

California Comprehensive Center: Successful Schools and Districts

Prepared by the American Institutes for Research

Central Union High School Central Union High School District

Quick School Facts

Enrollment	1,836
Average class size	28
Grade span	9-12
Location	El Centro
County	Imperial

Source: California Basic Educational Data Systems (CBEDS) and Academic Performance Index, 2006-07.

Quick Student Facts

Percent free/reduced lunch	50%
Percent minority	93%
Percent English Learners	34%
Percent Special Education	5%

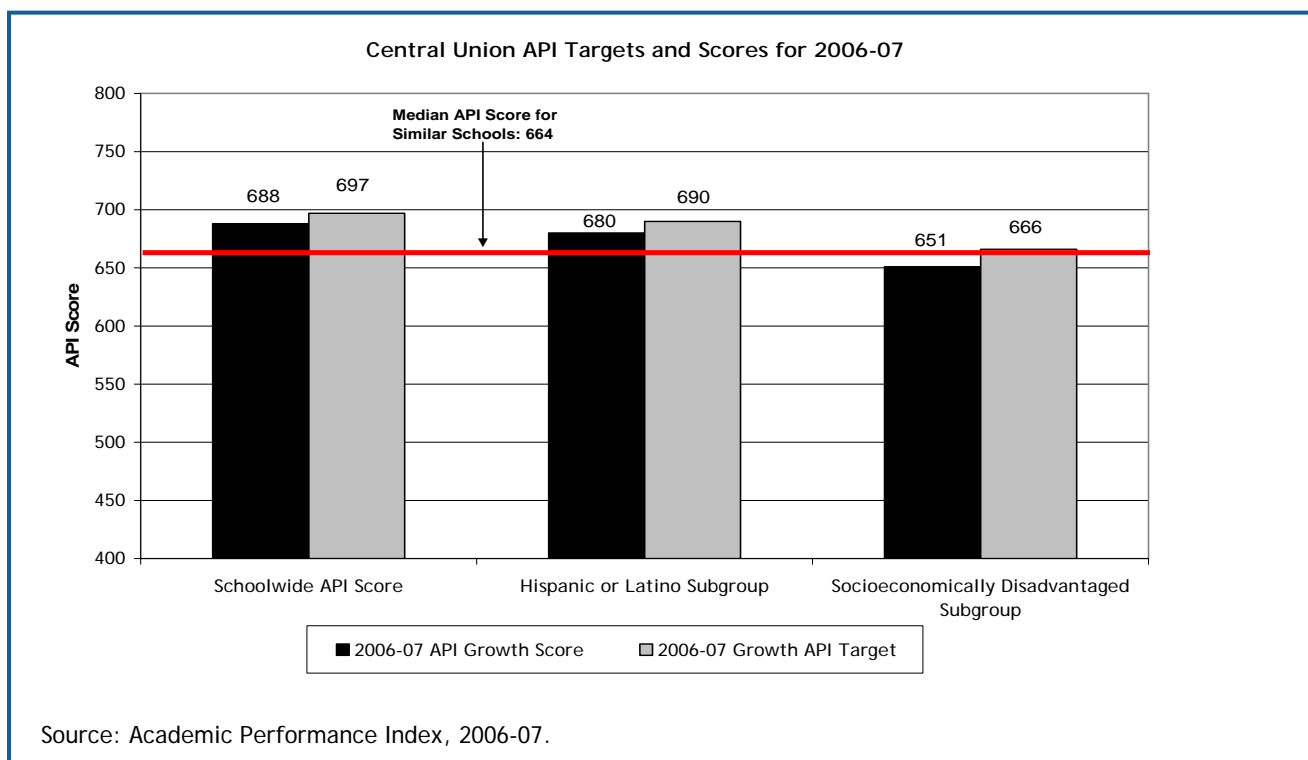
Source: California Basic Educational Data Systems (CBEDS) and Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program, 2006-07.

School Rankings

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Similar Schools Ranking	10	9	9	9
Statewide Ranking	5	5	5	5

Source: Academic Performance Index, 2003-04 through 2006-07.

2006-07 API: Schoolwide and Subgroup Scores



Recognitions of Central Union's Success:

Central Union was selected a California Distinguished School in 2007. Its school jazz band is ranked in the top 20 in the US. The school's Academic Decathlon team has been county champions for 29 consecutive years.

Why Central Union Was Selected

To identify a pool of high-performing schools we examined student and school performance data from 2003-2007. An overview of our methodology is posted on this website. Generally, we selected schools to highlight based on the following criteria:

- **Substantially higher performance than predicted**
As indicated by a Similar Schools rank of 9, Central Union students are performing above the levels of their peers in similar schools.
- **Meeting or exceeding subgroup performance standards**
Central Union students in all subgroups are meeting or exceeding Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals.
- **Sustained performance over time**
Central Union has never been identified for program improvement under No Child Left Behind and has met all AYP requirements. Furthermore, Central Union has met all Academic Performance Index (API) targets across all subgroups.
- **High poverty**
50% of Central Union students are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch.
- **No selectivity in admissions**
Central Union serves neighborhood students within their attendance zone.

Factors in Central Union's Success

A main contributor to Central Union's success is its emphasis on improving instructional practice through a system and culture that incorporates routine formal and informal classroom observations, analysis of instructional techniques, and feedback on teacher practices.

Central Union's district has a monitoring plan that includes a component called "Data in a Day." For "Data in a Day," the principal, assistant principals, academic coaches, and department chairs visit and observe classrooms in pairs for 20 minutes each throughout the day. These visits occur four times a year, and the observation teams include not only school administrators but also a rotating set of teachers and some district personnel. The teams observe and code various facets of a teacher's classroom instruction through the use of an observation protocol. These areas include classroom environment, instructional practices and techniques related to standards, teacher and student interactions, levels of student thinking, and assessment of student learning. Observers debrief afterwards to ensure the reliability of their observations and to provide feedback to teachers.

The "Data in a Day" strategy is one important part of an overall system that encourages improvement in instructional practice through critical examination and accountability. The principal and other administrators, for example, do 3-minute walk-throughs to every classroom in the school at least once a week to gain a larger picture of classroom instruction. The superintendent and assistant superintendent sometimes join these walk-throughs and provide feedback to the administrators, which in turn helps the administrators guide teacher instruction. Also, academic coaches informally observe and assist teachers throughout the year, and teachers are themselves encouraged to observe other teachers. All of these activities have fostered an atmosphere where teachers are open to improving their skills and techniques in the classroom through both informal collegial feedback and formalized observation and analysis.

How Central Union’s District Provides Support

- Collaboration between district and school**
 The District Improvement Team meets every other month and the District Leadership Team meets monthly to ensure that school staff are all participating in the same types of staff development and interventions. In addition, a Site Leadership Team meets weekly to discuss site-specific issues and to provide further communication with the district.
- Flexibility in the use of funds**
 The district allows Central Union to exercise flexibility in its funding allocation created through the school site plan. All of the teachers have input into the site plan, and every teacher is asked what he or she needs. As a result of this flexibility, Central Union has purchased technological tools such as LCD projectors.
- District-wide monitoring plan for accountability**
 Central Union High School District provides a systemic, coherent accountability plan for all schools that includes the “Data in a Day” as described previously.

Students

Snapshot of the Key to Central Union’s Success:

Data collection, analysis, and classroom observations are key to improving instruction.

Vision Statement:

All students are part of a caring community where each member is valued and will be free and safe, and where all students will grow in a positive learning environment.

	Central Union	Statewide High School Average
Percent students eligible for free/reduced price lunch	50%	39%
Percent students with parent education level at high school degree or greater	80%	79%
Percent minority students	93%	63%
Percent American Indian	0%	2%
Percent Asian	1%	8%
Percent Pacific Islander	0%	1%
Percent Filipino	0%	2%
Percent Hispanic	89%	41%
Percent African American	3%	9%
Percent English learner (EL) students	34%	15%
Percent special education students	5%	9%

Source: California Basic Educational Data Systems (CBEDS) and Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program, 2006-07.

How Central Union Develops Teacher Capacity

- **Staff development focused on instructional strategies**
Staff learn to use English learner strategies, which focus on building academic competencies in children through three areas: language, content, and study skills. Teachers are also taught a particular approach to teaching students from low-income backgrounds. In addition, staff attend external trainings focused on Stiggins Assessment for Learning. These Stiggins trainings show teachers how to work in learning teams to understand how to assess for learning, and subsequently attendees are able to train other teachers at the school in the use of the program.
- **Academic coaches offer follow-up support**
Two academic coaches (shared between two schools), who were former English teachers at Central Union, support teachers in the follow-up of staff development.

Staff

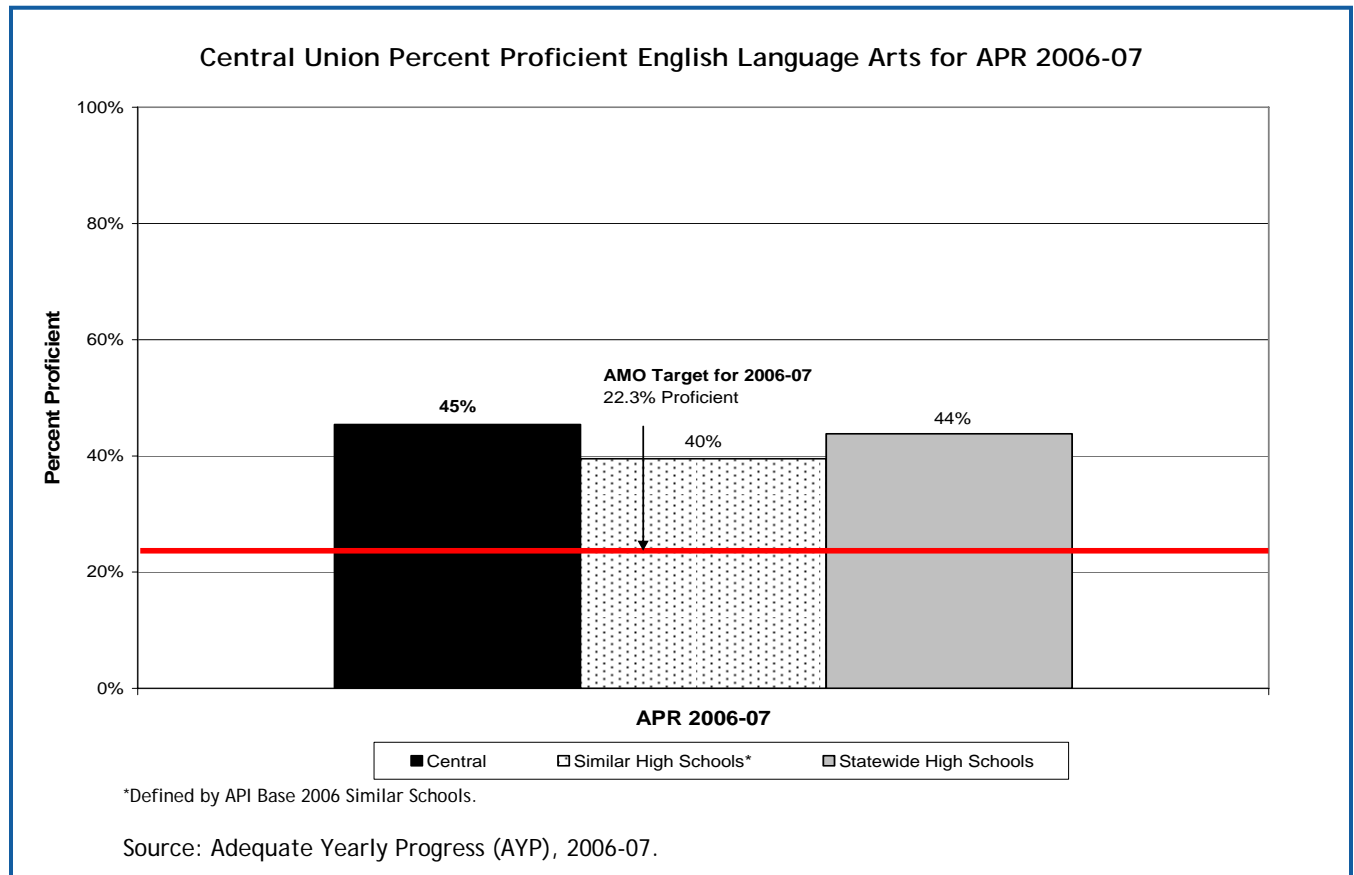
	Central Union	Statewide High School Average
Total Administrators	4	4
Total Pupil Services (counselors, nurses, etc.)	5	4
Total Teachers	85	52
Average Years in Education	14	12
Percent Teachers with greater than Bachelor's Degree	69%	80%
Percentage with Full Credential	81%	90%
Total Paraprofessionals	8	13
Total Office Staff/Clerical	10	9

Source: California Basic Educational Data Systems (CBEDS), 2006-07.

How Central Union Targets Instruction

- **Provide teachers with frequent observation feedback**
Four times a year, administrators and teachers visit classrooms to observe and collect data on teachers' instructional practices and student responses. Observers use a structured observation protocol to code observations. The protocol includes a rating of levels of student thinking based on Bloom's taxonomy. Observers meet to discuss ratings and increase the reliability of their observations before giving their observations to teachers.
- **Review observation data to improve instruction**
The observation data teachers receive help them reflect on their teaching and make improvements. Administrators also put the data collected into a spreadsheet in aggregate form and go over the data with teachers.

Percent Proficient: English Language Arts



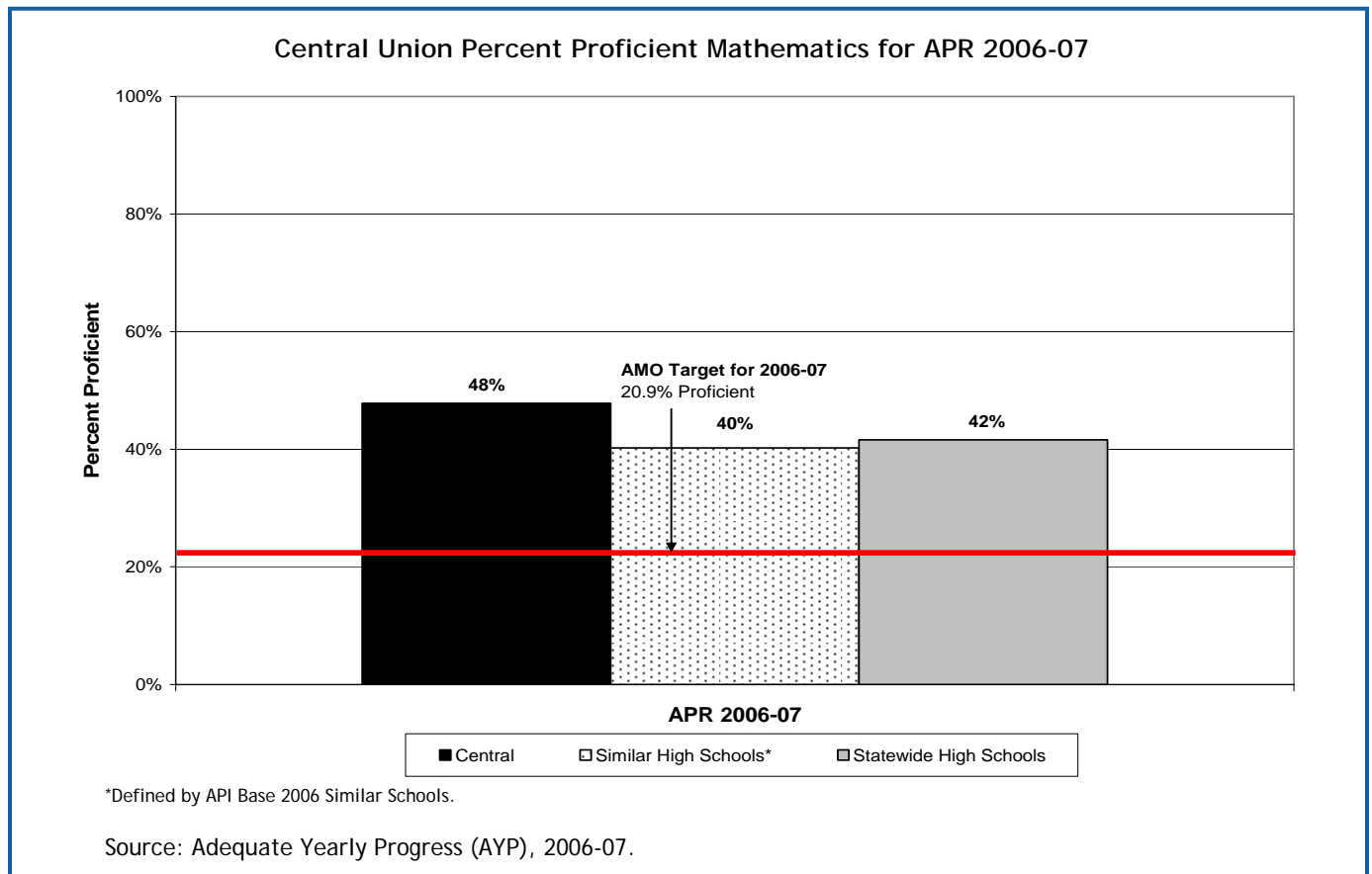
How Central Union Uses Data

- Regularly examine data to identify areas of need**
 Several times a year, the school uses data reports, called "Springboards for Success," to show teachers combined output of each student's GPA, CST scores, CAHSEE scores, and grades in various classes. These data help teachers determine what instructional support students may need by providing a clear picture of a student's academic growth and struggles over time.
- Use common assessments to gauge student achievement**
 Teachers in the core content areas create, administer, and analyze common assessments four times a year to help drive what they do in the classroom with their instruction. In addition, teachers turn in data analysis sheets to the administrators and based on the sheets, the administrators ask teachers to modify their instruction or pacing guides and to establish new goals.
- Integrate technology to provide immediate feedback**
 Teachers use remote control clickers to administer pre- and post-assessments. The remote clickers serve as part of an electronic audience response system that projects questions onto a screen, then gives students immediate feedback on whether they answered the questions correctly. Students receive immediate feedback on response items, allowing teachers to quickly identify students in need of additional support and modify instruction where appropriate.

How Central Union Uses Data to Target Support:

Analyze data to look at what students and teachers are doing and support them accordingly.

Percent Proficient: Mathematics



How Central Union Fosters Teacher Collaboration

- **Encourage peer observation**
The academic coach takes new teachers to 3-4 classrooms within their first month at the school. The coach and teacher discuss exemplary and non-exemplary practices observed for the teacher's consideration in his or her own class.
- **Use content leads and meetings to maintain common pacing and practices**
Content leads for each grade within each department lead meetings during bi-weekly "Minimum Wednesdays." These meetings allow the content leader to monitor teacher use of common assessments and data analysis sheets.
- **Use content teams to share ideas**
Content teams often spend lunches or after-school time together to discuss curriculum.

How Center Union Builds Teacher Capacity:

Provide teachers with the time and flexibility to observe their peers. Teachers will identify new teaching techniques and reflect on their own instructional practice.
