



Press Release

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Renowned Educational Researcher Explores Whittier Union's Culture of Collaboration

WHITTIER, CA – Whittier Union provides a rare example of a collaborative culture that successfully boosts student achievement and teacher development, according to international education expert Michael Fullan, who last week visited the site as part of case study on high-achieving school districts.

Now in year two of the three-year project, Fullan on Feb. 3 interviewed administrators about the District's collaborative culture to support teachers and met with a team of English teachers, who act as leaders and mentors to peers at their school sites, to discuss best practices and the importance of teamwork to improve student growth and learning.

"A lot of other districts want to move in this direction," said Fullan, the former dean of the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. "Only about 10 percent of schools do what Whittier Union does. Fifty percent of districts want to do it, but don't know how to do it and some just never get there."

"How does a teacher get better at their pedagogy, their teaching? Innovative pedagogy leads to student success," Fullan said. "If you're in this District, you should be growing and learning from day one."

Whittier Union is one of four school districts in the state – along with Fresno, Long Beach and Twin Rivers – participating in the case study, which builds on Fullan's ongoing work to study how districts improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

Fullan is noted for his expertise in education and advising state and national policymakers, local school leaders and California school districts on systems reforms, including a 10-district collaboration under the California Office to Reform Education (CORE).

During his visit to Whittier Union, teacher leaders and coaches discussed their weekly course-alike meetings on their sites and the quarterly District best practices meetings, which give them the opportunity to analyze assessments and data; review curriculum, instructional practice and effective teaching standards; and share and compare strategies to take students to the next level.

He and his team have analyzed Whittier Union's student achievement data and continue to collect data through interviews with teachers, focus groups and observation of classroom and teacher professional learning activities.

Through this process, Fullan will be able to both validate and recommend improvements in the collaborative work being done at Whittier Union.

“Michael Fullan is one of the most respected educational authorities in the world and his research has been instrumental to our District establishing a culture that values professional collaboration and targeted support for our teachers and students,” Superintendent Sandra Thorstenson said. “Our staff has worked diligently to bring this culture to fruition and is directly responsible for the District’s success. We are thrilled to be an example to other districts who work every day to ensure their students thrive.”

PHOTO CAPTION:

FULLAN: Educational researcher Michael Fullan meets with some of Whittier Union’s English teacher leads to discuss best practices meetings on Feb. 3. Whittier Union is part of Fullan’s three-year case study, which builds on his ongoing work to study how districts improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

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The Whittier Union High School District provides all students with an engaging, quality standards-based instructional program delivered by a well-trained staff resulting in improved student achievement.

Whittier Union High School District works to achieve and maintain excellence in providing a comprehensive education for all students.

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