CREATIVE LEADERSHIP SOLUTIONS
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From Collaboration to Collective Impact

Four years of building a culture of continuous improvement.

CLIENT OVERVIEW

Client Name: McFarland High School Early College
Location: McFarland, CA
Timeline: SY 2022 - SY 2026
Service(s): Tier 1 Instruction & Grading Reform

McFarland High School Early College serves approximately 1,000 students in California's Central Valley. At the heart of the school's improvement work is a highly professional staff deeply committed to students and willing to learn with and from one another. Supported by consistent leadership, teachers spent four years strengthening collaboration, instruction, assessment, and their response to student learning.

CHALLENGE

McFarland teachers were collaborative and committed to their students, but expectations for instruction, assessment, pacing, and grading varied across classrooms. Literacy needs crossed content areas, while limited course-alike collaboration made consistent instructional planning more difficult. Teams needed stronger ways to connect their collaborative work to evidence of student learning and build the professional capacity to identify and solve each new problem of practice.

- The challenge went beyond improving PLC meetings. Teams had no shared process for testing instructional practices and studying the results.
- Collaboration risked staying disconnected from the classroom. Without that process, teamwork stayed separate from classroom experiences and measurable student outcomes.

PRACTICE

Rather than introducing new programs, McFarland built its improvement work around the Challenge - Practice - Results structure of action research. Teachers and leaders identified challenges, tested practices, studied student evidence, and adjusted. CLS supported instructional rounds, lesson study, collaboration, grading, and assessment practices. Leadership maintained focus while teachers brought the trust and willingness to experiment, which deepened the work.

Teachers examined student work, calibrated scoring, and opened classrooms to colleagues. They strengthened literacy, student discourse, course-alike planning, and common assessments while testing feedback and grading practices. A Grading Exhibition showcased their improvement stories through evidence and student response.



COLLABORATION WITH PURPOSE

Moved from meeting together to learning together through common expectations and open classrooms.



CONNECT THE SYSTEM

Linked priority learning, pacing, common assessments, and short-cycle evidence.



EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

Studied how feedback, revision, grading practices, and meaningful assessment affect learning.

"Humility and trust have allowed our teams to share data, recognize areas that need improvement, work together on solutions, and remain objective about what is pushing student achievement."

-Ben Taylor, Assistant Principal of Academics

TAILORED PROCESS

01 Year 1 - Build the Culture: Examine student work, calibrate scoring, and use instructional rounds and lesson study.

02 Year 2 - Change the Experience: Make literacy and student discourse shared instructional priorities.

03 Year 3 - Create Coherence: Refine course-alike teams, pacing, priority learning, and common assessments.

04 Year 4 - Study the Evidence: Test fair and accurate grading practices and document what students learned.

RESULTS

13%

D/F FINAL GRADES

From 24% in 2022 to 13% in 2026
(-11 points)

70%

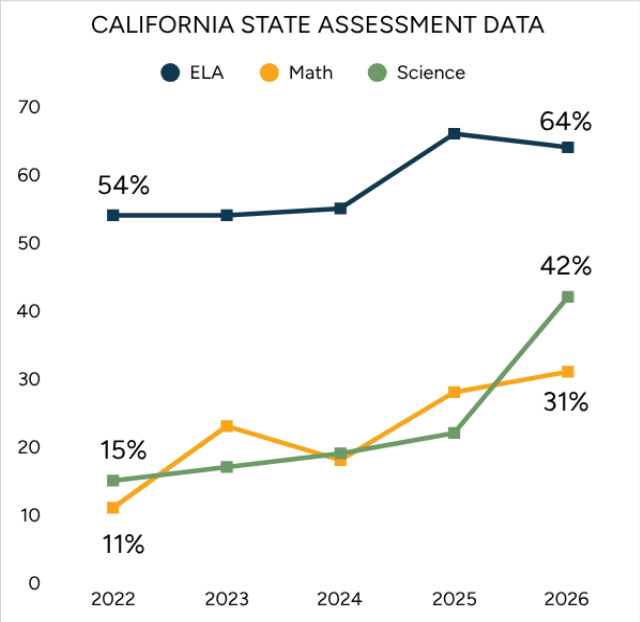
A/B FINAL GRADES

From 57% in 2022 to 70% in 2026
(+13 points)

98.9%

DUAL ENROLLMENT

Class of 2026 students graduated having taken one or more dual enrollment courses.



ROADBLOCKS

Different classroom expectations, limited time for course-alike collaboration, and the risk that each new improvement priority would become another disconnected initiative regularly tested the work.

Stable leadership sustained the focus and direction while collaborative structures evolved. The consistency helped teachers embrace the changes and see the connection to continuous improvement. As they grew, teachers used student evidence to adjust practices and built on earlier work rather than starting over.

IMPACT OVER TIME

McFarland did not spend four years implementing four different initiatives. It went deeper into one question: How do we improve learning for students? Collaboration revealed a need for alignment; alignment required stronger evidence; evidence raised questions about assessment and grading.

Named a
2026 California Distinguished School

ABOUT US

Creative Leadership Solutions is a leading provider of research and evidence-based professional development and coaching for K-12 education. We partner with districts and schools to achieve their goals, impact student learning, and improve performance. Our team of experts is dedicated to delivering personalized and differentiated learning opportunities.