

Community Engagement Initiative

Year 1 Evaluation Findings

The Community Engagement Initiative (CEI) was established to build communities' and districts' capacity to implement effective community engagement practices with a focus on improving student outcomes.

- CEI convenes cohorts of district teams consisting of district and school staff, families, community partners, and county office staff in a peer leading and learning network (PLLN) to identify, share, and learn effective practices to improve community engagement statewide. Network meetings are held throughout the year.
- CEI, as a System of Support lead agency, is facilitated in partnership by the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence and a consortium of three agencies selected for their expertise in community engagement.¹

RTI International administered surveys and conducted focus groups to evaluate CEI.² 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.

- More than three-quarters of PLLN participants reported that they learned new research-based community engagement practices that would enhance their districts' current practices. Some participants were able to implement the new practices this year while others hope to implement the practices in the future.
- Three-quarters of PLLN participants believed that the practices they learned in PLLN are linked to improving student outcomes.

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

- Two-thirds of PLLN participants reported that their districts have continuous improvement processes in place to reflect on and improve their districts' community engagement practices.
- Two Geographic Lead Agency³ PLLN participants are embedding community engagement practices as part of their differentiated assistance continuous improvement efforts.

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

- PLLN participants reported feeling comfortable reaching out to peer district teams outside of PLLN meetings to improve their current practices, and half of the survey respondents have already done so. To further extend their learning, some participants requested more opportunities to converse with districts to learn about practices in depth.
- The California State Department of Education and external partners are collaborating with CEI to align it with tools and resources developed for effective stakeholder engagement in Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) development.
- Over three-quarters of PLLN participants reported that their districts have community partnerships that meet the needs of students and families. Some districts aim to expand their partnerships for health and wellness based on practices shared in PLLN.

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.

- Over nine-tenths of PLLN participants understood the goals of CEI and shared the same commitment to include families and communities as partners in education.
- CEI lead facilitators and PLLN participants reported high levels of trust within the network. Almost all participants felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and reaching out to one another for support.

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

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

- Three-quarters of PLLN participants perceived CEI lead facilitators as effective educators in PLLN.
- Three-quarters of PLLN participants agreed that PLLN had developed a shared definition of effective community engagement.
- Almost three-quarters of PLLN participants perceived decision-making in PLLN as being mostly shared, which suggests that CEI lead facilitators were effective in creating shared leadership.

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

- In addition to facilitating PLLN meetings for cohort 1 participants, CEI hosted three statewide webinars sharing effective community engagement practices for districts to adopt in their response to supporting families and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each webinar had over 100 participants.

Effective networks have the **Financial and Staff Resources** to continue coordination of the network.

- CEI lead facilitators effectively shared roles and responsibilities to bring the vision of CEI to fruition despite limited ability to engage in intensive planning before the launch due to statute timelines.
- CEI lead facilitators reported challenges with balancing day-to-day work at their agencies with CEI facilitation. They anticipate capacity challenges will increase as PLLN grows to include additional cohorts.
- District teams may face financial limitations, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, that could impact their continued participation in PLLN and ability to implement community engagement activities. But most participants reported that they have the necessary leadership support and other resources to implement effective community engagement practices at their districts.

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.

- Due to what was learned in PLLN, a few districts will implement new practices, such as incorporating student input, to make the LCAP process more inclusive.
- PLLN participants reported that they are rethinking how they communicate and plan to include parents or students who are not typically engaged, especially in decision-making.

¹ The agencies in the consortium are the California Association for Bilingual Education, Families In Schools, and San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools.

² Thirty-six people responded to a survey administered to PLLN participants—a response rate of 61%. Eleven of 12 CEI lead facilitators responded to a survey administered to System of Support leaders. RTI conducted interviews and focus groups with PLLN participants (22) and staff from the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence and the consortium facilitating CEI (14).

³ County offices of education serve as Geographic Lead Agencies within the System of Support to build the capacity of other county offices of education in their geographic areas, coordinate differentiated assistance, and provide resources to meet local needs.

Just the learning from the other districts, I think, was the huge chunk that I took away. Because there's a lot of people doing what they call family engagement, but then there are those that are really doing family engagement. And so to be able to talk to other groups that are really doing it and really understand how to do it has been so phenomenal . . . And then when it comes to the LCAP I think we have made huge changes.”

— District Family and Community Engagement Staff

I was shocked at how little I knew as far as the research goes with community engagement. I thought that the dual capacity framework . . . really lit a fire under me. Also in that same presentation . . . was [a district] sharing out the actual framework and then also the high-leverage strategies in that shift and just that one slide, there were a couple of slides in there that I just couldn't unsee as a leader . . . And to actually see folks applying some pretty amazing community engagement research and not just making stuff up.”

— Geographic Lead Agency Participant

With COVID-19, graduation is a hot topic. And maybe in years past, administrators locked themselves in a room and figured out how we were going to do graduation . . . Those old practices are being looked at . . . Now we're involving student voice.”

— District Administrator