education northwest

Interim Evaluation Memo: Year 3 Findings (2023–24)

The COVID-19 pandemic led to lost instructional time and diminished academic outcomes for California students, particularly those in early grades and the most vulnerable student groups. In response, the governor approved Assembly Bill 130 (AB 130) on July 9, 2021. This bill allocated funding to provide professional learning for educators to support evidence-based learning acceleration strategies for all students. The California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) operates the state's Learning Acceleration System Grant (LASG) program through this funding. The LASG program aims to establish statewide infrastructure to build local educational agencies' capacity to accelerate academic progress. The program's four goals focus on professional learning opportunities addressing evidence-based approaches and classroom practices, particularly in core academic subjects:

Develop a robust statewide infrastructure for professional learning.

Implement evidence-based professional learning opportunities or guidance for educators, paraprofessionals, and administrators to address students' learning acceleration.

Increase learning among educators, paraprofessionals, and administrators.

Accelerate learning for all students impacted by COVID-19 learning disruptions, including students with unique considerations.

CCEE created a proposal process and administration plan for the grants before awarding a total of $45 million to the education offices of Lake County (Rural Math Collaborative), Santa Clara County (The California Collaborative for Learning Acceleration), and San Diego County (California Literacy Elevation by Accelerating Reading) to provide educators with these professional learning opportunities. Each grantee is providing varied support for accelerating math, literacy, or language development.

Education Northwest and our subcontractor Social Policy Research Associates are leading a system-wide evaluation of the LASG program from 2022–2026. We use an equity lens in every aspect of our work, including planning, development, implementation, and analysis. This memo is part of the larger evaluation that includes three phases (planning, formative, and summative)—though data collection will span phases where appropriate. Our approach focuses on the collection of qualitative and quantitative data and engages a team with expertise in coordinating findings from these data in all phases of the project. Evaluation data sources include grantee and professional learning participant focus groups,

a professional learning participant survey, observations, document review, administrative records, and the California Healthy Kids survey. This memo shares findings focused on data collected during the third grant year (2023–24) of the evaluation and is organized around the grant goals and evaluation questions. This memo expands upon the first interim memo, which focused on data collected during the second grant year.

How are grantees developing a statewide infrastructure for professional learning?

We explored several factors to provide insight into LASG grantees' progress towards the first grant goal of developing a statewide infrastructure for professional learning. These include the characteristics of staff members served during the grant period as of June 2024, the systems and processes that supported grantees in developing evidence-based professional learning, the alignment of these systems and processes across grantees, and how grantees are leveraging technology in their efforts. **Year 3 of the LASG (2023–24) was characterized by the general expansion of statewide infrastructure and an increase in the number of educators served**. Specific findings are presented below:

LASG grantees maintained partnerships with County Offices of Education (COEs) in half (n = 29) of the counties in California.

The LASG infrastructure provided support for a **growing number of professional learning activities** throughout the 2023–24 year.

LASG professional learning activities reached approximately **981 educators,**[1] across 40 counties, more than doubling the number from the previous year.[2]

Grantees were at different stages of planning and implementing professional learning opportunities, but **focused this year more on developing and providing professional learning** rather than on the selection of evidence-based strategies.

Grantees shifted focus from using What Works Clearinghouse[3] to identify proven strategies for learning acceleration last year to using **six systems and processes (team values, partnerships, interest in streamlining processes and resources, internal evaluation learnings, expansion**

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[1] This number was derived from grantee participant lists shared with the external evaluation team and represents an unduplicated count of participants; some individuals attended multiple opportunities.

[2] In the 2022–23 year, LASG professional development opportunities served 374 educators, according to grantees' participant lists.

[3] The What Works Clearinghouse is a project of the Institute of Education Sciences, which is the primary research and evaluation arm of the U.S. Department of Education. Its main purpose is to conduct rigorous evaluations of educational programs, practices, and policies to determine their effectiveness.

goals, and sustainability considerations) to support development and refinement of professional learning offerings and efforts.

CCEE provided grantees with ongoing support through mechanisms such as one-on-one check-in meetings and quarterly LASG Professional Learning Network meetings with a focus on building grantee relationships and fostering collaboration on problems of practice and new ideas.

The alignment of systems and processes across grantees continued to strengthen, and there was an increased focus on alignment and coherence across statewide initiatives.

Grantees partnered with county offices of education, content developers, and facilitators to combine their expertise and employed multiple online dissemination systems to support and enhance professional learning throughout California.

Each LASG grantee **engaged with technology to increase access to professional learning** through a combination of virtual meetings, asynchronous online courses, and storing and sharing resources.

How are grantees implementing evidence-based professional learning opportunities?

The second grant goal focused on the implementation of evidence-based professional learning opportunities. To explore grantee progress, we examined how the learning content is meeting participant needs and whether these needs vary by locale; the delivery methods that best meet participant needs and whether these vary by locale; how well professional learning aligns to CCEE's theory of action and essential design principles; participant perception of professional learning quality, relevance, and usability; and the strategies, structures, and supports participants perceived to be most effective. We also examined whether professional learning opportunities address the needs of diverse learners, including early learners, English learner students, students with disabilities, students with dyslexia, students experiencing homelessness, low-income students, and foster youth. Year 3 findings are presented below:

LASG provided support for various professional learning activities across the state throughout the 2023–24 year and these **activities varied in terms of target audience, format, and duration.** Opportunities with wider reach often focused on awareness or knowledge-building, while opportunities with a smaller reach were more often dedicated to supporting educators with classroom implementation.

Like last year, grantees implemented professional learning opportunities **covering a range of content and evidence-based strategies** in the domains of math, language development, and/or literacy.

Professional learning participants experienced a variety of structures, ranging from asynchronous online courses to site-specific lesson study cycles and interventions. Grantees and professional learning participants **appreciated that these opportunities were offered both virtually and in person.**

Grantees are successfully **designing professional learning opportunities aligned with CCEE goals,** and grantees took varied approaches in how they incorporated these goals into professional development opportunities.

Participants overwhelmingly reported in the survey that **the professional learning opportunities they participated in were of high quality, relevant, and useful for enhancing instructional practice.** Interview and focus group participants also shared positive perceptions, although there was some variation across educators. A few participants noted room for improvement in the navigation and organization of professional learning materials.

When asked about the effectiveness of different professional learning offerings across the grant projects, **the highest percentage of participants rated graduate-level coursework, lesson study cycles, professional learning networks (PLNs) and network improvement communities (NICs) as "effective."**

LASG professional learning participants **greatly valued opportunities to collaborate and network with other educators, work with mentors, and immediately apply their new knowledge and skills with structured support.**

Grantees and participants shared that **professional learning provides frameworks and approaches that can be used across settings to reach all students and increase their attendance, engagement, and feelings of belonging.**

Professional learning materials frequently touched on equity and diverse learners. The amount of time and details focused on specific strategies to address the needs of diverse learners varied across professional learning opportunities. **Participants generally agreed that there was a focus on equity in their professional learning, but they felt the least prepared to address the specific needs of students with dyslexia and asked for more materials addressing the specific needs of diverse learners.**

How is the grant increasing learning among educators, paraprofessionals, and administrators?

The third grant goal focused on increasing learning among educators, paraprofessionals, and administrators. To examine progress toward this goal, the evaluation team explored whether participants accessed the professional learning materials and completed the learning objectives related to evidence-based accelerated learning strategies. Evaluators also gathered initial insight into whether professional learning leads to changes in the ability to address learning gaps or to changes in instructional practice. Year 3 findings are presented below:

Survey results suggested that **participants found professional learning accessible and that they successfully completed learning objectives** regarding learning acceleration strategies and asset-based mindsets.

Over three-quarters (79%) of survey respondents said they had already made changes to their instructional practice based on what they learned through LASG professional learning opportunities. This was an increase of 35 percentage points from last year.

In survey responses, **participants reported changes in their knowledge and confidence regarding accelerated learning.**

Educators shared initial descriptions of how their participation in LASG professional learning opportunities led to changes in their practice, including an increased focus on student agency, use of student-led activities, and creating collaborative learning environments.

How is the grant accelerating learning for all students?

The fourth grant goal focused on accelerating learning for all students. In this stage of the evaluation, we explored progress toward this goal by reviewing educators' perceptions of student outcomes. Third year findings are presented below:

Educators perceived positive impacts of instructional changes on student outcomes such as increased engagement and confidence, learning and comprehension, and collaboration among students.

Grantees have chosen different strategies such as using pre/post surveys, observation protocols, and classroom assessment data to measure student growth in socioemotional skills and/or academic achievement.

Challenges, bright spots, and lessons learned

Several challenges continued into year 3, including **recruitment, generating enthusiasm and buy-in from potential participants, and time commitments or capacity constraints.** Additionally, this year grantees described challenges with **implementation logistics,** rather than the start-up processes explored in the past.

Despite these challenges, grantees described their continued work to **adapt to the needs and circumstances of both current and prospective participants** as a bright spot. While they continue to describe recruitment as a barrier to implementation, grantees were generally pleased with the results yielded by their efforts to date. Through focus groups, grantees also reflected on their efforts to **start with sustainability in mind** and many grantees acknowledged that while they are still early in their evaluation activities, they've perceived **shifts in educator practices and mindsets including developing educators' feedback structures and fostering mindset shifts among staff members. Additionally, some grantees observed increased teacher confidence as a result of the professional learning.**

Lessons learned focused on **grantees' growing understanding of how participants would prefer to engage in professional learning opportunities.**

Recommendations and next steps

Recommendations to drive continuous improvement efforts and next steps towards accomplishing LASG grant goals are summarized below.

Recruitment and increased participation in professional learning

Continue to refine and build on current recruitment efforts. This year, grantees built upon recruitment strategies and efforts established last year by developing flyer and pamphlet templates to continue to broaden their reach. They also held more information and awareness sessions, attended conferences, collaborated on recruitment plans, and disseminated information through monthly newsletters. Grantees should continue these recruitment efforts and add additional ones as needed.

To address capacity constraints regarding COE and district participation in various initiatives, the LASG program should **(1) continue to prioritize developing an understanding of how grantees fit within the statewide landscape and (2) support coherence of the statewide landscape.** Grantees could in turn learn about the different initiatives at each COE and district. The state may consider how to decrease the administrative and time burdens on COEs and increase the benefits of participating in statewide efforts (for example, offering stipends or other forms of compensation to teachers and administrators).

To address the time constraints of educators interested in professional learning, **continue to clearly communicate the expectations and time commitment of LASG opportunities.** Continue to offer opportunities for engagement with different levels of intensity, and clarify the time required for each professional learning offering. These expectations should be built into professional learning design and delivery as a road map for participants. Importantly, clearly outline what participants can expect to learn (e.g., value statement) and whether they can count the time toward their professional development goals. Encourage participation by identifying times that maximize engagement and learning about participant constraints such as childcare.

Continue to offer professional learning in a variety of formats to maximize accessibility and participation. Maintain a balance of virtual and in-person and synchronous and asynchronous opportunities to ease scheduling conflicts. Many participants expressed a preference for in-person professional learning, so continue to consider how to make such gatherings logistically and financially accessible.

Implementation and continuous improvement of professional learning opportunities

Support grantees as they implement professional learning. This year as grantees focused more on professional development implementation, logistics emerged as a challenge for which grantees could benefit from additional support. For example, grantees may benefit from support with details around structuring or hosting professional learning sessions to maximize participation, such as in-person/virtual, travel, facilitation, securing speakers (contracts), etc.

Create systems and structures to document the work of expanding professional learning opportunities at the school and district levels. This includes continuing to catalog the different opportunities implemented, collecting participant feedback, and measuring outcomes.

Continue to hone and adjust professional learning opportunities to maximize quality based on formative assessment data. It is important for grantees to take time to review, assess, and pivot if necessary while maximizing successful aspects of their work. This includes continuing thoughtful, intentional data collection and use to inform future efforts and plan strategically. It also includes continuing opportunities such as the PLN and meaning-making sessions where grantees have the opportunity to hear about and discuss data and findings.

Proactively and collaboratively strategize on maximization of data collection efforts for both the internal and external evaluation teams. Working together as a system helps ensure better response rates and representation in the data collected to explain the impact of grant activities on educators and students. For example, consider a beginning-of-year meeting to brainstorm the timing of data collection activities and to implement a better system to reach participants.

Continue to incorporate more concrete examples into professional learning, especially strategies for working with diverse learners. Provide educators with concrete strategies, relevant problems of practice, and guidance on how to apply accelerated learning strategies with different groups. Additionally, provide opportunities for educators to observe exemplar classes, either in person or through video recordings. Ensure that professional learning continues to incorporate hands-on, practical application of the content.

Implementation and continuous improvement of professional learning opportunities

Continue to share lessons learned and best practices across grantees. Learning should continue to be shared system-wide, through avenues such as the professional learning network meetings. This will help to bridge gaps and build a community in which grantees can learn from each other and leverage each other's partnership and expertise.

Look for opportunities to create coherence and build collaboration across statewide initiatives. For example, professional learning participants expressed a need for more concrete practices for serving students with dyslexia. A partnership with the **California Dyslexia Initiative,** led by Sacramento COE, could potentially support this request. Some participants also wanted more content related to science and computer science, hinting at the potential benefits of a partnership with the statewide **Mathematics, Science, and Computer Science Professional Learning Grant** led by San Joaquin, Monterey, and Santa Barbara COEs.