



Making A-G the Default Curriculum

HOW & WHERE IT'S HAPPENING

THE ISSUE

Schools that serve low-income students, EL students, and underrepresented students of color have, on average, more than 10 percent fewer a-g approved English courses than affluent high schools. When districts implement a-g as default they are automatically giving all students access to college preparatory coursework and the opportunity to graduate eligible for the UC/CSU systems, addressing the longstanding inequity in access to these courses. "A-g as default" requires that every student be automatically enrolled in the fifteen course sequence starting in 9th grade.

AN APPROACH

What makes a-g as default successful is the intentionality with which district and school leaders think about the pre-existing systemic barriers that prevent students from accessing and succeeding in the a-g course sequence, and the work they do to remove those barriers. This work often begins with reviewing data, then using these data to make strategic decisions about policies, practices, and resource allocation in order to meet the needs of their most vulnerable student populations. With a-g as default, high school graduation is not contingent upon successful completion of the a-g sequence. Rather, the emphasis is placed on creating positive learning environments with necessary supports, and building master schedules that ensure access to courses are based on students' needs.



Sanger High School, located in Fresno County, has successfully instituted a-g as the default curriculum by shifting structures and creating strong student supports. Some of these shifts include changing the high school graduation requirements from 2 to 3 years of science, mainstreaming English Learner (EL) students into the a-g sequence, and, with a few exceptions, ensuring that all courses (including CTE, or Career Technical Education) are a-g approved. To help students succeed in the a-g default curriculum and meet new high school graduation requirements, Sanger focused on creating and fostering a strong system of support for students by hiring Parent Student Advocates and intervention teachers.

Sanger's eight new "Parent Student Advocates" are college graduates, enrolled in school counseling programs, and most are also Sanger High alumni. They offer both academic guidance and social/emotional support to students, augmenting the support these students also receive from an academic counselor. Each advocate has a caseload of approximately 50 to 70 students needing Tier 3 supports, with whom they regularly check-in to ensure students are successful in college preparatory courses.¹

Additionally, Sanger's eight part-time intervention teachers—four English Language Arts and four math—provide Tier 2 academic supports for students who are struggling academically. Much like advocates, these part-time teachers pull students out during non-core courses to re-teach lessons and/or help students with specific assignments. They also offer in-class supports through a modified co-teaching model that allows students to have two academic teachers in English and math.

To help EL students' graduate college and career ready, the **Los Angeles Unified School District's (LAUSD)** team of secondary EL specialists and academic counselors used Laurie Olsen's report "Reparable Harm"² as a guide to create and implement a-g approved courses for long-term English learner (LTEL) students. They also worked closely with the UC system to make their LTEL courses a-g approved. Embedded within these courses are the standards for learning language, standards for English language arts, elements of AVID curricula, and work specific to students' social/emotional well-being.

To ensure students have equitable access to college preparatory coursework **Chaffey Joint Union High School District** also created a new administrative position at each school site: the Assistant Principal of Achievement. These administrators are expected to help increase students' a-g completion annually. They are responsible for monitoring ninth grade students' academic progress, their advancement toward a-g completion, and

instituting all of the necessary programs and interventions to ensure they can graduate from high school college and career ready.

Monrovia Unified School District also developed a new position: Director of Counseling, College and Careers. In this role, Dr. Catherine Real not only ensures every course in the district, with a few exceptions, is a-g approved, but also helped create a culture where school based academic counselors return to work two-weeks prior to the beginning of the school year. With the help of site based administrators, counselors are able to schedule twenty-minute summer appointments with students and their families.

Counselors use the individual twenty-minute meetings to discuss students' progress toward a-g completion and design a plan for the upcoming school year. The majority (87 percent) of families at **Monrovia High School** report finding these meetings very useful; additionally 96 percent of families shared that the individual appointments improved their involvement in their students' academic planning decisions.³ Through this practice, Monrovia Unified School District is ensuring students and families are supported and have a more personalized relationship with their counselors.

This system of supports at Sanger, LAUSD, Chaffey Joint Union, and Monrovia are examples demonstrating that when a-g as default is accompanied by the right supports, students can succeed academically in college preparatory coursework and graduate college and career ready.

1 For more information on Response to Intervention see RTI Action Network: A Program of the National Center for Learning Disabilities. What is RTI? <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti>

2 Laurie Olsen, "Reparable Harm: Fulfilling the Unkept Promise of Educational Opportunity for California's Long Term English Learners" (Long Beach, C.A.: Californians Together, 2010), <http://www.ctdev.changeagentsproductions.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/ReparableHarm2ndedition.pdf>

3 Monrovia Unified School District (2017), Parent Perception Data: Summer Registration Appointments at Monrovia High School.

Guiding Questions for Advocacy

- 1** Does your district/school automatically enroll students into an a-g curriculum? If so, how do you ensure this is possible?
- 2** What supports does your district/school offer first-generation students and their families who are navigating UC/CSU application requirements for the first time?
- 3** Does your district/school currently have a streamlined process for submitting courses (including EL and CTE) to the University of California Office of the President (UCOP) for approval? If so, what does this process look like?
- 4** How does your district/school monitor students' progress toward a-g completion? How is this information communicated to students and their families?



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