



ImpactLA

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Through Thick and Thin: Preparation, Collaboration, and Resilience for Success



Superintendent's Message



It is a pleasure to share the second issue of Impact LA, an LA Unified publication dedicated to elevating the strategies, tools, and voices that are

shaping the future of education across our District.

This issue centers on a shared understanding: resilience is a skill that can be developed. It is shaped by the environments we create, the relationships we foster, and the support we provide. Our students bring remarkable courage, perseverance, and optimism to their learning experiences. As educators, leaders, and support staff, we play a vital role in cultivating school communities that recognize those strengths, respond to complex needs, and help every learner thrive.

In the pages that follow, you'll find compelling examples of how LA Unified is building resilience—through data-informed practices, holistic support, and strategic collaboration. These stories illustrate how we are creating environments where students feel seen, supported, and empowered to succeed.

We hope this issue provides insight and inspiration as you plan, reflect, and lead in the year ahead.

Sincerely,

Alberto M. Carvalho,
Superintendent of Los Angeles Unified
School District

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Resilience: Skill, State of Mind, Ordinary Magic



adversity comes in the form of systemic inequities such as discrimination or community violence. Although these challenges vary, they all contribute to the complex reality that students must navigate daily.

Research shows that students dealing with persistent adversity may struggle to concentrate, engage, and complete coursework, and may have low self-esteem and mental health challenges. *Fortunately, by*

celebrating and cultivating students' resilience, we can support their wellbeing and development, mitigating the long-term effects of emotional struggles. Resilient students are more likely to regulate their emotions, maintain a sense of purpose, and cultivate agency. These strengths contribute to long-term success both in and outside the classroom.

Historically, resilience was seen as an inherent trait – something people either had or didn't. This perspective implied that some students were naturally better equipped to overcome adversity. However, research now provides a more hopeful and nuanced understanding of resilience as a state of mind developed over time. Psychologists and educators recognize resilience as a dynamic process, shaped by relationships, environments, and experiences; a capacity to recover from disturbances, emphasizing qualities like confidence and adaptability within cultural and institutional contexts influencing individual development. According to psychologist Ann Masten, *ordinary magic* is about the everyday, seemingly small things that can create positive changes in children's lives. These *ordinary magic* interactions are like tiny spells that build resilience, a child's ability to bounce back from challenges.



Educators play a transformative role in students' lives and can help them develop their *ordinary magic*. It is essential that school staff embrace a holistic approach when working with students – one that considers their academic, social-emotional, and physical well-being. This means not just preventing harm by implementing risk-focused strategies but also supporting students' strengths and reinforcing their social safety nets through protective efforts informed by timely and comprehensive data.

Links below offer resources to foster student's *ordinary magic* and resilience!

[Create opportunities for students to find connections](#)

[Foster positive relationships between students](#)

[Promote alternative thinking strategies for students](#)

[Teach students how to regulate emotions](#)

[Teach students how to think like optimists](#)

[Detect and reduce stressors for students early on](#)

[Teach students mindfulness to manage stress](#)

[Nurture the self-efficacy of students and the collective efficacy of classrooms](#)





A Holistic Data-Informed Approach to Support Students

Carrie Watson, Professional Expert, SD&E, Kevin Chow, Data Coordinator, Equitable School Performance Office - Data Champion Initiative, and Mark Raia, Director, Data and Technology, Equitable School Performance Office

Fostering a truly supportive educational environment requires that schools adopt a comprehensive, data-informed strategy that reflects the complexity of students' lives. Fortunately, our schools have access to integrated platforms that support this work in real time. For example, the *Whole Child Integrated Data Platform* enables educators to access academic, behavioral, and attendance data all at once, helping identify students exhibiting academic difficulty (e.g., those whose scores dropped between BOY and MOY) or demonstrating remarkable resilience (e.g., newcomers passing core classes). This centralized access empowers staff to proactively detect challenges and coordinate interventions, ensuring support is both responsive and equitable – [laying the groundwork for students not just to recover, but to thrive](#).



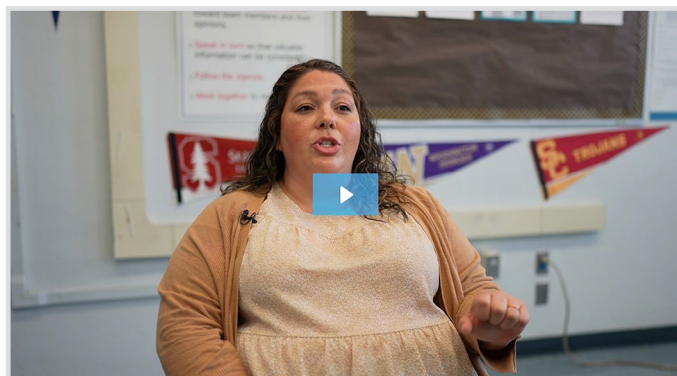
A holistic approach to student success goes beyond academics, addressing five interrelated dimensions: academic support, social and emotional learning and mental health, physical well-being, a safe and inclusive

learning environment, and active community and family engagement. Data-informed strategies in each of these areas enable schools to provide targeted, meaningful interventions:

A Holistic Data-Informed Approach to Support Students

- **Academic Support:** Weekly attendance, current grades, iReady assessments, and SBA scores reveal academic gaps, allowing educators to tailor interventions such as tutoring or targeted instruction.
- **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Mental Health:** Behavior incidents and attendance trends can uncover students' emotional or social struggles, prompting timely counseling and SEL support.
- **Physical Well-Being:** Health-related absenteeism and behavior patterns can inform wellness initiatives that address physical needs and promote learning readiness.
- **Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment:** School climate data – tracking when, where, and how incidents occur – as well as how students are feeling helps schools detect patterns of exclusion or bullying, guiding proactive efforts to foster inclusion and safety.
- **Community and Family Involvement:** Aggregated student and schoolwide data can shape strategies for family engagement, including communication, workshops, and partnerships that strengthen the home-school connection.

A data-informed approach is most effective when coupled with a structured process for continuous improvement. The PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act) cycle provides a practical framework to guide and refine these interventions. Widely used across the District, PDSA is a framework for testing and learning from changes, helping to refine and improve processes or interventions in a cyclical, iterative manner.

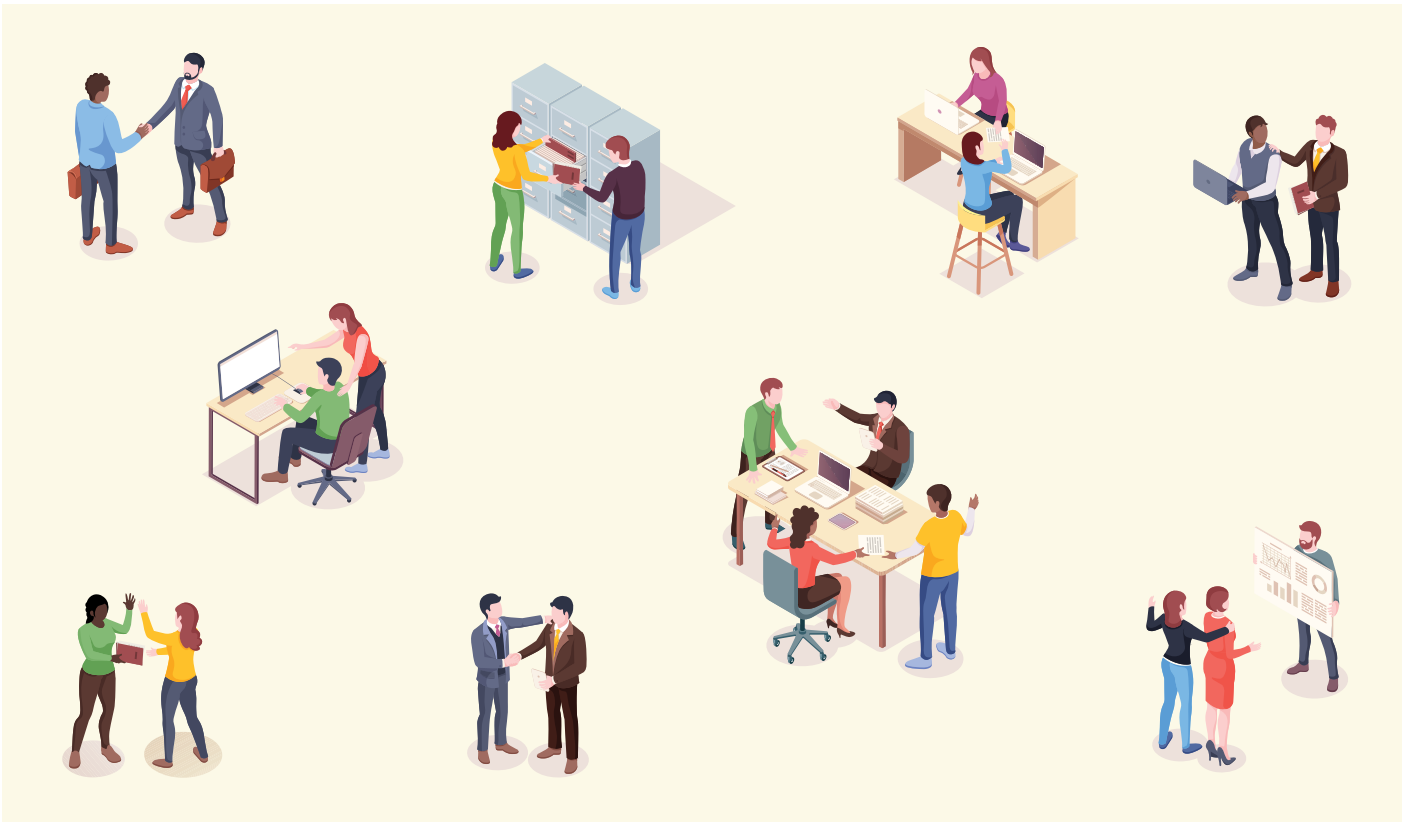


Schools across the district are already demonstrating the impact of this holistic approach. For instance, Madison Middle School used *Whole Child* to support their PDSA cycles:

- **Plan:** Madison Middle School aimed to promote data-driven instruction and teacher collaboration through their PDSA cycles. Recognizing the need for easy access to real-time, comprehensive data, they introduced the platform to consolidate multiple data sources.
- **Do:** Teachers used the platform to access data such as attendance, grades, iReady scores, and SBA results. This enabled informed data chats with students to support reflection and goal setting. The school also introduced a custom iReady tracker to boost student engagement with their performance data.
- **Study:** Staff used it to monitor student progress and evaluate intervention effectiveness. By tracking growth metrics (e.g., 90% reaching typical growth by MOY), the school demonstrated a clear improvement in outcomes.
- **Act:** Building on these insights, Madison staff planned to offer differentiated PD based on teacher data fluency, highlight success stories, and better support students through targeted data analysis.

Students are motivated to try their best when they trust school personnel have their best interests at heart. When done correctly and with sensitivity, Data Chats (teacher-student data review sessions) build trust. Similarly, strategic collaborations among school staff are built on trust. Trust fuels healthy relationships, productive group dynamics and builds self-efficacy which contributes to resilience. Resilience flourishes through the support and guidance of a trusted mentor and it grows through positive experiences inside and outside the school walls.

By embracing holistic, data-informed strategies, schools can respond to the full range of student needs with intention and care. [These approaches help create supportive environments where students feel seen, supported, and empowered to succeed.](#) When schools center on the whole child, they lay the foundation for lasting growth and resilience.



The Power of Collaboration: How Instructional Leadership Teams Strengthen Holistic, Data-Informed Practices

Carrie Watson, Professional Expert, SD&E, and Octavio Pescador, Program Evaluation and Research Coordinator, SD&E

School leadership is a team effort. As schools navigate increasingly complex needs, distributed leadership is more essential than ever. Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs) offer a structured way to bring key voices together, build shared ownership over goals, and make data-informed decisions that center on equity and student success. School leaders starting or strengthening an ILT can create the right conditions for collaboration, trust, and transformation. *Effective ILTs are a good vehicle for holistic, data-informed conversations in support of student resiliency.*



The Power of Collaboration: How Instructional Leadership Teams Strengthen Holistic, Data-Informed Practices

A strong ILT brings clarity, focus, and follow-through to holistically-based school improvement efforts. ILTs are most effective when their goals are guided by a shared vision of equitable and excellent instruction. A pedagogy that defines the adult practices that support holistic student success. With a clear vision in place, it's essential to establish habits and systems that make the work actionable. Key steps to building clarity and focus within the ILT include:

- **Set group norms.** Establishing clear agreements about how the team works together. These agreements clarify expectations, support productive conflict, and enable all members to contribute freely.
- **Run structured meetings.** Rotating roles like facilitator, notetaker, and timekeeper can help distribute responsibility. A clear agenda with time limits keeps meetings focused.
- **Clarify decision-making.** Transparency is key. Not all decisions will be made by consensus, so it's important to be clear about which decisions are shared, and which are leadership-driven. Data should guide choices about which problems of practice to prioritize.

Staff reflected on the importance of clarity and focus in their team and shared how they helped prevent overload while driving deeper commitment.

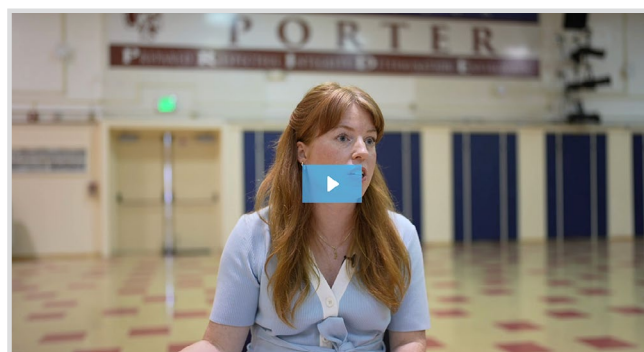


I have different committees, different groups because I don't want to always [burden] the same teachers. They meet with me and we flesh out the dates, the times. We do that for everything that's high leverage for me, because then I have better buy-in... Let's do three good things together... and let's see if we show growth in every domain. To me, that's more important.



—ILT Member, Region North

Once the team is grounded in a clear purpose and structured to collaborate well, the next step is staying focused – and that is where data comes in. *ILTs can help shift the conversation from perception to evidence.* Rather than jumping from one issue to the next, strong teams use data to prioritize and deepen their work over time. They use data to gain a holistic understanding of their students and devise individualized strategies to support their resilience. Some strategies that help teams use data effectively include:



- **Use disaggregated data to focus your work.** Analyzing school wide trends can help identify common goals. Data protocols reduce bias and shine a light on where adult practices need to shift.
- **Build a culture of data use.** Encourage regular reflection on student work. Formative, short-cycle assessments, for example quizzes and observations, support tracking growth and providing students with actionable feedback.
- **Track progress and adjust.** Monitor data to see what's working and be willing to shift strategies based on what the evidence shows.

Building a culture of consistent data use is what keeps an ILT aligned and responsive. One ILT member in a Region East school described how regular data conversations and disciplined routines help their team stay focused on what matters most:

“ We meet every week... and we look at data. We are constantly changing our intervention groups. We’re talking about the PDSA cycle. So yeah, it’s just a lot of consistency, a lot of looking at data. ”

–ILT Member, Region East

Effective use of data doesn’t happen automatically – it takes time, support, and leadership development. ILTs lead meaningful change when team members have opportunities to grow their skills, reflect on their impact, and receive ongoing coaching. Some ways to support leadership development across the team include:



- **Provide professional learning on team roles.** A high-performing team thrives when everyone is learning and growing together. Targeted training can help build skills in resilience, communication, and facilitation.
- **Align on classroom observations.** ILT members should conduct consistent, high-quality observations and deliver feedback that supports improvement.
- **Coach your team.** Just as ILT members coach teachers, they too benefit from coaching. This supports continuous improvement and helps teams adopt innovative, effective strategies.



At the heart of this work is trust. Leadership doesn’t grow in isolation – it develops in environments where team members feel safe to learn, take risks, and support one another. Trust is what allows teams to move forward together:



“ It also takes a lot of, I believe, trust... That we are all working to the best of our ability to do our roles, and to provide that support for teachers, students, and parents. ”

–ITL Member Region West

Strong ILTs don’t replace school leadership – they extend it. When teams are structured well, grounded in purpose, and supported to lead, they help schools act with greater coherence and create important impact. Educator teams working together building trust and sharing data enhance their ability to support student resilience, helping youth adapt, recover, and succeed.



Share Your Thoughts



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