

Geographic Lead Agencies Year 1 Evaluation Findings

Within the System of Support are seven Geographic Lead Agencies (Geo Leads) housed within nine county offices of education (COEs): Shasta COE, Sonoma COE, Placer and Sacramento COEs, Alameda COE, Tulare COE, Kern County Superintendent of Schools, and Riverside and San Diego COEs.

Geo Leads build the capacity of COEs in their geographic areas, coordinate and calibrate Differentiated Assistance across their geographic areas, identify existing resources and develop new resources in response to their local area needs, and collaborate with other Geo Leads to share best practices and resources.

RTI International administered surveys and conducted interviews to evaluate the work of the Geo Leads.¹ The evaluation findings are presented in the seven categories of practices for effective education networks that lead to systems change and improved student outcomes.



A network that implements the above practices effectively will lead to improved student outcomes*

Technical assistance focused on Evidence-Based Practices improves student outcomes and builds organizations' capacity to deepen learning engagement for all students.

- Three-fourths of COE survey respondents reported that their Geo Leads provided access to high-quality professional learning opportunities and built their capacity to work more effectively with their local education agencies (LEAs).
- Geo Leads reported tremendous expertise within COEs across the state. They also reported that working with other Geo Leads has given them a good sense of the expertise COEs have and how they can tap into their resources and evidence-based practices to share with COEs and LEAs in their region, especially for needs related to Differentiated Assistance.

Organizations in the system engage in Continuous Improvement to identify challenges, try out solutions, implement changes, reflect on results, and improve outcomes.

- Eighty-nine percent of COE survey respondents receiving support from Geo Leads in the use of improvement science reported that the support was effective, and 82% of those receiving support in how to establish high-functioning improvement teams reported it was effective.
- More than 80% of COE survey respondents reported that their organizations incorporated a continuous improvement mindset into their work and that their Geo Leads modeled continuous improvement.
- All Geo Leads reported that they have embedded continuous improvement practices into their own work both as a Geo Lead and COE.
- All Geo Leads reported that they have focused on building the capacity of partner COEs and LEAs to use continuous improvement practices, especially around the analysis of student data to inform decision-making.

Knowledge sharing and Collaboration Within and Across Organizations surfaces best practices and innovative solutions to make positive differences for students.

- COE survey respondents reported that their Geo Leads were doing a good job of connecting them to other COEs with similar needs to share best practices (7.2 on a 1–10 scale), and they would like to see more of it (8.2 on the scale).
- All Geo Leads reported that the Geo Lead structure has led to greater collaboration than in the past, both with other Geo Leads to share problems of practice and resources and with and among COEs in their geographic areas.
- Geo Leads reported that the relationships and collaboration with other Geo Leads built prior to the COVID-19 pandemic enabled them to quickly pivot to sharing resources and strategies for distance learning in ways that would not have been happened previous to the establishment of the Geo Lead structure.

* Adapted from Rincón-Gallardo, S., & Fullan, M. (2016). Essential features of effective networks in education. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*.

Developing **Trusting Relationships and Shared Accountability** for common goals creates the conditions needed to enable learning and implement change. Trust is crucial to engaging in challenging conversations and acknowledging what participants do and do not know.

- Three-fourths of COE survey respondents reported that they felt safe or comfortable going to their Geo Leads for assistance and brainstorming regarding difficult challenges. Respondents also reported that their Geo Leads helped facilitate trusting relationships among COEs in their geographic areas.
- Geo Leads reported that it has taken time to build trusting relationships, but the time spent was necessary. This trust now allows them to engage in frank discussions about difficulties they are having and seek assistance and guidance from other Geo Leads to help them be more effective. COEs within Geo Lead areas also reported increased trust in their relationships with one another.

Leadership cultivates collaboration and co-creation rather than relying on compliance to achieve shared goals.

- COE survey respondents reported that their Geo Leads treated them as equal partners in their work together (8.5 on a 1–10 scale), which is close to their ideal of equal partnership (9.3 on the scale).
- COE survey respondents indicated that the current level of balance between compliance and support with their Geo Leads is heavily weighted toward support (73 on a 1–100 scale) and is close to the ideal balance they would like to see (78 on the scale).
- Several Geo Leads reported that they focus on a shared leadership model by finding staff members with expertise and having them lead conversations, trainings, and resource sharing. These Geo Leads characterize leaders as being facilitators and capacity builders rather than directors.

Effective networks and education systems **Curate and Develop Resources** that enable collaboration, promote continuous learning, and lead to improved outcomes for schools and students.

- COE survey respondents reported that their Geo Leads connected them to external resources in response to their needs (6.5 on a 1–10 scale) and they would like to see more of it (7.9 on the scale).
- Geo Leads reported that, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, they used their Geo Lead and System of Support networks to quickly find, curate, and share resources to assist COEs and LEAs in shifting to distance learning, including how to meet the needs of students without computers or internet access.

In an **Equitable System** professionals at all levels have the knowledge, skills, and mindsets needed to disrupt and replace biased policies and practices to ensure equally high outcomes for all students.

- COE survey respondents chose organizational mindsets and systems change as the top areas in which capacity needed to be built to disrupt systemic bias.
- Several Geo Leads reported that they are focusing their work with partner COEs and LEAs on deep dives into student data to surface inequities. Geo Leads are also using root cause analysis to uncover the structures, policies, and practices that must be addressed to lead to changes in student outcomes.
- Several Geo Leads reported that they and their COEs are partnering with external agencies to help address issues of racial justice at all levels. Other Geo Leads are turning to Geo Leads and COEs who have demonstrated expertise around issues of equity in education.

¹ One hundred twenty-nine people responded to a survey administered to COE staff working with Geo Leads—a response rate of 64%. RTI conducted interviews with the seven Geo Leads about their work.

I would say, specifically thinking about our relationship with the other Geo Leads, I think having our almost monthly now, especially during the pandemic, meetings where we're able to bounce ideas off of each other, share what are some of the best practices. I feel like we have really learned and grown from each other as a statewide network of Geo Leads through those relationships. . . . I think that infrastructure of our Geo Lead network is super critical to our success because while we're meeting our local needs, there are so many things in common across the state that we can learn from each other."

— Geo Lead

Our needs are continuously being met by our Geo Lead Agency. They are responsive to our requests and connect us to resources (consultants, professional learning, other COEs, digital platforms, etc.) that help us strengthen our local work."

— COE Survey Respondent

I appreciate all of the resources, the open door policy, and the willingness to always share best practices. Every meeting is important and productive. I have personally learned tremendously from everyone involved."

— COE Survey Respondent

In light of COVID-19, we've been having in our geographic area meetings a lot of conversations around how do we create structures when we do return [to schools], if it's a hybrid model, that don't continue to disenfranchise the students that systematically are underserved within our organizations and our systems? . . . In every conversation we had, that is top of mind for people. . . . How do we ensure that the kids who really need the most support are getting the most support?"

— Geo Lead