



Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) Lead Agencies: Final Evaluation Report

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Prepared by
Robin Wisniewski, *Project Director, SELPA Lead Evaluation*,
Kersh Naidu-Subramanyam, Brittney Denson, Jon
Boyette, Juliana Fitzgerald

California Statewide System of Support
Evaluation Team:

Jay Feldman (*Project Director*), Jon Boyette,
Susan Rotermund, Nitya Venkateswaran,
Robin Wisniewski

Contact
Robin Wisniewski
RTI International
2150 Shattuck Avenue, Suite 800
Berkeley, CA 94704
919-597-5164
rwisniewski@rti.org

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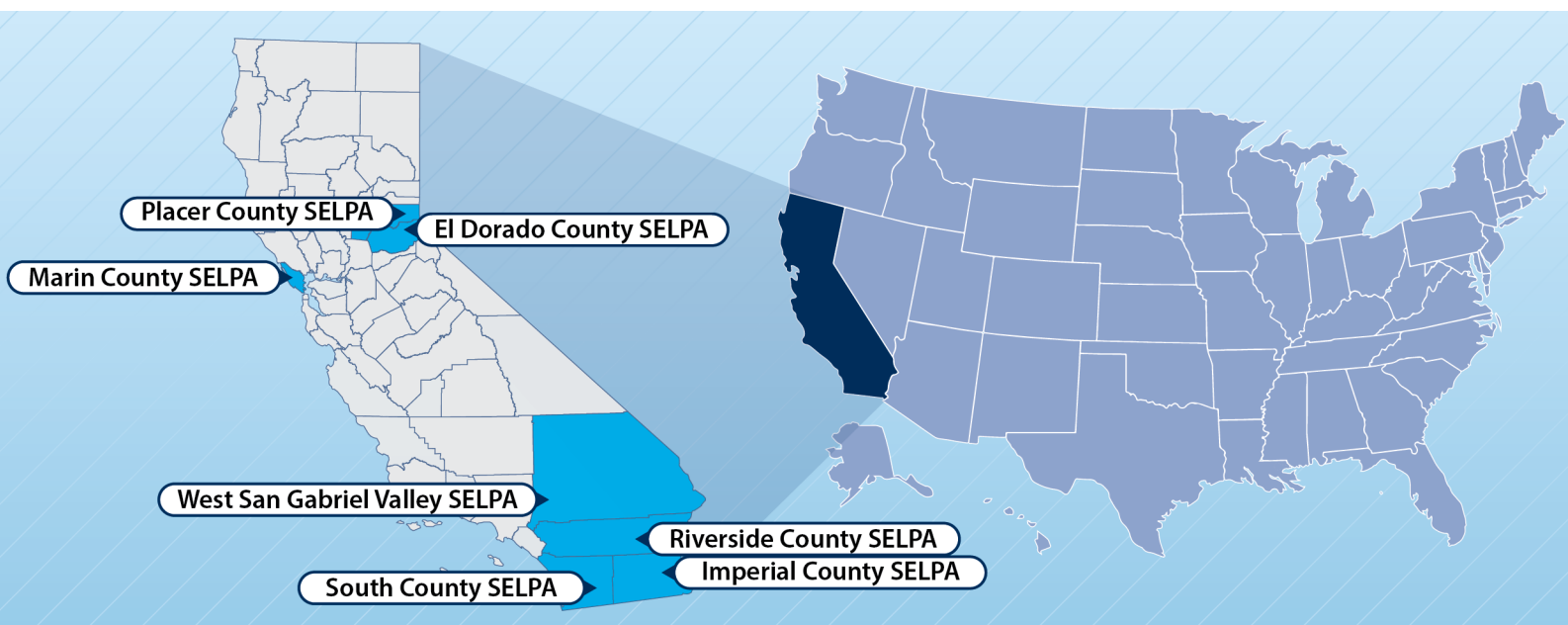
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Key Takeaways



1. SELPA Leads implemented **nine essential features** that reflected the research base on effective networks in education, professional development, and systems change: a positive environment, sufficient length of time for learning, coaching, tailored trainings, collaboration and networking, practice opportunities, resources and tools, evidence-based practices (EBPs), and leadership. These features influenced SELPA Lead impact on partners, partner work with LEAs, LEA changes, and student benefits.
2. **Continuous improvement** was the primary impact area: SELPA Leads reported that participant teams improved their own continuous improvement and continuous improvement approaches in LEAs. Approaches included those from implementation science and improvement science. Continuous improvement was also essential to SELPA Leads' leadership, reflected in their tailoring of offerings for partners and improvements in offerings over the course of the grant.
3. SELPA Lead capacity building **benefited students and resulted in positive changes in districts and schools**. The primary impact of these changes were (a) increased integration between special education and general education services and supports and (b) higher quality Individualized Education Program (IEP) development and implementation. Both these changes resulted in increased engagement in general education settings and an increase in students meeting their respective IEP goals. Participants also perceived EBPs as increasing, possibly related to increased student engagement.
4. SELPA Leads **created sustainability structures**, and 93% of partners involved with capacity building agreed that they could continue implementation of practices learned in SELPA Lead trainings once the SELPA Lead support ends. These practices include their own work of integrating special education and general education in teaming and in policy and procedures, analyzing data for decision making, determining effective instructional practices and social-emotional strategies, and using online tools and resources from SELPA Leads. Partners also agreed that they would continue to lead or guide teams in LEAs to implement these practices.
5. SELPA Leads and partners cited **connections across the Statewide System of Support (SSOS)** as one of the supports that can help with sustainability, whether it be access to resources or understanding resources available within the SSOS.

Introduction



THE SELPA LEADS

As part of the 2018 Budget Act, the California Legislature authorized the California Department of Education (CDE), in collaboration with the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) to select Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA) or a consortia of SELPAs to serve as special education leads.¹ The purpose of the leads was to improve student outcomes as part of the California Statewide System of Support (SSOS).

CDE and CCEE selected four content leads and one system improvement lead: Imperial County SELPA, focused on English learners with disabilities; Marin County SELPA, focused on autism and evidence-based practices (EBPs); Placer County SELPA, focused on access; South County SELPA, focused on disproportionality and equity; and System Improvement, coordinated among El Dorado County, Riverside County, and West San Gabriel SELPAs.

The purpose of the SELPA Lead Agencies (SELPA Leads) was to build the capacity of SELPAs in supporting local education agencies (LEAs) to meet the needs of students with disabilities and improve student outcomes, connect with partners, align priorities and integrate special education and general education, and facilitate resources and relationships.

This is the fourth and final year of the SELPA Lead evaluation. The purpose of the data collection was to explore and describe the impact of SELPA Leads as they planned and implemented their capacity building activities.

This fourth year shows features common to SELPA Lead capacity building that were important for outcomes, scale, and sustainability as well as the impact that the work had on SELPA staff and their collaborators and how they, in turn, effected LEA improvements and student achievement.

¹ California Education Code Section 52073 and 52073.1.

ABOUT THE SELPA LEAD EVALUATION

Over the four evaluation years, RTI International administered surveys to participants, conducted focus groups and interviews of SELPA Leads and those who participated in SELPA Lead capacity building sessions.

In focus groups, interviews, and surveys, RTI started by asking about features of the capacity building work that are most important and the impact that it has had. This provides good background information for sustainability-specific questions about what aspects of the work participants believe will continue and why, what support would be needed for the work to continue, and what participants themselves will continue in their own work. Many participants mentioned not only sustainability but also scale—they expect not only continuity but growth. The following evaluation questions guided the final evaluation:

1. What were the effective features of SELPA Lead capacity building?
2. What was the impact of SELPA Leads?
3. What SELPA Lead features related to sustainability?
4. What connections do SELPA Leads have with the SSOS?

The evaluation team sent survey invitations to 977 leaders who SELPA Leads indicated had participated in SELPA Lead capacity building; 335 responded to the survey, for an overall response rate of 34.3%. Of those 335 respondents, 128 reported having a medium or high level of involvement with their Lead Agency, mostly likely involved with capacity building of sufficient length or duration (e.g., 12 or more hours over the course of a semester or throughout the year). Of those 128 respondents, 72 reported that they provide training or professional development to LEAs. Data from the 72 respondents were used for this report's findings.

SELPA Leads were SELPAs who were awarded the SELPA Lead grant to build the capacity of SELPAs to assist LEAs in making improvements for students with disabilities. SELPA Leads provided multiple levels of service regionally and statewide, from universal webinars and widely accessible resources to targeted and intensive capacity building for participants.

Each SELPA Lead worked collaboratively within the SSOS to build the capacity of SELPAs and LEAs with a common goal to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. They offered services regionally to SELPAs and associated staff from county offices of education (COEs) and regional consultants to build capacity in improving LEA policies and practices for students with disabilities. They also provided statewide training for teachers, teacher-leads or coaches, support personnel, general and special education service providers, and administrators.

For the purpose of this report, “**participants**” and “**partners**” were regional-level staff who received capacity building services from SELPA Leads. Participants were staff of SELPAs and COEs as well as regional consultants and staff in LEAs. The purpose of participation was to support LEAs in improving the access of students with disabilities in cohesive and effective school systems intentionally designed to provide necessary supports and interventions for educational and postsecondary success.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluation findings are divided into three parts: SELPA Lead **capacity building features**, SELPA Lead **impact**, and SELPA Lead **sustainability**. First are the features of capacity building, which addresses the alignment between what SELPA Leads did and what research says is effective in capacity building for systems change. Second is the impact that may relate to the implementation of these features, from changes that participants enacted themselves in their own organization and professional development practices to changes that resulted from participant work in LEAs for districts, schools, and students. Third, sustainability addresses the need for participant practices and changes to continue upon the conclusion of the SELPA Lead grant cycle. The SELPA Lead SSOS connections and connections across the state are integrated within the sustainability findings, as SELPA Leads played a role in the SSOS, from their connections with other SSOS Leads like Geographic Lead Agencies to participant knowledge of the wider SSOS purpose and resources.

SELPA Lead Capacity Building



In the SELPA Leads' start-up and first year (2019-2020), the evaluation investigated the features that were present in the SELPA Leads' capacity building work based on features of effective networks in education.² These features include EBPs, continuous improvement, collaboration within and across organizations, trusting relationships and shared accountability, leadership, and the curation and development of resources.

In Years 2–4, evaluators collected data to further investigate these successful features but to also identify those specific to the SELPA Leads. Results showed that SELPA Lead capacity building reflected not only the features of effective networks but research-supported practices in professional learning and systems change.³ The following are results showing a synthesis of nine **essential features of SELPA Leads**.

The essential features of SELPA Lead capacity building are as follows:

1. Positive environment
2. Sufficient duration for learning
3. Coaching
4. Tailored and responsive trainings
5. Collaboration and networking
6. Practice opportunities
7. Resources and tools
8. EBPs—process and content
9. Leadership

² Rincón-Gallardo, S., & Fullan, M. (2016). Essential features of effective networks in education. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 1(1), 5-22.

³ Bishop, J., Darling-Hammond, L., & Jaquith, A. (2015). *Maximizing the use of new state professional learning investments to support student, educator, and school growth*. Learning Policy Institute; California Department of Education. (2015). *The superintendent's quality professional learning standards: Approved by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction*.

1. SELPA Lead capacity building provided a positive environment for participant learning.

A positive environment is defined as a learning context for participants that includes supportive relationships, empathy, trust, and accountability. One SELPA Lead described facilitating a positive environment as “building relationships and trust and making the work meaningful for what [SELPAs] were doing.” Other SELPA Leads agreed that these relationships contributed to making efforts more relevant and responsive to participant needs and to enabling authentic collaboration within and among teams. Some SELPA Leads described relationships as having empathy for demands that partners faced in their own work in supporting LEAs as well as problems that LEAs faced themselves in doing the work. One SELPA Lead member explained that, because of these challenges, the SELPA Lead “walks alongside” partners as they solve problems. Another SELPA Lead shared that participants need “someone to lean on” and that trust is gained through those supportive relationships.

Participants agreed that positive relationships were necessary and helpful, mentioning that SELPA Leads guided and supported their work with patience, enabling trust. For example, one partner described that relationship: “What I liked about working with them is one, they didn’t take over. They trusted me, they trusted my leadership.” Another partner added a feeling of empowerment and not having to “wait months... There was someone, a human being I could talk to... It was very much relational.”

SELPA Leads approached partners as “listeners” willing to adapt rather than “experts” intending to dictate. Strong relationships were necessary for the work, and most SELPA survey respondents strongly agree that they felt safe or comfortable going to SELPA Leads for assistance and brainstorming regarding difficult challenges.

2. SELPA Lead capacity building was of sufficient duration.

Ninety-six percent of partners agreed that SELPA Leads provided a sufficient amount of time for capacity building throughout the year, including sessions and other training and individual coaching, although slightly more agreed that the length of time was helpful as opposed to very helpful, citing a preference for more time with SELPA Leads. This percentage was similar to the percentage in previous years.

SELPA Leads discussed their offerings for capacity building as ongoing; some were, over the course of the fall or spring,

while others were spread throughout the year. SELPA Leads discussed improvements in their delivery throughout the years. Some discussed using a “chunked” approach to capacity building, for example, moving from a 3-hour data training to 1 hour at a time for “more portable” content and providing 15- or 20-minute snippets in preexisting meetings to avoid saturation. Others moved to a second year of participation, in which SELPA Leads coached partners in bringing on additional teams at their sites or implemented new solutions for another problem of practice. For example, one SELPA Lead implemented capacity building for teams in the fall, and a team requested coaching for a new problem of practice in the spring, then asked for support the following fall when there was scale-up in the school. Participants noted in open-ended survey responses that they could build in time at the school level to implement improvements because of the ongoing SELPA Lead support. One SELPA Lead had described the capacity building as intentional, ongoing support for “a district or as a county office or whomever are selecting [LEAs]... so they could be part of your system of support in these areas, and then you have the materials and resources you need to really take people through that process and be able to do it with fidelity.”

3. Capacity building activities were enhanced by coaching.

Ninety percent of participants rated coaching from SELPA Leads as helpful or very helpful, with those who did not receive coaching mentioning that coaching would help with implementation. SELPA Leads described coaching as one of the most successful training activities. They defined coaching or mentoring as ongoing, for both individuals and teams, and for SELPAs’ implementation of continuous improvement processes for their own organizations and for helping LEAs. In the last 2 years, coaching increased and was the “key to [their] success,” as one SELPA Lead put it. SELPA Leads described coaching as allowing participants to apply the information received during trainings to implementation practices. One SELPA Lead member said that there could not be capacity building in which participants were told to just do it by themselves. Two SELPA Leads described coaching as sustainable because they modeled for participants approaches for addressing ongoing processes of problem-solving and implementation so that participants could “begin the teaching and content delivery process and coaching their [own] people... so they continue to move forward.”

One SELPA Lead explained coaching as a gradual release to continue support: “We coached [partners] along the way and have handed the reins over now to them. They’re running their teams and they’re doing the scale-up work out in the districts with us just kind of cheerleading at this point from the sidelines.”

Partners also described coaching as the most effective support they received from SELPA Leads. They called it individualized, direct, and one-on-one. One partner described the coaching relationship as needed guidance, with one acknowledging that “the mentorship and coaching support has contributed tremendously in building my own capacity” and that of the team. Another shared that coaching helped with implementation, “to apply the tools in real time and learn effective implementation practices when encountering barriers.” Another said that coaching kept people “focused, progressing, and open to discussing ideas that we did not think of on our own.” Another participant related coaching as the “most effective support compared to any other entity in the past.”

4. SELPA Lead capacity building was tailored and responsive to participant needs.

Ninety-seven percent of survey respondents agreed that it was helpful or very helpful that trainings were tailored to their needs. Participants provided feedback about the helpfulness in tailoring the format of trainings to their needs and helping them select a problem of practice. Participants shared specific instances of responsiveness, like helping their team analyze data differently to align with their selected need and the responsiveness to questions within and after sessions.

SELPA Leads also discussed their intentionality towards being responsive, such as having multiple avenues of communication like open-office hours, email, and phone and answering direct needs-assessment questions. Two SELPA Leads discussed leveraging partnerships to tailor trainings. For example, one SELPA Lead described “collaborat[ing] with CDE... to make [technical assistance] interactive... reflective... and individualize[d].” Another SELPA Lead “contracted real experts in the field” to provide training to facilitators, teachers, and academic coaches that was specific to content area needs.” SELPA Leads discussed tailoring their resources and developing sessions based on needs they heard in previous capacity building trainings.

5. SELPA Lead capacity building provided opportunities for participants to practice.

Ninety-three percent of SELPA Lead survey respondents agreed that practice and implementation opportunities were helpful or very helpful. Practice occurred within and between sessions. Within sessions, some SELPA Leads and partners described the learning as interactive like when SELPA staff members engage in a problem of practice within their own organization and with LEAs. A SELPA Lead team member shared a gradual release approach within three tiers of certification: first with a course for teachers and paraprofessionals, second for special service providers, and third “to make sure that they truly are functioning ... specialists and know everything they need to know to drive the whole system when it’s done.” Partners commented on the practice during and after sessions, sharing that the follow-up that SELPA Leads provided helped them reflect on the practice so that they could continue implementation.

6. SELPA Lead capacity building provided participants with collaboration and networking for learning and working together.

Ninety-seven percent of survey respondents agreed that collaboration on their teams and across teams was helpful or very helpful, with almost all agreeing that collaboration and teaming was central to the work. SELPA Leads discussed inviting participants into their SELPA teams or creating teams among partners during capacity building. In the last year, some SELPA Leads emphasized the integration of special education and general education on capacity building teams as it would help with teaming in LEAs as well, with “educators coming together to support all kids.” Rather than focusing specifically on pedagogy, partners learned how to “build up the confidence [needed] to be able to support... students” in a safe and collaborative environment. Similarly, another SELPA Lead discussed the importance of multidisciplinary teams for incorporating multiple lenses in “develop[ing] actionable next steps that are responsive to the needs of... individual students.”

Ninety-three percent of participants agreed that network connections across SELPAs and COEs was helpful or very helpful in their work, with only a slight few viewing networking as not applicable. Nearly all SELPA Leads referenced networks as impactful for capacity building, whether it was in collaborating across statewide networks to identify high-needs LEAs or using the network to develop

teams that could lead to scaling up capacity building efforts. Most often, SELPA Leads described networks as avenues for collaborating on complex problems of practice. For example, one SELPA Lead described convening teams from across the state to agree on a shared aim, “share data with each other and share our best practices with each other, share what we’re trying out and then really try to reach [change] faster by working on it together?” Similarly, another SELPA Lead described using available resources across the state and “allowing these folks to come together, have the technical aspects be taught, the technical aspects worked through, but really lean on each other” to solve problems of practice. Another SELPA Lead noted that networks have led to practitioners receiving “very strong peer support throughout the state with other people who are working on similar types of initiatives.”

7. SELPA Lead capacity building provided resources and tools for participants.

Ninety-seven percent of survey respondents agreed that the tools and resources that SELPA Leads developed and provided were helpful or very helpful. Participants ranked tools and resources as most important for their work. They noted the tools and resources were essential, accessible, and the “right amount.”

All SELPA Leads described the tools and resources provided to SELPAs as creating impact. Notably, many SELPA Leads’ websites served as an essential resource for the distribution of tools partners could use, including data tools and reports, infographics, templates, appendices, visual aids, and others “designed with the practitioners in mind.” Data tools were cited most often, with multiple SELPA Leads noting that SELPAs being able to “access their data for the first time... is a real kind of game changer.” SELPA Leads also described other tools that they used with SELPAs aside from their websites, including those created by distilling existing frameworks and resources to localized tools that were applicable and actionable. For example, one SELPA Lead described “develop[ing] a procedures manual” from a national resource that provided tailored regional support for SELPAs. Similarly, other SELPA Leads described introducing SELPAs to more general tools during trainings and coaching them on how to adapt the tools to their local contexts.

8. SELPA Leads provided participants with EBPs for both skills in school improvement and the content for student success.

Since SELPA Leads’ first year of implementation, they included both process and content-related EBPs to build the capacity of regional leads. Process EBPs were skills like coaching and motivational interviewing to use while supporting LEAs. Other processes were embedded in the work that they facilitated, notably continuous improvement from either improvement science or implementation science perspectives and engaging participants to identify challenges, test solutions, implement changes, reflect on results, and improve outcomes. Content-related EBPs were those that SELPA Leads taught, like ways to set goals and provide services on IEPs, instructional and social-emotional learning practices, assessment of English learners, and universal design for learning.

9. SELPA Leads were leaders in their development, implementation, and revisions of capacity building for participants.

Finally, SELPA Leads not only created and delivered capacity building activities that included the nine essential features but they also showed evidence that they themselves were committed to continuous improvement, improving their work throughout the grant cycle. For example, the SELPA Lead work changed given the pandemic and equity awareness context during the 2020–2021 school year, with a focus on virtual capacity building and equity-centered discussions and goals with partners. Over the next 2 years, SELPA Leads adjusted their capacity building formats (i.e., to both virtual and in person) and responded to partner needs to help LEAs in their pandemic recovery. They cultivated collaboration and co-creation among themselves rather than relying on compliance to achieve shared goals. All SELPA Leads discussed this leadership as important on their own teams for high-quality work, notably their own continuous improvement. One SELPA Lead described the need to model continuous improvement while building the capacity of their participants by using internal evaluation: “If we’re asking other people to look at data to make improvement, we need to be looking at [our own] data as well.” Another SELPA Lead discussed the role of data in continuous improvement, noting that “we’re touching it, we’re using it, we’re leaning forward, we’re making mistakes, and [building our] own capacity... within our team, too.” One SELPA Lead discussed the importance of regular meetings

within the team to discuss “what went well, what could [be] improve[d] on, and so [they’re] always improving... always creating.” Another SELPA Lead also noted how diversifying the internal team was impactful in that it enabled the team to engage in “human-centered... and student-centered approach[es]” by leveraging differing experiences and expertise when approaching problems.

The leadership of SELPA Leads was well noted by participants. Participants found that SELPA Lead capacity building was high quality and beneficial to them. As one participant expressed, “This is probably the best work that I have participated in since I started my position 8 years ago.” Another said, “The opportunity to participate ... has been one of the most impactful and rewarding experiences of my professional career.” Participants expressed gratitude for what they learned and how it applies to their work, citing a “wonderful journey” and the quality of SELPA Leads as “experts in the field with real-time experience doing the work.”

“ We are so grateful for the work you all are doing to pave the way in supporting students and educators across the state. We know it has been hard work to achieve such a lofty dream.

— SELPA Lead participant

A purpose for describing features of SELPA Lead capacity building is to understand how to interpret the impact that SELPA Leads made: what was it that influenced the impact? The following section lays out the regional and local impact that these features influenced, as related by SELPA Leads and participants.



Even though the pandemic hit smack dab in the center of the 5-year effort, capacity was built, awareness was raised, EBPs were broadened across more educators. The [SELPA Lead] managed and coordinated small logistics and lead by convening throughout. They have been an enormous and important support and resource for our region.

— SELPA Lead participant

SELPA Lead Impact



SELPA Lead impact was measured using document analysis and perceptions of impact from focus group and survey respondents. Both SELPA Leads and those who participated in SELPA Lead capacity building were asked about knowledge and skills gained as well as behaviors they implemented or changed. They were also asked about how these actions influenced changes in schools and for students.

Like SELPA Lead features, evaluators investigated impact over the 4 years of the evaluation. In Year 1, impact was focused on whether SELPA Lead participation was useful and influenced knowledge and mindset shifts as well as how participation expanded partners' own work and work with LEAs. In Years 2 and 3, questions focused on specific practices that participants used in their work and with LEAs and how that work, in turn, influenced changes within LEAs and for students. The most common impacts generated the foundation for data collection in Year 4, which added to and synthesized findings from previous years.

The following categories and descriptions of impact reflect impact within SELPAs themselves, in SELPAs' work with LEAs, and for the ultimate beneficiary—students.

1. SELPA Leads influenced SELPAs' improvements in practice in their own organization's work, namely data use, continuous improvement practices, and cross-SELPA collaboration.

Over the years of the evaluation, three major areas of SELPA organization improvement emerged as a result of SELPA Lead capacity building: use of data, continuous improvement, and collaboration across SELPAs. Most respondents agreed that these improvements happened in their own teams and that their skills in selecting EBPs for academics and behavioral outcomes improved.

At first, some SELPA participants who did not form teams for capacity building added staff in future years to attend sessions as a team. One participant said that the work "drastically changed our practice, the engagement in data collection and reporting and empowering change from a success/fail model." Another described analyzing data in new ways, which helped "to develop a strategic, sustainable process more thoroughly." All SELPA Leads mentioned that SELPAs used data tools that the former created for collecting and analyzing SELPA data, including for analyzing historical trends of special education and performance indicators. A SELPA team described training staff in its own SELPA to build capacity for helping LEAs: "We are still in the preliminary stages of rolling out the trainings to our own SELPA; [but] there are already improvements with staff starting to understand and implement [the content]."

Participants in 2022 had offered examples of their changes that occurred within their SELPAs or organizations. A SELPA administrator offered an example of creating a problem of practice by, instead of “checking boxes” on a compliance report from CDE, looking at the data and asking, “What does it mean for our students and how can we improve so, ultimately, their outcomes and lives are improved?” Another said that structures and processes put in place for teaming and continuous improvement helped keep the work going despite high staff turnover. An example of collaboration across SELPAs was staff working with SELPA staff in new ways, aligning goals and working on a similar problem of practice across regions. Participants talked about being able to “phone a friend” with new colleagues across the state to work on challenges.

2. SELPA Leads influenced partners’ improvements in knowledge and skills of providing professional development to LEAs, mostly in their facilitation of continuous improvement, providing tailored support, and communication about improvements.

Previous partners in 2022 agreed that there was an increase in the knowledge and skills that they gained. Ninety-three percent of partners agreed that the SELPA Lead they worked with built their capacity to work effectively with LEAs. Eighty-nine percent of partners agreed that they guided LEAs to use helpful online tools and resources obtained from SELPA Leads, with 89% helping LEAs with evidence-based strategies for academics and 85% helping LEAs with evidence-based strategies for social-emotional learning.

During this last year of SELPA Lead capacity building, participants reported the same changes that emerged during the 2021–2022 evaluation, emphasizing that how they model work for and work with LEAs has improved. Data use for continuous improvement is a major area of change or improvement for partner work with LEAs. This includes important information to collect, such as information about caseloads and services on IEPs to determine how to provide improved supports. Other examples are how to input data, how to analyze the data, and how to decide on the problem to work on and practice to implement for improvement. Tailored trainings were also a highlight, especially in the last

2 years of the SELPA Lead work. As SELPA Leads described, partners asked need-related questions and tailored their support for LEAs and implementing their problem of practice. Finally, communication with LEAs improved, with SELPA Leads and partners referencing a shift from compliance to improvement discussions. Some SELPA Leads used empathy interviews, which emphasized listening and understanding the perspective of LEA staff. This helped reduce “fear and shame around data” and instead focused on using data tools to objectively look at data. As one SELPA Lead stated, the empathy interviews were “focused on taking [fear] away and giving folks processes to make it human centered again.” Partners shared that they began “discussing the data to inform our decisions [in working with LEAs] and the development of next steps to improve the system” and “created a demonstration site that other districts can attend to view as a model program.”

3. SELPA Leads influenced improvements in LEA practices, including continuous improvement, IEP writing, data use, instructional practices, team integration, and family-school engagement.

A primary impact on LEAs was the use of **continuous improvement** approaches, with 97% of partners agreeing or strongly agreeing that they influenced the use of continuous improvement strategies in schools and districts. One partner stated that the school was now using continuous improvement “to help guide initiatives and show how the [initiatives] can complement each other as opposed to feeling siloed or in competition with each other.” Another said that there was a continuous improvement “mindset shift at the site level.”

Instructional practices was a second impact for LEAs, with 93% of survey respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that staff in LEAs improved their instructional practices. SELPA Leads also described that the EBPs they modeled and/or encouraged LEAs to use created impact such that LEAs were “changed forever” by an emphasis on continuous improvement. These practices included habit stacking, process mapping, engaging in communities of practice, and other “tangible strategies” that can be “replicat[ed] in any problem area.” One partner mentioned preparing problems of practice with LEAs for “small wins and where we can improve” on the evidence-based strategies they selected. Another partner said “using the tools on how to select evidenced-based practices based on student needs” along with coaching support helped to implement instructional practices.



We have created a new system for training, coaching, and implementing evidence-based practices in a school district.

— SELPA Lead participant

Data use was the third significant improvement in LEA practices, with 85% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that they influenced the use of data to inform school-level improvements. SELPA Leads described practitioner mindset and behavior shifts, with LEA staff wanting to organize their district data instead of “never want[ing] to get close to” the data. Similarly, another SELPA Lead noted that “the increase in the number of people accessing that data on a regular basis has increased,” which is essential to the work of equity and continuous improvement. Using an example of low student math scores, a partner described helping LEAs thoroughly examine a situation by asking questions about the system of math like “how is math taught? What time of day? Are students just pulled out and sent” as opposed to providing a quick “fix... like give everyone another intervention class.”

A fourth impact was both **team integration** and **IEP writing**, with 81% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that they influenced the creation of teams that integrate general and special education and that IEP writing better aligns with student needs. Many SELPA Leads referenced LEA teams being more “representative” of different offices and departments and representing both special education and general education staff. A SELPA Lead team member discussed changes in teaming for data use and continuous improvement: “Many [LEAs] did not have teams before. It was a very top-down unilateral process whenever program decisions were made. So the formation of teams, holding regular team meetings, having a set agenda with norms, using action planning, following up on action planning, having procedures for addressing barriers when they arise, data-based decision-making, both collecting the data but then evaluating and using the data in order to determine needs and if something is working or not working—those are all components that they’re now doing, that weren’t happening before.”

A partner described the teaming as helping the prereferral process for English learners because staff from multiple disciplines shared information about students to help figure out what support was needed for students, helping “improve the process for appropriate and accurate referrals.” This integration led to an instructional coach in one school who started “to meet with both general education and special education peers to discuss [the EBP] implementation in the classroom.”

Others shared problems of practice related to improving IEP writing and measuring improvements over time. One

partner emphasized improvements in using resources “to inform and write more accurate and linguistically appropriate goals and objectives” in IEPs for English learners. Another partner stated, “The percentage of compliant IEPs has increased significantly.” One SELPA Lead noted that “SELPA and districts that are involved are seeing the quality of their IEP goals improve [and] they’re seeing their data entry and practices improve.”

School-family engagement was the last area of impact, with 70% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they influenced school-family engagement. One area of engagement that participants reported was increased collaboration between families and school IEP team staff.

SELPA Leads influenced impacts on students in areas of increased access to general education, meeting IEP goals, access to assistive technologies, and engagement.

A top area of impact on students—and the reason that SELPA Leads and participants undertook the capacity building work—was **student engagement**. Eighty-nine percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there was an increase in student engagement in the educational environment. One partner noted “an increase in student engagement during group and individual work sessions due to use of effective reinforcement strategies.” Another partner related that student engagement in evidence-based instruction improved “their behaviors, academics, social-emotional functioning which leads to greater access.” Another partner shared that a student was engaged in writing and completed their “first paper ever.”

A second area of impact for students was a **less restrictive environment**. Seventy-eight percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there was an increase in student access to general education. One partner shared that a “student was able to stay in the general education environment for core instruction.” One partner said, “Students transitioning from 6th grade to 7th grade are moving to a lesser restrictive environment as a direct result of the support from [the SELPA Lead].” A third area of improvement that participants reported was student access to **assistive technologies**. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students had increased access to these technologies.

A fourth area of improvement was **IEP goals**. Seventy-two percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there was an increase in students meeting IEP goals.

SELPA Lead Sustainability



SELPA Leads provided capacity building for thousands of participants across California over 4½ years. An important next step from capacity building is sustainability so that participants and LEAs continue the work of SELPA Leads. In Year 4, 93% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they could continue implementation of practices learned in SELPA Lead trainings once the SELPA Lead support ends.

1. SELPA Leads created structures for sustainability with their tools and resources and networks.

In this last year of SELPA Lead work, 97% of partners found helpful or very helpful the tools and resources, including data tools, databases for using data for improvement, tools for continuous improvement, processes for equitable special education eligibility, and services for improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Examples include tools built to provide reflection for overidentification, data visualization, data sheets, root cause analysis guide, data quality toolkit, improvement data center, English Learner Roadmap and Practitioner's Guide, effective communication, process map, resources specific to English learners, universal

design for learning and assistive technologies guides, disproportionality resources, and autism assessment. One SELPA Lead described a database as continuing "to help support this work as it is a central location where all those involved will have access to really important information and can see the impact and can continue to reflect on what needs to be done to improve outcomes for students." Ninety percent of partners agreed or strongly agreed that they would use these tools in their leadership and guidance of LEA teams.

Nearly all SELPA Leads acknowledged the pivotal role networks played in their work and the importance of the sustainability of these features. One SELPA Lead described networks as a "hub of expertise" for its region so that partners could continue to teach and lead LEA improvements as the SELPA Lead "focused very specifically on putting systems in place and making sure those systems are supported by content delivery from coaching to implementation." Another launched a network improvement community to empower SELPAs or LEAs working individually

to approach improvement in a teamed environment. Networking across SELPAs, although informal compared with the hubs, was an impact of the SELPA Lead work that both SELPA Leads and participants viewed as important for sustainability. A SELPA Lead emphasized that SELPA staff “now have colleagues across the state ..., who they never would’ve met otherwise... It’s not just about their local problem, [and they can] connect to one another as they work through these challenges.” Another SELPA Lead team member, in describing the ability to scale the growth of this professional learning network, shared that the SELPA Lead extended its reach across the state, along with tens of COEs and LEAs. Partners concurred with the networking effects, saying that they aligned work with other SELPAs, worked with teams that they would not have otherwise worked with, and learned from other SELPAs when focused on similar problems of practice in different geographic locations. One participant described these network connections as collaborative commitments across SELPAs on which the success of this work hinges.

2. Partners agreed that there are essential practices that they would continue in their own work as well as in their work with LEA capacity building.

Partners were asked about five practices that they would either continue on their own or lead or guide staff in LEAs to continue. Between 85% and 99% of partners agreed or strongly agreed that they would continue the following practices, ranked from highest to lowest: analysis of data for decision making (99%); determination of effective instructional practices (95%); use of online tools or resources from SELPA Leads (95%); integration of special and general education personnel, policy, and procedures (89%); and determination of effective social-emotional strategies or practices (85%).

Between 83% and 90% of partners agreed or strongly agreed that they would continue to lead or guide teams or staff in LEAs in their work in these areas, with the highest (90%) tied among analyzing data for decision making, determination of effective instructional practices, and use of online tools or resources from SELPA Leads, followed by integration of special and general education personnel, policy, and procedures (83%) and determination of effective social-emotional strategies practices (80%).

Partners shared areas that they would continue, including collaboration with other districts and agencies, outreach and support to staff, presentation of online or virtual trainings, discussions with general education and special education administrators about the importance of this work, and improvement of projects and coaching opportunities with expert leads.

3. SELPA Leads shared that personnel, time, and connections across the system would help sustain the work.

All SELPA Leads noted the importance of personnel and time when describing their ability to sustain their efforts. A few SELPA Leads commented that a barrier to providing increased services was a lack of personnel. However, two other SELPA Leads described using additional personnel to provide local and more in-depth services. Some SELPA Leads described networking across SELPA Leads and the SSOS, or “system integration” as described by two SELPA Leads, as a potential solution for insufficient personnel. Accordingly, one SELPA Lead mentioned the need for shared language across the system to streamline networking across the system.

Most SELPA Leads discussed visions of scaling up their efforts to broaden their reach across the state. For example, one SELPA Lead discussed the desire to “partner with every element of the Statewide System of Support and support the work that all leads are doing,” which would increase the number of personnel working towards capacity building across the state. Another SELPA Lead elevated partnerships across the system as a conduit for scaling to “tag team the work,” and another noted that “the amount of progress [the state] would see in systems change would be significant” with more engagement across partners. Another critical component of scaling supports included leveraging preexisting resources. For example, one SELPA Lead felt “a strong sense of responsibility of getting those resources out... statewide and sharing the common tools and resources” developed by SELPA Leads to increase their reach.

SELPA Leads collaborated with organizations within and external to the SSOS. The survey showed 77% of respondents were aware of the structure of the SSOS, including state-sponsored initiatives. Fifty-seven percent

responded saying they know how to navigate the SSOS to get the support they need, and 13% said that the SSOS was not applicable: they had not tried to access support beyond the SELPA Leads yet. Although the survey prompts improved from previous surveys to show respondents the image of the SSOS, it is likely that many respondents who were aware or said that they accessed other SELPA Leads in the SSOS thought that the SSOS was mostly SELPA Leads. Many mentioned the resources of the SELPA Leads as helpful, specifically websites or other online resources, training, and coaching. They also noted that access to SELPA Leads was important. It will be important for sustainability to have continued access to resources that are consolidated on a website or other easily accessible media. One respondent from a COE recognized the SSOS, saying it partnered with

many SELPA Leads in their existing initiatives and was grateful for the tools and expertise. Another said it had immediate access to all SELPA Leads. Another said that the “information provided by each SELPA Lead Agency is vast. My challenge is I need more time to dive into the many resources provided by each SELPA.” Others mentioned Geographic Lead Agencies, stating that the SELPA resides in a Geographic Lead Agency area but was not aware of the resource and that an increase in collaboration between COEs and SELPAs would be helpful.

Overall, SELPA Leads created structures for sustainability with their tools and resources and networks. Partners agreed that they would continue essential practices in their own work as well as in their work with LEA capacity building. Further supports will also help with sustainability.

The single greatest gift we can give to our students is the ability to plan a systematic approach to life's challenges in a data-backed, goal-oriented manner. This is how successful individuals live. It is also how successful organizations live, and [the SELPA Lead] provides the backbone that allows us to become a sustainably successful organization.

— SELPA capacity building participant, 2023.