



California Statewide System of Support Geographic Lead Agencies Evaluation Report 2023-2024

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Contents

Introduction	1
Facilitating Partnerships	2
Building Capacity	4
Engaging in Continuous Improvement	6
Providing Universal and Targeted Support	8
Implementing Logic Models Focused on Student Outcomes.....	10
Appendix.....	12

Introduction

Within the System of Support are seven Geographic Lead Agencies (Geo Leads) housed within nine county offices of education (COEs): Santa Clara COE, Kern County Superintendent of Schools, Placer and Sacramento COEs, Riverside and San Diego COEs, Shasta COE, Sonoma COE, and Tulare COE. Assembly Bill 1808 (Statutes of 2018) appropriated \$4 million to establish the California Geographic Leads (Geo Lead) to build the capacity of county offices of education (COEs). Geographic Leads ensure that counties are equipped to build the capacity of their local educational agencies (LEAs) to support the continuous improvement of student performance within the state priorities as defined in California Education Code and address the gaps in achievement between student groups.¹

RTI International is the external evaluator of the Geo Lead work. In this report we spotlight five aspects of the evaluation that provide insight into Geo Lead roles and impact areas. We provide survey findings, highlight key Geo Lead activities, and share illustrative quotes from COEs about their experiences with Geo Leads. The five areas highlighted in this report are facilitating partnerships, building capacity, engaging in continuous improvement, providing universal and targeted supports, and implementing logic models focused on student outcomes.²

¹ See the appendix for the California Education Code related to Geographic Lead Agencies.

² Survey findings focus on data from the 2024 survey, as the findings are consistent with data collected in earlier years. Instances where data changed substantially are highlighted in the text.

Facilitating Partnerships

Building a culture of trust and strong relationships with their partner COEs and LEAs is a key aspect of the Geo Lead work. These relationships enable Geo Leads to effectively identify and provide necessary supports. In addition, Geo Leads create structures and processes that increase coordination, collaboration, and integration across initiatives within the Statewide System of Support. By leading purposeful integration and collaboration within and across agencies, Geo Leads expand access to the resources of the System to better support COEs and LEAs in their mission to support schools and students throughout California. Examples of how Geo Leads enacted this work include:

- ▶ Created or broadened leadership advisory committees within their geographic region to ensure representation of the needs of all COEs within their regions and increase connectedness and trusting relationships.
- ▶ Implemented a common data reflection protocol for use during each Geo Lead meeting to prompt open and honest conversations around how to shift processes and structures to better serve students across their Geo region.
- ▶ Created a Differentiated Assistance (DA) Huddle with members from SELPA, Ed Services, and Prevention Services from each of the county offices participating to discuss best practices, strengthen collaboration, and align the Compliance Improvement Monitoring (CIM) and Differentiated Assistance (DA) processes.
- ▶ Collaborated with and referred COEs to the California Coalition for Inclusive Learning (CCIL) Lead Agency to build partnerships focused on improving inclusive practices for all students with a focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Survey Findings

- 95% of COE respondents in 2024 agreed or strongly agreed that their geographic lead agency has helped **facilitate trusting relationships among** COEs in their geographic area.
- 83% of COE respondents in 2024 agreed or strongly agreed that they have felt safe and **comfortable going to their geographic lead agency** for assistance and brainstorming regarding difficult challenges.
- 84% of COE respondents in 2024 agreed or strongly agreed that their geographic lead agency is **available for consultations** that enable their COE to effectively support their LEAs, schools, and students.
- 100% of COE respondents in 2024 reported that their geographic lead agency connected them **to at least one other agency within the SSOS** for specialized assistance.

Quotes

“ I appreciate the opportunity to **collaborate with other COEs** around problems of practice, reviewing county-wide data for common themes and patterns, sharing resources and allowing space for reflective feedback.

“ I greatly appreciate being able to **reach out and receive expertise and support** when needed. Like everything in a small COE, capacity is still an issue, and our geo lead offers more than we can even take advantage of. It is hard to miss out on those opportunities, but I am thankful they are available if we can find ways to participate.

“ It's always good to hear **different approaches to Differentiated Assistance** from the other COEs in our Geo area. We have picked up several ideas to use in our own practice.

“ I appreciate the constant availability of our Geo Lead as well as the willingness to always enter **conversations with genuine inquiry and professional respect**.

“ Our protected time during Geo Lead meetings has allowed us as a team to effectively plan DA/CIM integration and **our approach to one system of support**.

“ I highly appreciate the support of our Geo Lead and **how, across the state, we have created structures to better support each other**. We now know how many resources are available throughout the System and experts we can tap into both within and outside our region.

Building Capacity

One of the central roles of the Geo Leads is to build the capacity of COEs within their region to provide effective assistance and support to districts and schools and align these efforts with state priorities. In this role, Geo Leads have provided their COEs with a wide range of professional learning opportunities as well as targeted technical assistance and access to tools and resources. Examples of capacity building activities implemented by specific Geo Leads include:

- ▶ Provided a Geo Lead Coach to all COEs in the geo area to support implementation of Action Plans focused on student outcomes and provide professional learning, as needed.
- ▶ Implemented a region-wide Data Community of Practice (CoP) and partnered with several school districts across the region to engage in the CoP alongside county office colleagues and lead conversations about equity, data, student needs, the role of empathy, belonging, and culturally responsive environments in our schools.
- ▶ Created a Geo Lead consortium website to disseminate resources to COEs and LEAs within their Geo Area and statewide, and developed a DA resource hub that was shared with all their COEs and Lead Agency partners.
- ▶ Provided customized opportunities based upon COE requests, including providing support for MTSS implementation, creating social and emotional networks, and assisting with improving data related to A-G subject requirements for college entry.

Survey Findings

- 81% of COE respondents in 2024 agreed or strongly agreed that their Geo Lead **understands their needs**.
- 82% of COE respondents in 2024 agreed or strongly agreed that their Geo Lead provides access to **high-quality professional learning opportunities** that enable them to effectively support their LEAs.
- 80% of COE respondents in 2024 agreed or strongly agreed that their geographic lead agency provides **access to technical assistance** that enables their COE to effectively support LEAs to improve student outcomes.
- 81% of COE respondents in 2024 agreed or strongly agreed that their geographic lead agency provides **access to high-quality tools or resources** that enable their COE to effectively support LEAs to improve student outcomes.

Quotes

“ We have implemented coaching for teachers and have **increased our professional development opportunities** as a direct result of the work we have been involved with our Geo lead.

“ We have provided **new customized tools to our LEAs** as a result of our work with our Geo Lead to support LEAs with data analysis, differentiated assistance and LCAP development. We are also creating our own case studies based on the case studies seen in [our] DA cohort. We have designed our **charter DA support** based on collaboration and guidance with the [Geo Lead] DA for charters cohort.

“ It has been really great to have the time/space to connect with other COEs about their experiences and brainstorm best practices together. All of the **tools, resources, and professional learning opportunities from our Geo Lead have been high quality** and impactful.

“ Our Geo Lead Agency have been extremely helpful in building our capacity. We've seen **huge growth and impact with our district partners** because of our Geo Lead and the expertise they provide.

Engaging in Continuous Improvement

State agencies and leads in the System of Support engage in and model continuous improvement focused on educational excellence. These agencies understand and emphasize the importance and value of a continuous improvement mindset to drive improvement throughout the system and ensure student and educator success and well-being. Geo Leads are tasked with conducting an annual needs-based assessment of their regions to determine goals for the year. Geo Leads use these needs assessments and engage in continuous improvement to ensure that their services are consistently and continuously improving and responding effectively to California's evolving educational environment. Examples of continuous improvement Geo Lead work include:

- ▶ Created a Continuous Improvement in Differentiated Assistance huddle that met monthly as a community of practice to discuss best practices and identify supports needed.
- ▶ Provided continuous improvement funding for county offices to extend staff learning and hosted an in-person annual Improvement Science Basics training for beginners
- ▶ Provided highly valued (highest rated item on end year of survey) continuous improvement professional learning funds to COEs within the Geo Area.
- ▶ Led one-hour Improvement Tool Zoom Meetings to dive more deeply into specific improvement tools--their use and how to facilitate them with teams.

Survey Findings

- 84% of COE respondents in 2024 agreed or strongly agreed that their Geo Lead has **modeled continuous improvement in its own work**.
- 90% of COE respondents in 2024 agreed or strongly agreed that their organization has **incorporated a continuous improvement approach** into its own work.

Quotes

“ My **toolbox for improvement and implementation science** has continued to grow this past year. We have revamped our DA process to ensure a deeper use of improvement science and at the implementation stage we pull out some of the knowledge and tools for deepening planning of implementation.

“ The **Improvement Science Basics course** has provided knowledge of the three improvement questions that drive change. We are currently applying this work to build educator capacity in our county.

“ I am fairly new to my role as the LCAP reviewer for my county and my knowledge regarding the LCAP development process, the throughline, and the tie to DA has grown tremendously because of the meetings and conversations with my Geo Leads I am able to more effectively support my county LEAs and work on their mindset shift **from a compliance checklist to a real continuous improvement process and document.**

“ Our Geo Lead helped us weave outcomes through **improvement work in special education and our overall work so that all improvement work is aligned.** My work with the UDL leaders has also helped us weave UDL into all of our professional development as "the way we do things" rather than a separate initiative for staff to consider.

“ I appreciate our Geo Lead's willingness and openness of looking at our structures, seeking feedback and being **willing to constantly evolve and improve.**

Providing Universal and Targeted Support

The California Statewide System of Support is designed to provide varying levels of assistance to meet the unique needs of school districts, charter schools, and County Offices of Education (COEs). Geo Leads are key providers of both universal and targeted support for LEAs.³ Universal support is a foundational level of support available to all districts, charters, and COEs. Targeted support is offered to districts, charters, and COEs that meet specific criteria based on data from the California Dashboard. Examples of Geo Lead universal and targeted support include:

- ▶ Provided their small COEs with the resources, consultations, technical support, tools, and strategies needed to support small COEs' differentiated assistance work within the context that small COEs have fewer staff to engage in this work.
- ▶ Expanded their Differentiated Assistance trainings and support for COEs to include a focus on charter schools and providing the supports needed for charter schools in DA
- ▶ Coordinated with special education lead agencies throughout the SSOS to provide support for districts eligible for differentiated assistance based on outcomes for students with disabilities
- ▶ Incorporated in-depth training in the use of data to identify and track needs of students into the Differentiated Assistance workgroup in their geo area.

Survey Findings

- 73% of COE respondents in 2024 agreed or strongly agreed that they have collaboratively built their organization's capacity to **provide targeted/supplemental assistance** (inclusive of Differentiated Assistance) through their work with their geographic lead agency. Notably, this finding has increased by nine percentage points compared with the 64% survey finding in 2023.
- 77% of COE respondents in 2024 considered training on development of resources and **technical assistance to support Differentiated Assistance** to be "moderately" or "very" effective.
- 80% of COE respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their geographic lead agency has provided resources or training to **support their COE's work with LEAs in using data to identify** gaps in the performance of students in different demographic groups. Notably, this finding has increased by 17 percentage points compared with the 63% survey finding in 2023.
- 79% of COE respondents in 2024 agreed or strongly agreed that, overall, the work that their COE has been doing with their Geographic Lead Agency is **helpful in building their capacity to work** more effectively with their LEAs.

³ See the Statewide System of Support website at <https://systemofsupport.org> for descriptions of support offered through the system.

Quotes

“ Our **Differentiated Assistance support for our districts has been strongly influenced** by collaboration meetings through our Geo Lead, including the use of Improvement Science tools we learned at a training from them.

“ I facilitate a community of practice for smaller county offices in our consortium. New practices for this group include collective problem solving, sharing of resources for differentiated assistance and developing strategies that small county teams can implement to **support DA with small districts.**

“ We evaluated the approach we use when beginning the **differentiated assistance process** with LEAs and we're able to improve our strategies using the resources and planning provided by the Geo Lead

“ I oversee my **differentiated assistance team and we interact frequently with our Geo Lead.** Our Geo Lead has been wonderful in keeping me informed of the differentiated assistance work that is happening and helps me support my team as needed.

“ Our Geo Lead has provided Tools and practices from Improvement Science and Implementation Science that have **enabled me to support our districts and charters in Differentiated Assistance.** These tools have allowed LEAs to look deeper at their systems, as well as create plans for sustainable changes and implementation.

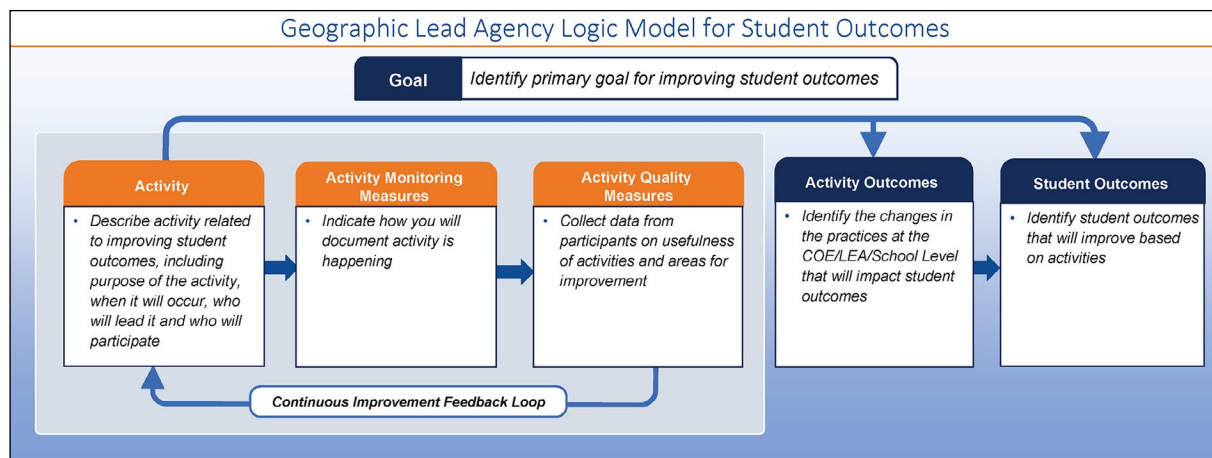
Implementing Logic Models Focused on Student Outcomes

The Geographic Lead Agency evaluation shows that Geo Leads provide a wide range of support to their COEs, and the survey results presented in this report indicate that COEs benefit from that support in myriad ways. One aspect of the Geographic Lead Agency/COE work is to provide assistance to COEs in building their capacity to work effectively with their LEAs. Geo Leads and COEs work with districts (especially those eligible for Differentiated Assistance) to change or enhance practices at the district and school level that ultimately can lead to improvement in outcomes for students.

While COE staff report many examples of how their work with the Geo Leads has strengthened their ability to support LEAs and impact students, it can be difficult to trace a throughline from the Geographic Lead Agency work with COEs to the impact of that work on district practices and student outcomes. In an effort to provide an opportunity for Geo Leads to demonstrate this impact, RTI worked with state agencies and Geographic Lead Agency advisors to develop and pilot a Student Outcomes Logic Model in the Spring of 2024. Each Geographic Lead Agency identified a strand of work to use for their Logic Model pilot.

A logic model is a ‘**road map**’ that tracks the progression from resources through to outcomes (See **Exhibit 1**). It depicts the relationship between activities and their intended effects and identifies data that can be used to measure progress. The Geographic Lead Agency Logic Model follows these steps and also traces the continuous improvement aspect of the work that is a hallmark of the System of Support. RTI and the Geo Leads worked together to refine their pilot models and the Geo Leads began implementing their selected activities and gathering data on changes in practice during the spring. This pilot effort gave information to Geo Leads about the success of their logic models and how to improve them moving forward.

Exhibit 1: Logic Model Template for Student Outcomes



Several Geo Leads plan to refine and use their pilot Logic Model this coming year, while others found during the pilot that other activities were more suited to this work. For their Logic Models, Geographic Lead Agencies focused on a variety of activities and outcomes, including addressing chronic absenteeism, improving outcomes for students with disabilities, and reducing suspensions among 9th-grade students. See the text box on this page for an example of how one Geographic Lead Agency developed a Logic Model and tracked the outcomes of their work.

A Geographic Lead Agency Pilot Logic Model

For the Spring 2024 Student Logic Model pilot, one of the Geographic Lead Agencies identified a student outcome goal of improving outcomes for students with disabilities, as measured by the amount of time students with disabilities spent in the regular education classroom setting (referred to as the Least Restrictive Environment-LRE). A related goal was to improve California Dashboard Indicators for students with disabilities and move districts out of Differentiated Assistance (DA), as many of the region's districts were eligible for DA based on the Dashboard Indicators for students with disabilities. The Geographic Lead Agency worked with their COEs to identify school districts in the region that would be interested in participating in the program. The goal of the program was to provide support for districts and increase the amount of time students with disabilities spent in regular education classrooms.

To achieve this goal, the Geo Leads worked with COEs and districts to implement a needs assessment, conduct interviews with staff to collect baseline data for students with disabilities and identify what support districts and schools would need to accomplish the LRE goal. The Geographic Leads and COEs provided professional learning and coaching for district staff. They helped districts and schools implement new practices and met quarterly to review progress, collect interim data, and assist with any challenges that arose.

Preliminary data collected for the Logic Model process indicates that this Geo Lead program has been successful, with a significant increase in the amount of time students with disabilities in the region are spending in the regular education classroom. The Logic Model process allowed the Geo Lead to document their work related to students with disabilities and demonstrate their success in improving outcomes for students. The Geographic Lead Agency will continue with this Logic Model in the 2024-2025 school year as they continue to provide support for districts and schools. The 2024-2025 Logic Model will include tracking how many of the districts they support are no longer eligible for Differentiated Assistance because of improvement in outcomes for students with disabilities.

Appendix

ED Code 52073 subdivision B

- (b) (1) A geographic lead agency shall have all of the following responsibilities:
- (A) Assist in building the capacity of county offices of education within the geographic lead agency's defined geographic area to provide effective assistance and support to school districts under the state priorities identified in subdivision (d) of Section 52060 and federal programs.
 - (B) Coordinate and calibrate assistance and support provided to local educational agencies within its defined geographic area and with other geographic lead agencies, expert lead agencies identified pursuant to Section 52073.1, special education resource leads identified pursuant to Section 52073.2, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, and the department.
 - (C) Provide assistance and support if another county office of education within the geographic lead agency's defined geographic area is unable to provide appropriate assistance and support to one or more school districts in that county office of education's boundaries, or at the request of a school district or county superintendent of schools pursuant to subdivision (d) of Section 52071.
 - (D) Identify existing resources, professional development activities, and other efforts currently available within its designated geographic area to assist school districts and county offices of education to improve outcomes under the state priorities identified in subdivision (d) of Section 52060 and subdivision (d) of Section 52066, and upon request, share information about these existing resources.
 - (E) Upon request by the department and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, develop new resources and activities, designed to build capacity within school districts and county offices of education across the state under the state priorities identified in subdivision (d) of Section 52060 and subdivision (d) of Section 52066 or other areas of identified need.
 - (F) Other duties as specified by the department and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence as part of the process to select geographic lead agencies.