Public Scholarship as New School Development

April 2016

Scholars and practitioners representing four of the University of California research campuses report on six educational field stations – college-preparatory high schools for low-income students of color – developed through university-district partnerships. Each has the goal of using public scholarship to improve the preparation of underrepresented students for success in college and to illuminate the conditions for strengthened preparation in high schools.

In this policy brief, we highlight how site-based public scholarship and leveraged networks (district, university, and statewide) combine to develop schools that can advance both educational equity and excellence. And we address the challenges of such research-practice partnerships as exemplified by four creative tensions encountered in new school development (see sidebar).

FOUR TENSIONS

#1: The tension between supporting college-going for every single student and insisting on rigorous instruction that truly prepares each student to succeed in college.

#2: The tension between supporting teachers’ professional autonomy and sustaining a work culture that allows teachers to both stay and grow.

#3: The tension between the freedom to design a school and engage in public scholarship as a university or charter and the seemingly inevitable politics of districts and universities that constrain such design freedom in typical schools.

#4: The tension between university investments in single schools and the need to spread resources district-wide and regionally for dissemination and scale-up – toward fulfilling our responsibility as land-grant public universities.
Context

Our partnership schools are embedded in markedly different ecological contexts – of history, institutional arrangements (on or off-campus as well as within charter and traditional districts), locale, population, and design. These features in part shape our efforts and successes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>UC campus</th>
<th>Year opened</th>
<th># students</th>
<th>Grade levels</th>
<th>Policy context</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preuss School</td>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>UCSD charter, San Diego City Schools</td>
<td>preuss.ucsd.edu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAL Prep</td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>Aspire Public Schools Charter, early college model, 6-12 with 420 students in Aug 2016</td>
<td>cep.berkeley.edu/cal-prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gompers Preparatory Academy</td>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1,143</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>Charter, San Diego City Schools</td>
<td>gompersprep.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Sac Prep</td>
<td>Davis</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>Charter: UCD, Washington USD, Los Rios CC</td>
<td>westsacprep.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCLA Community School</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Pilot School, Los Angeles USD (LAUSD)</td>
<td>cs.gseis.ucla.edu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horace Mann UCLA Community School</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>2017 projected</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>LAUSD autonomous school model TBD</td>
<td>Under development</td>
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The seeds for CAL Prep were sown with the demise of affirmative action in college admissions and dwindling numbers of African American and Latinx undergraduates at UC Berkeley. In this time of raised expectations of college for all and in the face of glaring achievement gaps, disparities in college readiness, and sharply unequal schools, we leapt at the Gates Foundation invitation to start an early college secondary school. Such schools (now more than 280 nationwide) accelerate the education of low-income students of color through a college preparatory program paired with college-credited classes.

CAL Prep is a campus-wide commitment, guided by the Early College Initiative Committee and the Center for Educational Partnerships, and located within the Division of Equity and Inclusion. Framed by an MOU, we partnered with Aspire Public Schools (a charter district) to co-construct and refine CAL Prep as a non-selective and regional secondary school for first-generation college students. CAL Prep opened its doors in August 2005. With a recent move to new building, the Aspire Richmond California College Preparatory Academy enrolls 300 students and next year will reach our original 6-12 design with 420 students.

Achieving College Dreams (2016) tells the tale of this more than 10-year collaboration in public scholarship. With 23 co-author voices, we highlight the partnership structures, researcher-practitioner studies that shaped new school development, and the rich opportunities created. For CAL Prep and other Aspire schools, five college classes and acceptance at a four-year college are among the graduation requirements. All students in CAL Prep’s first two graduating classes enrolled in college, with 79% in four-year institutions. And 8% of seniors stayed on as “super seniors” to meet high school graduation requirements.

The Challenge of Untracking Schools

An enormous challenge for all our schools is how to enable remediation, a college-preparatory education, and college-level acceleration for all students – without taking students off the college track. Our students arrive greatly underprepared (e.g., 1.5% proficient in math in our first year) and face many obstacles. Yet stratified learning opportunities – through tracking, detentions/expulsions, remediation, and siloed support services – leave too many students behind. A seamless integration of rigor and support requires a culture-challenging mindset and system changes – driven by data and built over time. What we called SMART Supports principles oriented us toward School-wide approaches, Multiple domains of youth development, Aligned programs, Relationships, and Time use. This opportunity to fit the pieces together in new school development offered some lessons for policy.
Policy Lessons for Interweaving Rigor and Support

1. Addressing rigor alone proved insufficient as we needed to engage the hearts and minds of our students across multiple domains of youth development. We closed the opportunity gap not only in access to college-preparatory and college-level classes, but also in talent development (enrichment and afterschool activities), rich relationships (with teachers, peers, and families), social-emotional and transition skills, and preparation for college and for life.

2. We created an aligned and responsive pathway to college readiness and college success – one that targeted access and the conditions needed to thrive. Requirements and accommodations were universally programmed into classroom practice and school design, including alignment of positive college-going goals (across instruction, climate, and discipline), new roles (for teachers, support providers, and administrators), and structural mechanisms that linked high challenge with support and second chances. As examples we invested in a dean of students for early intervention, teaching for rigor and support, advisories, 8th period (for homework, tutoring, and seminars), Saturday School, course repeats, and an extended day/year.

3. We provided students with progressive challenge, autonomy, and individuation – across the grades. Progressive opportunities reduced the stress of school transitions into high school and college, and helped students grow in their competencies and identity development. For example, college experiences began with selected programs, moved to audited and credited courses, and culminated with College Week (classes and labs led by professors, graduate students, and support services).

4. A boundary-crossing and sustained partnership – across secondary-postsecondary, university-district, and research-practice – not only expanded resources for youth development but also yielded benefits across the divide in new knowledge, programs, and professional training opportunities. Our shared focus on school development for a first-generation college population contributed to a greater alignment of academic and social expectations between our institutions. At Aspire, the collaboration generated new leadership and programs, spread district-wide, and at UC Berkeley, it contributed to the teaching of a new gateway course for undergraduates in chemistry, the development of one-stop shopping for student support, and an innovative training program for social workers.
In 2009, the UCLA Community School opened its doors to 340 eager young minds in Kindergarten through 5th grade. After decades of being bussed out of their community, students in Pico Union/Koreatown were able to walk to school. The next year, the school expanded through 11th grade and welcomed 500 more students who transferred from over 60 schools across LA. Co-located with five schools on the former site of the Ambassador Hotel, the school has a social justice vision and historic legacy, including the tragic assassination of Robert F. Kennedy. There are no criteria for admission beyond living in the neighborhood. Families choose among six RFK Community Schools – the district’s first complex of “wall-to-wall” Pilot schools. There are now 51 Pilot Schools created as part of an in-district reform that gives schools charter-like autonomy in exchange for heightened accountability.

As an organization, the school is starting to hit its stride. Professional routines of practice have deepened and the school culture is strong. In contrast to the 20% annual turnover rate in high-poverty schools, our turnover rate is 11%. Teachers report very high levels of collective responsibility and trust. We are joining a growing body of research (e.g., Simon & Johnson, 2015) that is challenging the perception that teachers leave urban schools because the students are too hard to teach or face intractable barriers to learning. This research argues that teachers leave because the institutional arrangements and norms preclude them from doing their best work and flourishing as educators.

Teachers at our schools are driven by a fierce commitment to social justice and Horace Mann’s promise of education as the “great equalizer.” Being part of this larger movement for educational equity animates teachers and fuels their passion to create workplace cultures that allow them to make a difference in the lives of their students. All of our schools have autonomy arrangements that allow teachers to choose their colleagues, define their working conditions, and invest in professional learning. We highlight below each of these autonomies and the support needed to exercise and act upon their promise.

**Staffing Autonomy**

Based on an agreement between the district, union, and community, the UCLA Community School is able to hire its own faculty, with restrictions in periods of layoffs. Hiring committees are inclusive, the process is democratic, and decisions reflect the school’s values and culture. While UCLA organized the initial hiring teams for the lead teachers and principal, the school now has in place an operations team that manages staffing. The average annual retention rate of 89% translates into four or five
hires a year in this faculty of 46. The UCLA-based social networks that define the school have resulted in a highly-qualified faculty: 69% hold Master’s degrees, 20% are Nationally Board Certified, and almost half are UCLA alumni. The faculty is more racially diverse than the district and state workforce, and most of the faculty is bilingual (88%) or trilingual (5%) – bringing a wealth of cultural knowledge to their work with students and families. While the supports needed to recruit and retain this faculty are many, teachers describe the school as a family and take collective responsibility to ensure the well-being of all members.

**Working Conditions**

Teachers at the UCLA Community School (and other Pilot Schools) write their own school-based “Election to Work Agreement” (EWA) that specifies professional working conditions – the school’s vision and mission, teachers’ hours, the school calendar, autonomy to alter traditional teaching and learning conditions, additional roles, and so on. Teachers remain members of the union, may appeal to a common Internal Appeals Process, continue to accrue seniority for retirement, and are ensured at least the minimum salary negotiated for teachers in non-Pilot district schools. This sort of school-based collective bargaining has the potential to create and sustain professional working conditions for teachers.

**Professional Learning and Evaluation**

The school’s strong professional culture set the foundation for an alternative teacher evaluation system. Developed in partnership with UCLA researchers, the system was carefully crafted by a team of teachers. At the heart of the system is a Professional Learning Plan, a year-long improvement cycle that includes the collection of student work, artifacts, peer observations, and teacher reflections. Teachers work in teams to create digital portfolios that capture their practice and learning. Each year, a cohort of teachers receives a summative evaluation based on these portfolios along with other measures of teaching quality. This work is detailed in a Research, Practice, and Policy Brief co-authored by a UCLA graduate student and UCLA Community School teacher, available at [www.centerxchange.org](http://www.centerxchange.org).

**Broadening Our Community**

UCLA and LAUSD are partnering to create a second UCLA Community School in collaboration with the educators and community at Horace Mann Middle School in South Los Angeles. Together, we aim to restore faith in an historic public school by recruiting neighborhood students currently attending charter and magnet schools back to their community. Design work is underway, driven by a strong commitment to create a powerful public school where both students and teachers flourish.
In 2005, the School of Education was invited by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, with funding from the Gates Foundation, to develop an early college high school and join their national network. The result was West Sacramento Early College Prep (West Sac Prep), a limited liability corporation that includes the University of California, the Los Rios Community College District, and Washington Unified School District (in the City of West Sacramento). The School opened in August, 2007, and now has approximately 95 students in grades 6 through 12. West Sac Prep is governed by a board of directors which has legal and fiduciary responsibility for the school. As the Dean of Education at UC Davis, I represent the university on the Board and have been its president since the school's inception. My motivations to establish West Sac Prep were (a) serving students who are being failed by our public schools – students who come from low-income homes, would be first-generation college-goers, are significantly behind academically when they come to us, and have a language other than English at home; and (b) “pushing” schools of education to be accountable for “walking the talk.”

### Design Freedom and Institutional Politics

I’ve learned a great deal in the last 7+ years about schooling, about what “school” means to different constituents, about the politics that too often seem to careen out-of-control, about school financing and accountability regimes, suspension and dismissal, IEP’s and 504’s, the Brown Act (open meetings rules), unionization, and on and on. My most potent lesson is that establishing a public school to serve this particular population is not for the faint of heart.

While all three partnering organizations continue to share similar lofty goals about what West Sac Prep is, it is the university that often finds its ideals constantly challenged – by the realities of school governance, administrative leadership, school culture, and the politics of both the local community and the school district’s own board. For example, despite clear state requirements for annual student performance, we struggled with what the school was to be “accountable for.” As another example, while it was our clear intention to establish a project-based curriculum, both teachers and university faculty had differing views of how it would be integrated into the curriculum and the degree to which it would “replace” instruction of “core” knowledge. It also was the case, perhaps not surprisingly, that there were disagreements among the School of Education faculty about what the reforms should be.

The success of West Sac Prep is in the eye of the beholder. State-administered test scores (when we had them for comparison) were up and then down and then up and down again. Our high school graduation rates have typically been over 80%, but there has been great angst that they were not 100%; and our college-going (two- and four-year) rates vary enormously from year-to-year –
sometimes remarkable and other years embarrassingly poor. However, the “objective” data – even the “good” data - are merely a backdrop for the underlying disagreements about both the purpose and outcomes of schooling.

Policy Lessons for Building Research-Practice Partnerships

How can we protect the freedom to design a school and engage in public scholarship as a university or charter amidst the inevitable politics of districts and universities that constrain such design freedom in typical schools? In the face of such politics, our challenge at UC Davis was how the university’s role would become less about “good” education or “redefining” schooling but more about “threading the needle” between reform-minded practices and traditional approaches to, and measures of, what is “school” and the “right” outcomes of schooling. Much of the effort has been to fight against becoming like any other school, regressing to the mean, while balancing the need to make accommodations to stay both “alive” and financially solvent. I offer three recommendations for action in the face of specific tensions that we experienced in new school development.

Tension: Faculty conceptualizations of "school reform" and “success” can often conflict with the day-to-day realities of running a school and meeting state reporting requirements.

Recommendation: Careful, and ongoing, calibration of this inherent tension, and recognition that difficult negotiations may be required. Which university ideals can be jettisoned, or modified, or saved for a later day?

Tension: "Everyone" in the community may believe that having a research university involved is a great idea; but this can lead to unfulfilled expectations and pressures on the university that it cannot meet.

Recommendation: A carefully thought-out MOU between the university and the district (and other partners) for the specifics of the university’s responsibilities and day-to-day involvement in the school may be required. It should include an a priori agreement with key constituents about the key metrics that will be used both to tell the school’s “story” and to characterize its annual performance.

Tension: The organization/governance of the university-assisted school may create a new political entity that can (and must) provide direction, leadership, and “protection” for the school, but at the same time can further isolate it from the local political context where broad-based support for the school’s existence, evaluation, and eventual success will inevitably play out.

Recommendation: Local political contexts are rarely static, so adaptability and flexibility are key to perceiving the school as a “value-added” asset to the community. Whatever other aspirations the university may have for its school (e.g., a national model), managing – or at least, tracking – local community politics must come first. Each school needs a local politics “expert” with as much access to the various power structures as possible.
Creating Exemplary Schools and Regional Partnerships

UC San Diego, The Preuss School, and Gompers Preparatory Academy

Is it more productive for a university to partner with the K-12 sector to promote whole school reform within a small number of partner schools? Or is K12 equity better served if a university distributes its capacity and resources more widely across many schools within a region? At UC San Diego’s CREATE (Center for Research on Educational Equity, Assessment, and Teaching Excellence), we work on both. We invest deeply in whole model schools and leverage resources to improve the school lives of many students regionally.

CREATE’s Comprehensive Approach to Whole School Reform

In response to the elimination of Affirmative Action policies in 1995, UCSD established the Center for Research on Educational Equity, Assessment, and Teacher Excellence (CREATE) and The Preuss School, a 6-12 charter school exclusively serving low-income students whose parents do not have college degrees. Guided by CREATE’s commitment to engaged scholarship, Preuss established a detracking model that offers only college-preparatory classes, many Advanced Placement. Its curriculum fulfills or exceeds the University of California and California State University entrance requirements. Educators at the school have installed a range of academic and social supports or “scaffolds” to prepare every student for the rigorous study required to qualify for four-year colleges and universities. These scaffolds include extending learning time by 18 days and an intensive advisory model (http://preuss.ucsd.edu/current-students/university-prep.html). UCSD students serve as tutors (and informants about college life) for Preuss students who need additional help. UCSD faculty, staff and students also support curriculum development, enrichment activities, and fundraising. Preuss is successful in preparing underrepresented students for college; 85% (742 of 871 graduates) enroll in 4-year colleges. It has been cited as the Most Transformative High School in the US for 3 consecutive years.

Gompers Preparatory Academy, UCSD’s second “partnership school,” saw Preuss as an “existence proof” of college preparation for all. After Gompers parents’ pressure led to transforming a failing school into Gompers Preparatory Academy, a 6-12 grade charter school in Southeastern San Diego, educators designed everyday rituals shaping school and student identity toward college preparation for every GPA student. Through focused support for students struggling with personal and family traumas as well as academics, Gompers turned a suspension rate of 1000/year for its 100% low-income students into a 100% graduation and college acceptance rate.
for its first senior class. Gompers has graduated four “100/100” classes from 2012 to 2015; 99% of their 344 graduates plan to attend either a 4-year or a 2-year college or university; 57% plan to attend a 4-year college in the fall after they graduate.

CREATE supported the creation of both schools and continues to support each school’s success. But Preuss and GPA of course cannot serve all of the region’s low-income youth. To CREATE, the situation requires university-based efforts both to continue the two partnership schools’ successes and to leverage university resources into many more schools serving low-income students.

CREATE’s Methods for Leveraging Resources Regionally

Funded by our Chancellor in July 2013, UCSD’s CREATE STEM Success Initiative (CSSI) is a collective effort that links faculty, staff, and students with the San Diego education community to support K-20 STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education in the region. With this initiative, our engaged scholarship works to produce new and expanded opportunity for thousands. The CSSI supports core CREATE staff to work with campus and community partners to design outreach and education projects that leverage university resources to help plug “leaks” in the regional pipeline to STEM skills, degrees, and jobs. We believe the Initiative is forging a sustainable and replicable way to leverage and network a university’s vast resources for local public education for many. CREATE’s staff (a) already know K-16 partners after years of work, and so, deeply understand the region’s educational needs and (b) have skills in education research and evaluation. In turn, the core staff supports university faculty, staff and students to design efforts making the most local impact with their research, expertise, service energy, and grants. Together with K-12 partners, we pinpoint learning opportunities students and teachers need and desire, and then network campus resources with local partners’ to create these opportunities.

In our first two years, the CSSI team supported more than 200 additional distinct projects helping campus/community partners, engaging 60 faculty + 30 student/staff organizations + hundreds of K-12 partners to co-design, deliver, and assess high-quality pipeline interventions. We helped colleagues write, submit, and/or execute more than 70 grants and contracts to support K-20 STEM education efforts serving the region’s highest-need populations. By fall 2015-16, we had helped bring $23 million to campus for grants and projects with education components, helped colleagues conduct 30+ evaluations of education projects, and held 40+ teacher development efforts reaching hundreds of teachers and thousands of students. In fall 2015-16, $1,183,850 was awarded directly to community education partners for STEM education projects.

Current efforts include a large grant to develop nearly 80 teachers in leveraging UCSD science; a $1 million National Science Foundation grant leveraging our Supercomputer Center and CREATE’s knowledge of district change to launch 27 new AP Computer Science Principles courses in 19 7-12
schools in the region; and a significant three-year grant linking our region’s four largest low-income serving districts (plus Preuss and Gompers) in a San Diego Math Network, helping teachers support students successfully through the elementary-middle school transition in math. Put together, these efforts network opportunity to thousands of young people in hundreds of schools, particularly through investments in teacher development. Our partnership with district leaders helps push structural and sustainable changes district-wide in ways not possible in work with single schools alone. We come full circle by networking Preuss and Gompers into these broader regional relationships, doing both-and work to connect to single schools and many.

**Both-and: Universities supporting single schools and many schools**

With equity for many students continuously in mind, our goal is to achieve truly broad and deep regional impact with UCSD resources. Our investment in two stellar partnership schools (now leading to substantial UCSD enrollment) is a deep success on its own. Our investment in regional partnerships broadens our commitment and impact. This combination brings us closer to implementing a “both/and” strategy to achieve equity work at scale. See create.ucsd.edu for more information.

### References


This brief was prepared as part of a Presidential Session at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. The session was entitled, *Public Scholarship as Creating and Studying Excellent and Equitable Schools for a Diverse Democracy*. Participants in this session are listed below with their institutional affiliation.

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View the UC Network introductory video created for this session. Or visit, [https://ampersand.gseis.ucla.edu/aera-ucla-ed-highlights-uc-network-of-college-going-schools](https://ampersand.gseis.ucla.edu/aera-ucla-ed-highlights-uc-network-of-college-going-schools)