

Differentiated Assistance Podcast Transcription

Ana Tintocalis:	00:03	California's Public Schools are as diverse as the state of California.
Lesley Redkey:	00:07	We know that there's gaps. We have seen those over time.
Kevin Monsma:	00:10	It's hard when you're working to implement something that's still being designed.
Marcy Guthrie:	00:14	I think now it's like real, right? This just got real.
Ana Tintocalis:	00:18	Join us on a journey into school communities, big and small, to discover how educators in California are tackling issues of equity and school improvement.
	00:28	This is-
	00:29	This is-
	00:30	This is the California school field trip.
Ana Tintocalis:	00:32	A podcast brought to you by the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence. I'm your host, Ana Tintocalis, CCEE Senior Manager of Communications.
Ana Tintocalis:	00:48	This month, we're talking about differentiated assistance. It's a technical term that basically describes what happens when a district in California is identified for needing extra support under the state's new approach to school improvement. I've recruited my colleague, Michelle Magyar to help out. She's the CCEE's Senior Manager of Continuous Improvement. Hi, Michelle, thanks for being here.
Michelle Magyar:	01:13	Thanks for having me.
Ana Tintocalis:	01:14	In just a bit, we're going to play an interview Michelle had with school leaders from the Mother Lode Union School District and the El Dorado County Office of Education in northern California. Now, we highlighted this district and county on the podcast more than a year ago when we first introduced listeners to what differentiated assistance was all about. Let's hear a clip from that episode before we move on.
Marcy Guthrie:	01:41	This is in the heart of gold country, although we're not really a place you can find on the map.

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- Ana Tintocalis: 01:46 That's Marcy Guthrie, Superintendent of the Mother Lode Union School District. That's right, Mother Lode as in hitting the mother lode. Seems appropriate given the district is nestled among so many historic mining towns in this pine tree covered region.
- Marcy Guthrie: 02:01 I think people appreciate the smallness, the family orientation.
- Ana Tintocalis: 02:08 Again, that was Marcy Guthrie, Mother Lode's Superintendent from Episode One on the California School Field Trip. And as you heard, Mother Lode is a small and tight knit community, but the district is also facing some instructional challenges. Michelle, when it comes to differentiated assistance, can you give us a recap of what the district was dealing with in Episode One and what the district is facing now?
- Michelle Magyar: 02:35 Sure. When you first went to Mother Lode and conducted your interview, they were going through their first year of differentiated assistance. And we know that LEAs are identified for differentiated assistance through their dashboard performance. For too many of the districts, students with disabilities were not performing well academically. And this student group was also suspended at much higher rates.
- Michelle Magyar: 03:00 Fast forward to this year, there was a new indicator included in the dashboard for grades K-8, the chronic absenteeism indicator. And not only did Mother Lode continue their eligibility for support for their students with disabilities based again on the academic performance and suspension rates, now they were also eligible due to their performance on chronic absenteeism.
- Michelle Magyar: 03:20 And another layer in addition to this with the new indicator, their white students were now eligible for support on academic performance and chronic absenteeism. This new indicator introduced a new aspect of differentiated assistance for Mother Lode.
- Ana Tintocalis: 03:35 And we should add here that Mother Lode is not alone in needing extra support or DA for the second year. It is just one of 135 school districts that maintained their eligibility from last year. Now, close to 240 LEAs are eligible this year for DA for the very first time. But in all about 375 LEAs are going through DA this year.
- Ana Tintocalis: 04:06 Now Michelle, you specifically wanted to visit the Mother Lode story again, and interview its Superintendent and county

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partners. Why did you want to hear from these folks versus educators from another school district in year two of DA?

- Michelle Magyar: 04:21 First of all, you went out to interview them last year. What a great opportunity to have them reflect on year one and then share the lessons learned into year two. Our main question, really what we're interested in learning about is, what are the lessons learned from implementing DA within a continuous improvement process? We have many handbooks and policy papers on this topic, but very little information on the practical realities of implementing DA. We believe educators across the state can learn from this example because they clearly articulate some of the key takeaways that have impacted their DA process.
- Ana Tintocalis: 05:01 Okay, so let's hear more generally about those takeaways now, and then we'll go into more detail after we play your interview with school leaders in this district and county.
- Michelle Magyar: 05:11 There are three key takeaways in their responses and reflections throughout the entire interview that we want you to listen for. The first takeaway relates to the county office vision and how they approach their work with districts. The second describes their approach to leadership, and the third takeaway is building trusting relationships.
- Ana Tintocalis: 05:31 Now, let's listen to Michelle's interview with Mother Lode Superintendent Marcy Guthrie as well as Kevin Monsma, Deputy Superintendent of the El Dorado County Office of Education, and Tamara Clay, El Dorado's SELPA Director. Michelle will also be playing clips from Episode One.
- Michelle Magyar: 05:54 Marcy, when we first interviewed you about year one of DA, you indicated that you were not surprised when you got that call that Mother Lode was eligible for DA. Was that the case for year two?
- Marcy Guthrie: 06:08 We anticipated that we'd be back in differentiated assistance, but I was also like, "We are just now starting the plan we developed." I was not wanting to derail that momentum in that process. I actually asked for help with the newest indicator, which was the chronic absenteeism indicator because I felt like we had tackled and had a good plan in place to really look at our academic indicators and our suspension indicators for students with disabilities.

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- Marcy Guthrie: 06:38 It just so happens that the students with disabilities also were chronically absentee along with white students. They gave me a lot of grace as the differentiated assistance team and helped come alongside. And we learned a lot about what is chronic absenteeism? How is it calculated? What contributes to becoming chronically absentee for a student? That allowed us to learn that new indicator and all of its ramifications or implications while we were still working our plan to support the academics for our students with disabilities and all students.
- Michelle Magyar: 07:12 Tamara and Kevin, let's bring you into the conversation now. Once again, we have Tamara Clay. She's the SELPA Director of the El Dorado County Office of Education. And Kevin Monsma is the El Dorado County's Deputy Superintendent. I'm curious, now that you're in year two of DA, were you able to stay the course, or did you have to pivot and make drastic changes to the process from year one?
- Tamara Clay: 07:36 Last year, we were introducing an idea, a way of approaching systems change, and it was so introductory. This year, I think there was enough trust and opportunity for us to ask a few more questions to challenge thinking. Those gentle nudges around, "We believe this is happening in our system" we believe this is why it's happening in our system. How do we know? It was interesting to see the results of that. That was one of the big differences this year. We actually got to exercise those muscles around continuous improvement as opposed to really just introducing these concepts.
- Michelle Magyar: 08:20 And Kevin, did you want to add to that?
- Kevin Monsma: 08:22 Yeah. A couple things Tamara and I were providing the coaching. We didn't change the team. We kept some of the things we did last year, which was each team reaches out to the district ahead of time and has a conversation with the superintendent. Are there ways that we can be just proactive and understand the district better and deeper. And then that feedback loop before we meet right after touching base, are we on track? I think Marcy and Tamara and I exchange a lot of emails this year about, "Hey, here's where we are. Here's something we're looking at." It was a little different. We didn't meet in person as much ahead of time, but we did a lot of electronic communication.
- Michelle Magyar: 09:06 I think that speaks to the vision you adopted through year one and into year two on the importance of data, continuous improvement, and building the capacity of staff. Let's play our

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first clip from Episode One that speaks to the nature of differentiated assistance. Here is Ed Manansala, the Superintendent of schools for El Dorado County. He says the county kind of acts like a coach for a district.

- Ed Manansala: 09:31 I know that in order to achieve a big goal, there are times that I need a coach, someone who's going to come alongside, fully understand what my goals are, who's going to provide a level of technical expertise, push and support to that process. It's not our agenda, it's their agenda, but we will bring our very best in that way.
- Michelle Magyar: 09:53 Kevin, I wanted to ask you about this idea of building a trusting relationship. How did the trusting relationship you formed last year with Marcy and her team allow you to go deeper in the DA process this year?
- Kevin Monsma: 10:07 An example of that, Marcy indicated interest in chronic absenteeism. We were doing some work at the county level with Attendance Works, and they had some reports that we could access. But in order to do that, I needed to be able to run some extracts from their database. Marcy actually gave me full access to their student database, so I had access to every student, every course. I had administrative rights. I was like, "That's a lot of trust to let someone else enter your student information system."
- Kevin Monsma: 10:36 But what that benefited was that I could then pull some things and send it to Marcy like, "Hey, here's something to look at." And if she had questions, I could actually dive into the system and try to get some answers. It didn't hinge upon her having to do that. I think it's just one of those out workings of you see this, "I'm willing to let you have this type of access," where I don't know in year one that would have been a piece. It's been a developing process.
- Michelle Magyar: 11:03 And Tamara, your thoughts on building trusting relationships?
- Tamara Clay: 11:07 I think it's important to add it's not perfect. Trust is something that's earned. It didn't just appear. We tried to build really strong relationships with our districts and try and be as honest and transparent as we can. But we're still figuring it out. For anyone who's listening, it's not as though we have this perfected. Kevin and I debrief after every single meeting and talk about how it went and how we might do it differently next time. Underneath all of this is a lot of humility and learning.

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Michelle Magyar:	11:44	That's a perfect segue to our next clip from Episode One. Now, this clip features Kevin and Tamara talking about this idea of leadership requiring curiosity and humility to differentiated assistance.
Ana Tintocalis:	11:58	Monsma and Clay say they don't come in when checklists and timelines. Instead, they try to bring a spirit of curiosity and humility to the table.
Kevin Monsma:	12:07	I will tell you, it's easy to say. It's actually very hard to live because we have a natural inclination like, "I think I could solve that problem if we just did X."
Tamara Clay:	12:15	Well, certainly it's tempting to say, "Okay, we have six sessions, so let's plan them all out." You say this, and I'll say that. Here's where we'll take the group. It's just-
Ana Tintocalis:	12:25	It's not linear.
Tamara Clay:	12:26	No. And if it's really a facilitative process, then you really have to have that spirit of, "Where will the group take us?" As much as, "Where will we take the group?"
Michelle Magyar:	12:34	Marcy, I wanted you get your thoughts on that. Do you feel like the county is learning just as much as the district in this process?
Marcy Guthrie:	12:43	I think what I hear often coming out of Kevin's mouth is, "What we learn through this process is good for all the districts in our county." And they're actually kind of interested in what we're doing with differentiated assistance or improvement science. They've been thoughtful about, "How can we bring that to folks before they have to have it?"
Michelle Magyar:	13:03	Okay. Now, I'd like to move on to some questions that deal with solutions and strategies. Marcy, let's begin with you. In Episode One, we learned Mother Lode adopted MTSS or the multi-tiered system of support framework, and this is a district-wide strategy to better support all students, but especially students with disabilities. We've also learned that the district is also trying to incorporate UDL, or universal design for learning, and PBIS, positive behavioral interventions and support. This is a lot. In year two of differentiated assistance, are you still engaging in the same or similar strategies? How are you building capacity so that educators can implement all of these strategies?

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- Marcy Guthrie: 13:49 Our approach is a little different. I've got two principals, a director of student support services, and myself, who are really the ... We are calling ourselves "The Lead Learners." As principals, they went to training. And then their responsibility with our support at the district office is, how do you bring the chunks of learning back to their school sites and back to their staff during professional development times, collaboration times, or staff meeting times so that they can work their staff through this learning and bring them along with us? Because, we couldn't have 52 teachers get subs and go learn this with each other. We had to figure out a way to bring the learning to them.
- Marcy Guthrie: 14:30 I think my leaders, principals as lead learners, they really did that micro-professional development drip, drip, drip. Every Wednesday, all year long, they were getting something about MTSS or something about UDL or something about PBIS and the responsibility that the leaders had on their shoulders to bring the learning that they received back to their staff was taken very seriously. And I think that's been pretty powerful.
- Kevin Monsma: 14:56 And I would add as Mother Lode looked at the MTSS framework, it's a good way to describe it. It's a frame. To say it's not a program they implement, and suddenly everything is peaches and roses, right? It's an idea. It's a way of thinking. But, at the county level, we took the plans from Mother Lode as they were looking into, how can we reinvent what we do that will actually be more supportive for the districts?
- Kevin Monsma: 15:23 For example, we have our curriculum instruction leadership council, which is all our curriculum directors, and in our case, many superintendents sit at the table. And all year, we focus around UDL. And what does that look like from a leader's perspective? Not so much in the classroom, although there was that. But the idea was, how can we then support Mother Lode in a different venue so that Marcy has information coming that she's like, "Oh, that was really good. I want to share that back with my staff."
- Kevin Monsma: 15:54 We also started year one of a two year UDL institute, which Mother Lode is participating in, again, for a deeper, deeper level. We tried to structure some pieces around that would then support our districts who had been in DA. Continuing in DA, we leveraged our Rural Professional Learning Network. We did a lot of site visits this year where you could go and see what other sites were doing, which then also tied into what was happening. It's a really good way to build up and revolve around for year

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one, the academic piece like, "Oh, here's something that this site's doing or this district's doing which is impacting their students."

- Kevin Monsma: 16:42 As year two, this idea of chronic absenteeism, how does that wrap into the whole idea of MTSS? It's not something different. It's just the next layer of paper mache that we're talking about.
- Michelle Magyar: 16:55 One of the more revealing aspects of Episode One is that we learn the district and county uncovered about ten root causes leading to Mother Lode's poor performance and high suspension rates of its students with disabilities. Let's go back and play a clip from Episode One in which host Ana Tintocalis introduces us to one of those root causes.
- Ana Tintocalis: 17:14 Mother Lode's teachers may not know how to create flexible classroom environments. Environments in which all students are given various ways to learn to demonstrate what they've learned and feel motivated to learn. But that's not just a Mother Lode issue. Clay says districts across California should change the way they deliver instruction so each and every child can succeed.
- Tamara Clay: 17:38 As someone who's been in special education for over 20 years, it's not about special education. That's a conversation we've been waiting to have for decades is really building systems that are meeting the needs of every single students.
- Michelle Magyar: 17:55 You identified ten root causes in year one, but you really adopted a more narrow focus or vision rather than being scattered across all of these different areas. Did any of these root causes in year one of differentiated assistance change in year two when you considered the inclusion of chronic absenteeism rates and the addition of new student groups for DA?
- Kevin Monsma: 18:18 I don't know if there was necessarily a change in the root cause. I think it was, "Let's dig a little bit deeper." You know? How far does this root go? This allowed us to get deeper. And I think as Marcy indicated what we looked at as chronic absenteeism is actually discovering the connections to the work they had done previously. I wouldn't say we found new root causes for this. It was we found connections for this new indicator to some of the ideas developed and discovered last year. And then from there, now what is the next step for us?

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- Marcy Guthrie: 18:59 I also would add that I think we ruled out some hypotheses. We tested hypotheses. We had some preconceived notions. I had a principal who really believed that affluent families were part of the root. They were taking independent study, and they were taking their families on vacation. They were habitually doing that. And really our Latino or English learner families were the ones that had the perfect attendance, and they were really ultimately valued education to a different level, and that value was measured by attendance rates. Right? And as we dug deeper into our data, we did find that our Hispanic and Latino families had better attendance than our white students. And our white students actually ended up being flagged on the dashboard.
- Marcy Guthrie: 19:50 Those hypotheses, that was kind of tested and validated, whereas before we were in our head about thinking, "Oh it's this," or "Oh, it's that." We were able to test some of those hypotheses and either affirm or debunk them. That was a long way to say that.
- Tamara Clay: 20:05 See that gets me excited because now we're talking about building a culture within a district of continuous improvement. Right? I remember at one point, we were doing a process map for absenteeism. One of the team members ... Someone posited a sort of belief, a hypothesis about why students weren't coming to school. And one of the team members was looking at the process map and said, "Well, wouldn't we want to reach out and ask families about that to test that?" And it's like that is magical. Right? Now we're starting to build something within the culture of that district. That's how we really unveil equity gaps. Marcy spoke to it so concisely. That's where the real work is.
- Michelle Magyar: 20:50 That was a really helpful description on how to put continuous improvement in action and really try to shift the mindsets of everyone involved in this process. Marcy, I'm curious, in what ways are you supporting your teachers and engaging them in the systemic issues and really changing their instruction?
- Marcy Guthrie: 21:09 They become the advocates for change. They want what's best for all of our students, but of course they have their eyes on the students that they serve as education specialists. Their vested in partnering with people who do good things for all students. And they are so hungry for schedules and systems that support that work. As we're looking at our master schedule for next year, we're making changes. I hear their voices as, how can we build a system or a structure that supports inclusive practices, best

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practices, and differentiated instruction that will meet the needs of all of our students, not just our students with disabilities, not just our students who are English learners, but all students?

- Kevin Monsma: 22:01 I think it just illustrates what Mother Lode is leveraging is this whole idea of leading from the middle. Marcy leveraged her principles. She has leveraged her leadership team to take that message back to their staff and work with their staff and provide that. She actually has this mid-level leadership in the district that's starting to make these changes. And again, I would go back to ... We had Mother Lode present at our professional learning network. And other districts are like, "Well, we actually want to learn more from you." And these are teachers and others who are presenting. You start to see this evidence of a change, and we're on the right track.
- Michelle Magyar: 22:45 Now I want to focus on advice and reflections that might help district and county superintendents as well as their support staff. We have many LEAs out there that are in DA right now. They are going to glean quite a bit from your advice. Kevin, let's start with you. What have you learned that might help others?
- Kevin Monsma: 23:04 Where the system is now, it feels like we wait for November. It's like, "Okay, we'll wait to see if we get in DA." I think we have the tools in place to say ... Actually we think we'll probably be there, Looking at our data. For me, I think part of the advice, start early if you're looking at that, your design, your LCAP, you're looking at test results, reach out, say, "Hey, can we start the process now?"
- Kevin Monsma: 23:32 There's no downside to starting early. Let's say Marcy said, "I want to start early in September." And in end of November, her district wasn't eligible for DA. The only thing that has happened is she spent time really looking at the system and thinking about the groups where she knows that there's weakness in the district. That's a good thing. To me, I think start early, engage quickly. It makes the process ... Now you have time to be really thoughtful.
- Tamara Clay: 24:03 One of the greatest surprises in 2017-18, with a 2017 Dashboard release across the state was districts reaching out to their county offices and saying, "We haven't been identified, but we know what we need to work on. We just need support and a framework for actually getting the work done, to actually do it." That's pretty exciting. In California, to hear that you have "accountability process," where districts are saying, "Let us in.

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We want to be a part of that. We want to proactively address those areas where there are equity gaps, where students are not performing to expectations." That's a huge positive.

- Michelle Magyar: 24:45 Okay. We have this great opportunity for you to reflect back on year one of DA. Let's play one last clip from Episode One. And this one is of Lesley Redkey, the principal at Herbert Green Middle School in Mother Lode. And here she's talking about what she hopes for the district.
- Lesley Redkey: 25:02 You know, I would love to see us not have any reds and just a little incremental growth overtime. I think everybody's goal that being able to look at ourselves, being able to know what we need to change in terms of the systems that we have in place, and being able to do that so that we can all together see that growth take place over time.
- Michelle Magyar: 25:23 And Marcy, what's your reaction to that, about this idea of incremental growth over time?
- Marcy Guthrie: 25:29 Systems work takes time. I have to make that okay for myself, right? Because, obviously, you heard what my principal said. If you could just make incremental growth ... My responsibility as a superintendent is to make sure that I'm highlighting the wins on the way when my board is getting discouraged that we're in differentiated assistance again, right? I have to figure that out.
- Kevin Monsma: 25:57 I think part of year three often we think about ... If you're climbing a tall mountain, and you're looking up like, "Oh my gosh, we have a long way to go." What we don't do enough is turn around and go, "How far have we come up already?" And that is part of the process. If Mother Lode is eligible in year three, I think part of the process now is let's look at ... As Marcy said, what are the wins already that have happened on this way? Even though it's still like a climb, there are things we can look back at and say, "This is good. These pieces are set in place."
- Michelle Magyar: 26:34 Wow. This is just great, just to focus on the wins, the positive aspects of working together. Again, this is going to be so helpful for other LEAs that are going through this right now. I think sometimes you can get bogged down in the process. And anticipating year three may be a little daunting, but your positive attitude and your preparation is really impressive and just great to learn about.
- Kevin Monsma: 27:00 Thank you.

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- Tamara Clay: 27:01 Thank you.
- Marcy Guthrie: 27:02 Thank you. It's great being here today.
- Ana Tintocalis: 27:12 That was Michelle Magyar, who interviewed the folks from Mother Lode and El Dorado County. Michelle is the CCEE Senior Manager of Continuous Improvement. Once again, I'm Ana Tintocalis, host of this podcast. Michelle is here with me now. Michelle, let's wrap up this episode by highlighting some key takeaways from this interview that might help district and county superintendents as they enter or continue in the differentiated assistance process.
- Michelle Magyar: 27:40 Yeah. We wanted to come back and summarize in particular three key takeaways that we just mentioned in the beginning of the podcast. First, specific to El Dorado and Mother Lode, they provide a clear collective vision that supports what's known as "systems change." And that really transitions from the simple structural changes that they experienced within the system in year one of DA to the more transformative or shifts in their actual mindsets in year two of DA.
- Michelle Magyar: 28:11 The second key takeaway is that it's through this collective vision and really more their confidence as a team that allowed them to really emphasize what's known as distributive leadership or what they described in practical terms leading from the middle. They really were inclusive in bringing in the leaders across the system in this DA process.
- Michelle Magyar: 28:33 The third key takeaway is really about relationships. There's so much interdependence on this work that it's important, it's critical that LEAs learn to build that trust, and we heard about this throughout the entire interview. Overall, we learned that DA is a framework. It's a framework to help guide the process. It's not the solution to everything. We also learned that this is a very humbling process, that patience, persistence, and letting go of those perfectionist tendencies requires a little caring, empathy, and understanding.
- Michelle Magyar: 29:06 I think any of the 300+ LEAs who are going through this process right now can relate to that.
- Ana Tintocalis: 29:14 Where can folks find resources?
- Michelle Magyar: 29:17 Yeah. We are posting this podcast as part of a toolkit where we will feature the research that we reference throughout and that you've heard throughout this interview process. We will also

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share some of the more specific tools that El Dorado and Mother Lode, the team used. And we're going to share contact information on where to go if you have more questions.

- Ana Tintocalis: 29:38 Great. Thank you so much, Michelle, for helping us today.
- Michelle Magyar: 29:42 Thank you.
- Ana Tintocalis: 29:43 That's Michelle Magyar, the CCEE Senior Manager of Continuous Improvement. And to listen to previous podcasts as well as check out some new resources around this topic, go to our website at CCEE-CA.org ... And that's it for the California school field trip for this month. Thank you so much for listening.