

Cal-PASS

Transitions

Success at Every Level

From the Executive Director: On Growth & Perkins IV

From our humble beginnings in 1998, Cal-PASS has grown in membership to more than 4,000 K-16 institutions in 46 counties and houses more than 195 million records. There are currently 55 Professional Learning Councils (PLCs) across the state with more than 1,000 K-16 faculty meeting monthly in English, math, EL/ESL, science, counseling and career technical education, reviewing research on student transition and success and suggesting improvements in practice that Cal-PASS funds and evaluates.

One of the ways to determine if an organization is making an impact is to assess how well it is integrated into state operations and other activities. From the state perspective, Cal-PASS was recently

named in the California Career Technical Education State Plan as the data provider for local, state and federal Perkins IV reporting. Perkins IV is a significant change in reporting from the previous system and numerous accountability provisions have been added that focus on tracking students from high schools to community colleges.

Cal-PASS is honored to do this work and while we did not seek this role, now that we have been designated, this does put us in a different relationship with our members. Cal-PASS has always been voluntary; we want members to want our services. While serving in this capacity is a great boost to us, there are some issues that need clarification.

First, there is a perception that the state is making schools and colleges join. That is not true. If a school or college has another way to report the required information to the state and federal government, then they do not have to join. Since we are a free service, it does seem like a good thing to do, as developing these kinds of sharing relationships can be costly. However, it is up to the institution to make this commitment, not Cal-PASS.

Data to be reported to the federal government include only elements that we are already collecting, so institutions do not need to add any further data to be

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Cal-PASS on the Move!

PLCs more than double in number over '07-'08, now totaling 55 statewide with more than 1,000 participating faculty.

The Cal-PASS database currently contains more than 195 million student, course and award records, with the 200 millionth record on the horizon.

Successful PLC innovations in math and English will be scaled up this coming year.

The IT department is gearing up to incorporate electronic signature technology, aiming to simplify processes and create a green office.

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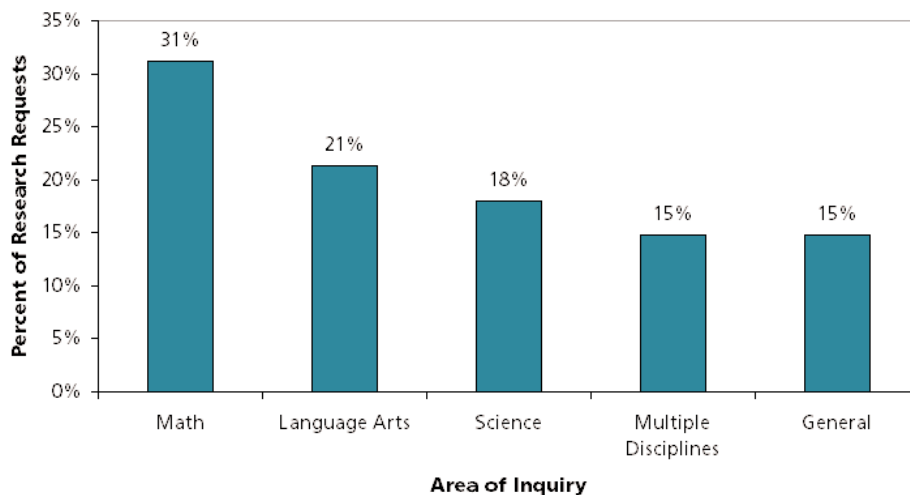
Spotlight on Data:

Research Across the Curricula

As the academic year ends, Cal-PASS researchers are completing reports for the Professional Learning Councils (PLCs) and preparing for summer projects. For '07-'08, the Cal-PASS research staff has completed nearly 60 reports with several to go. One-third of the requests came from the San Diego-Imperial consortium, the oldest Cal-PASS consortium, while other requests were generously spread around the state including many new PLCs. Math continues to be the most frequently studied discipline, but the subject did not constitute the majority of requests (see figure). This year, the requests have been evenly distributed among disciplines with an increase in interdisciplinary research.

One interdisciplinary study involved both math and science as the research team evaluated the preliminary effectiveness of the MoCHA (mathematics of chemistry) project. The MoCHA project targets successful high school and college students who plan on enrolling in chemistry but who have struggled in math. Students are provided a summer course designed to bolster critical math skills for success in chemistry. This project was inspired, in part, by an interdisciplinary report from October 2007

Percent of 2007–2008 research requests by area of inquiry.



(Report 2007004), which provided information on the relationship between eighth grade English and math and high school science achievement. Two major projects emerged from this report: the MoCHA project and an evidence-based advising guide for high school counselors to use when placing students in high school science courses. This advising project is still in the implementation phase and will be evaluated in the future.

For MoCHA, the researchers were asked to analyze student success in the MoCHA course compared with a high school peer group that did not have MoCHA instruction. Preliminary results suggest that MoCHA participants may have a higher GPA in high school chemistry than groups not in the program. MoCHA faculty members are reviewing this early evaluation as they prepare for another round of implementation this summer.

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Career Technical Education Projects

Cal-PASS is involved in a number of special projects supported by funds outside of its primary funding stream from the state. Funding from the Irvine Foundation supports work in career technical education (CTE), including the Career Advancement Academies initiative of the Community College Chancellor's Office. Cal-PASS also assists local educational agencies as they develop their local partnerships for federal Perkins CTE funds, which are submitted at the state level.

The Career Advancement Academies initiative funds three consortia of colleges in California to contextualize basic skills courses for specific career paths. With one-fourth of community colleges in California participating, addressing the data collection and reporting functions can be a burden. Cal-PASS is developing data templates to support reporting requirements and local improvement efforts, as well as custom data upload methods so that college faculty can enter data not typically included in the Cal-PASS data set. It is anticipated that this custom Web-based upload procedure will be a model for future projects that need to link students' academic information in the Cal-PASS database to student information not routinely collected.

Cal-PASS staff also provide information to colleges, school districts, and other groups with a stake in the federal Perkins CTE funding stream. Presentations to local CTE consortia explain Cal-PASS' involvement in the program and how to respond to requests for applications for these funds. Staff also have made presentations to the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) CTE Council and California Community College Association for Occupational Education (CCAOE) as well as other stakeholder groups to ensure that everyone is prepared to receive the CTE funds for which they are eligible.

PLC Growth Hits New High

Since this time last year, the number of Cal-PASS Professional Learning Councils (PLCs) has more than doubled. From 25 PLCs at the end of 2007, there are now 55 flourishing Cal-PASS PLCs from Eureka to San Diego and from San Francisco to Yucaipa. Approximately 1,000 faculty members representing middle schools, high schools, community colleges and universities now meet with colleagues in discipline-specific, regionally based councils to look at student data, analyze misalignments in curriculum, and develop innovations aimed at helping to align curriculum, increase student transition and decrease the number of students disappearing from the education pipeline.

Here are some highlights of PLC activities and discussions:

- Four math PLCs and a science PLC from San Diego County held a joint meeting this spring to showcase their PLCs' accomplishments and to share resources (see accompanying picture). This event was so well-received they decided to make this an annual event and other PLCs across the state have decided to follow their example.

- PLC co-chairs from three disciplines in San Bernardino County presented their PLC's work and future plans to their superintendents and presidents at the High Desert P-16 meeting, which

was also attended by California State University San Bernardino President Dr. Albert Karnig, Victor Valley College President Dr. Robert Silverman, and San Bernardino County Superintendent Dr. Herbert Fischer.

- Math and science PLCs in Sonoma County have begun working in their respective PLCs and collaboratively toward increasing the number of STEM majors in college. They are in the planning stages for developing innovations in their region to meet these needs.



San Diego county PLCs meet this past spring.

Several Cal-PASS PLC innovations were completed this academic year. Two have been chosen for expansion at this time:

- The English high school mentoring pilot innovation, in which university faculty worked with an entire high school English department to bring expository reading and writing skills more fully into the standards-based curriculum, completed its third year. English CST scores at the high school have risen consistently in the three years of the pilot and the school's API score rose 25 points in the last year. This pilot has

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Code Name *Green* Means Digital

Go green.

You hear it everywhere, but what does it mean? For Cal-PASS, a large part of being green means being paperless, but just how easy is this to do, and is it practical?

All of us have to shift our thinking to accept a process that is different from what we have been doing. Going paperless means more than scanning and saving things electronically. At Cal-PASS, trying to go paperless raises an important question: How can documents be kept "legal," yet stored electronically in a way that can easily be found and used? The technology is out there.

The technologies for efficient storage and search have matured so that IT personnel can use them with minimal additions of new programming or operating systems (one of the technologies used at Cal-PASS is Microsoft Office SharePoint Server). The other side of the issue is the legality of the electronic documents. While storage technology has evolved enough to require almost no additional user training, digital signature technology is just reaching a level that allows for smooth integration without complicated processes.

What is a "digital signature"?

A digital signature (as opposed to an "electronic" or "digitized" signature, which is just a scanned image of a handwritten signature) is a technology that makes electronic documents legal from the perspective of entities such as the federal government, the American Bar Association, and many others. This technology provides tools to assure the recipient

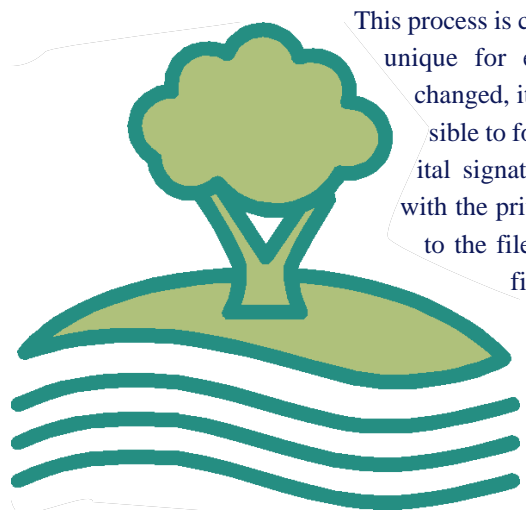
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Green Means Digital *cont.*

ent of a document that the signing parties are who they say they are. It also preserves the integrity of the content of the document, making sure that the document has not been changed since it was signed. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) has issued a definition and a standard (<http://www.nist.gov/publicaffairs/releases/digsigst.htm>) for digital signatures. Many vendors have implemented this concept, and their processes are compatible with each other.

How does it work?

Each user is given two keys, a public key and a private key. The public key can only encrypt text; the private key can both encrypt and decrypt the text. These processes are built into the software and are transparent to the user. The signer uses special software or a digital signature component built into software, like Microsoft Word or Adobe Professional, to compress the document into a few lines of text, or “document digest.”



This process is called “hashing.” The message digest is unique for each document. If the document is changed, its digest is recalculated and it is impossible to forge. Once the digest is created, the digital signature software then encrypts the digest with the private key and attaches the resulting text to the file (this is all invisible to the user). The

file can be sent via e-mail, published on a Web site or stored, but the signature will always remain with the file. When a different user needs to use the file and make sure that the file is signed by the right person and the contents have not been altered since it

was signed, he or she uses similar software (like the signing software, it’s tightly and seamlessly integrated with office automation products) to perform those functions. The software then uses the signer’s public key to take the document’s content, calculate document digest and encrypt it. If the resulting text matches the one attached to the file, the document is good. This process validates the integrity of the content of the document, but in order to verify the authenticity of the signature, the software verifies the signer’s public key. While these steps sound complicated, the user does not have to do anything laborious or complicated. With current digital signature solutions, users only have to right-click on a document and select “Sign” or “Verify Signature.”

Cal-PASS uses a third-party solution that is integrated into a Microsoft Active Directory environment and is currently in the process of integrating digital signature technology. Next on the list is automating the paper-intensive MOU process, moving Cal-PASS closer to the goal of being a paperless office.

New Associate Director

Cal-PASS is pleased to welcome Lauren Davis Sosenko as the new associate director for Special Projects. Prior to joining Cal-PASS, Sosenko was a project director in evaluation research at WestEd. She brings experience in evaluation research, state and federal education improvement efforts, and policy. She holds a bachelors degree in social anthropology from the University of Michigan and a master’s degree in justice, law, and society from American University in Washington, DC. Sosenko’s initial assignments will be managing work with the Irvine Foundation’s concurrent enrollment initiative and working with consortia in the Los Angeles region with funding from the Gilbert Foundation. She also will oversee Cal-PASS’ internal evaluation and continuous improvement efforts.

Spotlight *cont.*

The research staff also presented at several conferences last year including the Student Success Conference, the California Association of Institutional Research (CAIR) conference, the California Education Researchers’ Association (CERA) conference, and the Research and Planning Group (RP Group) conference. In addition, the Cal-PASS research office is partnering with other research organizations and foundations to participate in specialized studies and evaluations of student success projects. Many of these efforts involve the Cal-PASS IT team to help create more user-accessible queries and data cubes for project planning and evaluation for Cal-PASS participants.



2007–2008 IT Activity

This year, the annual Cal-PASS data collection brought an enthusiastic response, and there are now more than 195 million student, course and award records in the database. Cal-PASS looks forward to celebrating their 200 millionth record soon!

Other key activities this academic year were:

- Field requests indicated the need to be able to report on course enrollments with more detail. In response, the Data Dictionary v. 7.0 now includes additional fields for K–12 course records and high school exit exams.

- More Cal-PASS scripts became available for use with the various student information systems at K–12 districts. Currently there are extracts or utilities for Eagle Aeries, SASI (for all users, not just CSIS districts), Powerschool and QSS.

- The IT department worked with a CSU member school to develop code which queries the university database through Peoplesoft. Those queries are now available to any CSU.

- To provide better customer service, Cal-PASS hired a data technician to staff the help desk full time. Every member contact is recorded and tracked from initial contact through resolution. This information feeds into a knowledge base that will assist IT in future troubleshooting and improve the User's Guide and tutorials (help@calpass.org).

- On the myCal-PASS portal site (<http://my.calpass.org>), users can submit and download data (with appropriate authorization), query the database, share documents, chat with colleagues, and check calendars for PLC meetings. Cal-PASS is constantly improving this site and recently has expanded the functionality to include easier site registration, a registration tutorial, conference registration for PLC co-chairs and regional coordinators, and an up-to-date “dashboard” type information interface for staff.

- Cal-PASS data are available to users via custom reports, on-line queries and, for certain authorized users, via record downloads. The data download page in myCal-PASS has a new look and feel to make the user experience better. Users can now order data via a tree. Tree content is restricted by a member's MOU Sharelist. After ordering the data files, data are extracted directly from the database, ensuring the most current results.

- Data quality is a top priority at Cal-PASS and the Cal-PASS validation program is the foundation for successful, high quality data submissions. To improve data quality, the validation program now includes pre-submission analysis reports. These reports provide the user with immediate feedback on what is included in the submission. They contain frequency distributions of all of the values for every element in the student, course and award files being submitted. IT has also added new components to the validation program that include version checking to ensure the user always has the latest version; the ability to validate specific custom files (formerly called optional files) for some special projects; CSU file conversion from Peoplesoft queries; links to all updated data submission-related sites and documents, such as the User's Guide and Data Dictionary. Future modifications to the validation program include combining the steps for validating and submitting data via the Web for a more seamless process.

- As Cal-PASS strives to create a paperless office, the IT department is implementing more electronic solutions to forms management, document storage and electronic communication. Currently focused on internal processes, IT will be expanding to MOU processing

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CONFERENCE KEYNOTE SPEAKER CHOSEN

Rich Neimand, an expert on messaging who has been instrumental in helping communicate the Cal-PASS message, will be the keynote speaker at the June conference in Pasadena. Neimand is an exciting speaker and Cal-PASS is delighted to have him.

PLC Growth *cont.*

been so successful that plans are underway to scale it to two other sites in the 2008–2009 school year.

- Another successful pilot involved teaching applied algebra to chemistry students to increase success in their chemistry classes. A PLC member involved in the original project will be training other teachers in a different part of the state on how to develop their own summer bridge program in algebra for incoming chemistry students.

In June, representatives from all 55 Cal-PASS PLCs will meet in Pasadena with the entire Cal-PASS staff to learn what is happening across the state in their discipline, what resources are available to them from Cal-PASS and from other Cal-PASS PLCs, and how to more effectively ask for and use data, and they will have an opportunity to share the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of their Cal-PASS PLC work to date. Look for a report on the outcomes of this conference in the fall newsletter.



From the Executive Director *cont.*

compliant. In addition, there is no special software that institutions have to purchase in order to upload their data to Cal-PASS. In fact, some large student information system vendors are already providing Cal-PASS scripts to schools at no charge and have been doing so for the last few years. If a school does not have capacity to efficiently create this upload, the RFP provides that a college may use up to \$10,000 to assist K–12s in uploading data. Cal-PASS is also available to help and we have been working hard to ensure efficient and accurate uploads to the system.

On a macro-scale, by having Cal-PASS act as the data provider, the state does not need to invent a costly system, as many states are engaged in right now. According to Robin Harrington of the Chancellor's Office:

The System Office of the California Community Colleges and the California Department of Education (which collaboratively facilitated the development of the 2008–2012 California State Plan for Career Technical Education) are keenly aware of data requirements mandated under Perkins IV, the federal Carl D. Perkins Career Technical Education Act. Together, these lead educational agencies asked Cal-PASS if they could assist California in meeting the Perkins IV reporting requirements. Cal-PASS is widely recognized as the only statewide organization within California that has developed a system to track students across the educational segments and has a proven track record of success.

Cal-PASS' ability to conduct this work at a low cost to the state preserves funding that goes directly to these critical programs, not to a costly new data tracking system.

Regardless of why schools and colleges join, there are a number of benefits that come with membership. The most important is the ability to track students' transition and success across the segments. As always, there is no charge for this service and our researchers are able to assist schools, college and universities in this work. There remains no other way to track students across segments in a cost-effective way.

Finally, we have been asked to be the data provider for a number of statewide and regional grants. We are grateful to be included and funders now have an opportunity to see how their funding affects student transition and success beyond the initial institution that students attend.

2007–2008 IT Activity *cont.*

soon (renewals, modifications to existing MOUs, as well as new MOUs). To assist Cal-PASS staff with managing the MOUs, the IT department has an organization management system where IT staff can track an MOU and other information about districts. This system is being tested by IT and will be ported to a Web-based application soon to be available to all Cal-PASS staff, enabling anyone to get a current status about any district/institution.

Comments and suggestions for improving the IT and data collection arenas are welcome. Send ideas to help@calpass.org.

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