Interface.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Provide time and opportunities for collaboration.** At Sierra Sands Unified, weekly collaboration time was already a part of the culture. The introduction of the CAASPP System provided a new topic for discussion during that protected collaboration time. Teachers and others need time to learn new information, process it, and then use it to plan for change. Districts need to put structures in place to ensure this protected time.
- **Encourage teachers to explore interim assessments **FOR** learning.** The shift in language away from assessment for outcomes or accountability purposes (i.e., assessment of learning) to assessment **FOR** learning was monumental for teachers in Sierra Sands Unified. The idea that teachers could explore, practice, and experience the interim assessments in a low-stakes, non-mandated fashion opened the door for incredible learning opportunities and rich collaborative conversations about what teachers observed through their exploration and how that can be transferred into daily classroom instruction.
- **Set expectations and provide support.** Sierra Sands Unified established an expectation that each teacher select and administer two IABs with their students. District staff provided strong positive encouragement, reinforcing the message that teachers were doing assessment **FOR** learning. Additionally, the district provides support for administration, scoring, and reporting as needed.

“We are experiencing one of the greatest educational reforms in history from funding to standards. It is important to remember that the continuous improvement cycle involves professional learning as much as it does student learning. Learning occurs in environments where learners are supported. It is critical to meet the needs of our teacher-learners with collective support that informs and empowers their instruction.”

NEXT STEPS

After reflecting on which strategies were effective and which could be further improved, the Sierra Sands implementation team will continue to

- support teacher collaboration time dedicated to the alignment of classroom practices and assessments to the blueprints, claims, and targets of the Smarter Balanced assessment system;
- provide information and support on the CCSS and the Smarter Balanced assessment system via districtwide professional learning opportunities that focus on providing strategies to teachers to model inside the classroom the rigor and the expectations of the CCSS as demonstrated through the Smarter Balanced assessment system;
- focus on the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices and using the test blueprints to inform teacher learning about rigor and expectations;
- encourage use of performance tasks in the classroom either teacher-developed or the performance task IABs;
- encourage and support teacher use of the interim assessments on a voluntary basis **FOR** learning.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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CDE CAASPP Web page
www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca

CAASPP Portal
www.caaspp.org



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