



## California Area School District

California Area School District (CASD) is a rural school system in the southwestern part of Pennsylvania. It serves 952 students with 60% identifying as low income. CASD's designation as an AASA Learning 2025 Lighthouse District is an acknowledgment of its commitment to developing learners as co-authors and focusing on their cognitive growth. The system is dedicated to serving the whole learner, ensuring that no learner is marginalized. It reinforces a future-driven organization with a culture that encourages learners to investigate a variety of subject areas of interest. Grading/assessments are not punitive, and new ideas are welcomed. Teachers and adults are approachable, and students have voice, choice, and agency.

During the past two years, CASD has committed to systemic school redesign through a wide range of initiatives, including its Moonshot Program. This program is available to any student in the district and provides an alternative to traditional educational practices and experiences. The program eliminates grade levels and provides an individualized educational program for each student. Educators form partnerships with students and families to monitor co-constructed information about student progress. Data targets include both cognitive growth and social-emotional learning. The program is also unique in its cross-disciplinary approach with content areas taught in an integrated way and teachers serving as learning coaches for students.

The *Moonshot Program* models core and recurrent design principles used throughout CASD. According to district leaders: "Our preferred future of learning focuses on the individual learner with an asset-based approach, highlighting their individual strengths and designing a curriculum based on their needs and desired future. Our preferred future centers on a curriculum that commits to justice and equity. Our preferred future curriculum recognizes the collective impacts of all members of society and champions their contributions."

In overcoming traditional deficit-based approaches to education, CASD has dramatically revised its approach to assessment and progress monitoring. Rather than arbitrary or subjective grades, learners receive growth feedback on their academic progress. By focusing on high-quality feedback, student learning continues to be monitored via learners' achievement of standards mastery—as opposed to seat time or a particular grade. The result is improved student engagement and a student-reported reduction of stress in school. The district also uses a digital badge system to demonstrate student mastery of relevant standards. Student-centered assessments allow learners to set goals for their own learning and build agency.

Throughout the district, learners have multiple opportunities to think, explore, reflect, and use established feedback loops yielding multiple ways to demonstrate mastery learning. Using the *Data Wise Improvement Model*, the district is committed to an integrated K-12 data-driven improvement process. Educators regularly disaggregate and probe data according to program, race, socioeconomics, and other categories to identify opportunities for improvement.

Systemic improvement is viewed as a continuum of planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating this process. As part of this initiative, the district has become a part of the *Mastery Transcript Consortium*, redefining how the traditional transcript should communicate student progress and achievement. This non-profit organization supports competency-based education and is dedicated to making it available to all learners. This goal is reflected in the district's elimination of traditional grade assignments, basing placements on need and strengths of the learner. Additionally, the district creates multiple pathways for student learning that provide access to post-secondary opportunities, career experiences, and the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary for success in the 21st century.

Additional equity-related practices within the district include redefining what teaching and learning should look like over the summer months. While offering credit remediation and credit achievement options, the district also provides free summer camps to K-12 learners on themes that integrate school subjects and content areas. Similarly, a culture of high expectations ensures that each student has access to rigorous core instruction regardless of race, ethnicity, ability, gender, socioeconomics, or other categories of potential marginalization. The commitment to rigor and high expectations for all learners is evident in an increase of student access to Advanced Placement courses for all students, a 500% gain during recent years. Finally, the district has committed to Restorative Practices for school discipline, eliminating in-school and out-of-school suspensions.

The California Area School District was awarded an *AASA Demonstration System to Watch* citation in 2022. Part of this initiative and the district's recognition as a Lighthouse District is its dedication to a personalized and learner-centered approach for enhancing the achievement of both students and staff. Over the past two years, for example, teachers and instructional support staff were able to personalize their professional learning and growth. This program provides flexibility in the mode, time, and method of professional learning for all instructional staff. The immense positive feedback on the program has encouraged district staff to continue to develop more opportunities for improving personalized professional learning.