California Statewide System of Support Geographic Lead Agencies

Evaluation Report 2024–2025

Prepared by

Susan Rotermund, PhD, Project Director, Geographic Lead Agency Evaluation

Jay Feldman, PhD, Project Director, Statewide System of Support Evaluation

Jon Boyette, Research Specialist

September 2025

California Statewide System of Support Evaluation Team:

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

RTI International
2300 Frank J. Ogawa Plaza, Suite 280
Oakland, CA 94612

www.rti.org

RTI INTERNATIONAL

Contents

Introduction

Within the Statewide System of Support (SSOS) 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 Geo Leads to build the capacity of 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 quotations 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.

This report is based on an annual survey sent to staff in COEs who work with their Geo Leads. In 2025, 225 COE staff responded to the survey, a response rate of 74%.[2] Staff from 57 out of the 58 counties in California responded to the survey, providing insight into the impact of the Geo Lead work across the state.[3]

---

[1] See the appendix for the California Education Code related to Geo Leads.

[2] The survey asks respondents to rate their level of involvement with their Geo Lead. Responses presented in this report are based on results from participants who rated their involvement as "medium" or "high," a total of 178 respondents. Participants who rated their involvement as "low" were routed to an open-ended question asking them to describe their interactions with their Geo Leads and to provide information about the quality of those interactions.

[3] Survey findings focus on data from the 2025 survey because 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:

▶ Fostered cross-collaboration among COE departments to create improvement teams with representatives from multiple departments to provide a comprehensive and holistic view of the issues facing districts and to facilitate more effective and targeted use of resources to meet identified student needs.

▶ Facilitated deep collaboration among Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA), Differentiated Assistance (DA), and Leadership coaching teams to enable a COE to create a Least-Restricted Environment (LRE) Collaborative with a focus on measurable outcomes for LRE that multiple districts plan to join.

▶ Supported COEs in creating a coordinated Professional Development framework that aligns departments across the COE—curriculum and instruction, special education, student services, and continuous improvement—to ensure that Professional Development is not siloed but instead integrates expertise from all departments, reduces redundancy, and enhances the quality of technical support provided to districts.

▶ Created a Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) workgroup and network within their Geo Lead region to support COEs in sharing expertise through structured discussions to provide access to critical resources, discuss best practices for implementing UPK, offer guidance on aligning instructional strategies with California's early learning frameworks, and share insights into successful district-level integration of transitional kindergarten.

Survey Findings

- 88% of COE respondents in 2025 agreed or strongly agreed that their Geo Lead has helped **facilitate trusting relationships among** COEs in their geographic area.

- 81% of COE respondents in 2025 agreed or strongly agreed that they have felt safe and **comfortable going to their Geo Lead** for assistance and brainstorming regarding difficult challenges.

- 83% of COE respondents in 2025 agreed or strongly agreed that their Geo Lead is **available for consultations** that enable their COE to effectively support their LEAs, schools, and students.

Quotations

> " Our Geo Lead works really hard at making sure the Geo Lead work is meaningful to our day-to-day work. They make sure **our voices are heard** and that we are sharing best practices from our respective COEs.

> " Through our Geo Lead partnerships, we have been able to collaborate across departments to help our county find ways to really address **whole child learning** opportunities.

> " Our Geo Lead has always been **a safe space to share ideas** and to learn from one another. I am extremely grateful for the trust they bestow on me as a valued member of the group.

> " I have asked my assistant superintendent to include me in all the Geo Lead engagements. I have found the professional learning, discussions, and relationships the best I have experienced in my career. **I thank the Geo Lead team for their work to date** and hope to continue my participation.

> " As a result of our department's collaboration with the Geographic Lead Agency, we have refined how we utilize funds for Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) Planning and Implementation, as well as the Early Education Teacher Development Grant. **Engaging with other counties and sharing best practices has been invaluable** in shaping more strategic and effective approaches to funding allocation. This collaboration has strengthened our ability to support early learning educators and enhance UPK programs, ultimately leading to a greater impact on student readiness and success.

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:

▶ Implemented distribution of reports for each Geo Lead working group summarizing the topics discussed with links to resources, tools, and points of contact to enable smaller COEs with limited staff to easily access needed resources and broaden their capacity to provide services to their districts.

▶ Offered intensive professional learning and training to enable member COEs to directly support schools and districts with building Multi-Tiered Systems of Support tailored to meet the needs of their students.

▶ Hosted and supported a Professional Learning Community for eight COEs within their Geo Lead area focused on how to lead systems focused on sustained systemic improvement.

▶ Supported COES in furthering the implementation of the Observation Protocol for Teachers of English Learners (OPTEL) through professional development, leadership guidance, and ongoing coaching and facilitated collaborations to align practices and to foster innovative ways to address the needs of English Learners.

Survey Findings

• 83% of COE respondents in 2025 agreed or strongly agreed that their Geo Lead **understands their needs**.

• 82% of COE respondents in 2025 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 2025 agreed or strongly agreed that their Geo Lead provides **access to technical assistance** that enables their COE to effectively support LEAs to improve student outcomes.

• 84% of COE respondents in 2025 agreed or strongly agreed that their Geo Lead provides **access to high-quality tools or resources** that enable their COE to effectively support LEAs to improve student outcomes.

Quotations

" One of the most impactful benefits of our work with our Geo Leads is **the opportunity to network and share resources** and tools as a Geo Lead area. When we receive feedback on the resources and tools, it leads to improved protocols and supports for LEAs, which helps build LEA leaders' capacity, which will ultimately impact LEA beliefs, practices, and structures that will impact student outcomes.

" Our Geo Lead has provided training in data visualization practices. As a result, **we are better able to communicate information with our leadership teams** and prompt discussions.

" We have been able to create an integrated needs assessment using data and support from our Geo Lead. **It has been helpful to discuss evidence-based effective practices** and steps/barriers to implementation.

" Our Geo Lead has been instrumental in our **ability to use data to inform our work** with LEAs. The dashboard tools and comparison tools provided through the data team are extremely helpful, especially because our limited COE size makes it difficult to have the staff to do the work. I always walk away from our Geo Lead meetings with lots of great resources and connections to colleagues I can call upon to help when I need assistance.

" The more involved I have become with our Geo Lead, the more value it has been to my work. I was a more passive learner the first couple of years. As I have become more active, I can truly see a difference in my own skills and how I support my teams. **Our Geo Lead has improved every year** and keeps getting better and more responsive to our collective needs.

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 as well as responding effectively to California's evolving educational environment. Examples of continuous improvement Geo Lead work include:

- Provided support to their COEs in using implementation science as a tool to evaluate and improve their professional learning offerings.

- Provided a Leading Systems for Sustained Systemic Improvement training for all COEs in their Geo Lead area and plans to continue that work at a deeper level in the coming year.

- Convened and facilitated a Network Improvement Community that used improvement science as the organizing principle for a year-long collaborative effort focused on reducing chronic absenteeism for African American students.

Survey Findings

- 89% of COE respondents in 2025 agreed or strongly agreed that their Geo Lead has **modeled continuous improvement in its own work**.

- 93% of COE respondents in 2025 agreed or strongly agreed that their organization has **incorporated a continuous improvement approach into its own work**.

Quotations

> Our Geo Lead has provided **easy access to needed data,** which helps to support our ongoing work in continuous improvement

> With support from our Geo Lead, our COE has adopted a focus on **Implementation and Improvement Science as the foundation of our work** with districts.

> Through work with our Geo Lead, I have **improved my Implementation Science facilitation skills,** and I have used that knowledge to help my department discuss and explore areas of concern.

> Our Geo Lead has enabled our team to dive more deeply into Improvement Science training and implementation and **build our team's DA support capacity.**

> I appreciate how our Geo Lead **models Continuous Improvement practices for us,** shares the latest resources and connections with our state agency partners, and gives us the time to collaborate and learn from our other COE families.

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 COEs. Geo Leads are key providers of both universal and targeted support for LEAs.[4] 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:

▶ Supported COEs in implementing a data-driven reflection protocol for use during the LCAP development process to strengthen the alignment between identified student needs and planned actions to ensure targeted support that will improve student outcomes.

▶ Provided technical assistance to assist COEs in aligning DA and Compliance and Improvement Monitoring (CIM) into an integrated improvement effort to leverage the strengths of each system, avoid duplication of work, and provide robust and coordinated support to improve student outcomes.

▶ Supported COEs in creating real-time data progress monitoring systems for attendance and suspension data to assist districts in DA track outcomes for identified student groups.

▶ Provided support for a Geo Lead member to facilitate the work of seven small counties in the Geo Area area enabling those COEs to approach their DA work with more resources and strategically problem solve together for issues specific to their work.

Survey Findings

• 76% of COE respondents in 2025 agreed or strongly agreed that they have collaboratively built their organization's capacity to **provide targeted/supplemental support** (inclusive of DA) through their work with their Geo Lead. Agreement with this statement has shown a significant upward trend, from 64% in 2023 to 73% in 2024.

• 75% of COE respondents in 2025 considered training on development of resources and **technical assistance to support DA** to be "moderately" or "very" effective.

---

[4] See the Statewide System of Support website at https://systemofsupport.org for descriptions of support offered through the system.

- 85% of COE respondents in 2025 agreed or strongly agreed that their Geo Lead 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. Agreement with this statement has shown a significant upward trend, from 63% in 2023 to 80% in 2024.

- 83% of COE respondents in 2025 agreed or strongly agreed that, overall, the work that their COE has been doing with their Geo Lead is **helpful in building their capacity to work** more effectively with their LEAs.

Quotations

" Our systematic approach to Differentiated Assistance is a direct reflection of the **support and guidance** we have received from our Geo Lead.

" We were able to present to our Geo Lead partners on our work supporting intensive Differentiated Assistance districts, and **we incorporated some best practices from other county offices** shared at that presentation.

" Our SOS Geo Lead group has created **multiple resources for schools/LEAs** in differentiated assistance status. I have used these tools in my own trainings, and LEAs have reported that they find them to be a valuable resource in helping them improve their systems.

" As a result of participating in workgroups facilitated by our Geo Lead, one process that has been particularly beneficial to my work is the **collaborative calibration protocols** used in the DA/Data/LCAP workgroup. These protocols have strengthened our team's ability to analyze data consistently, align actions with identified needs, and ensure greater coherence across our continuous improvement efforts with districts in DA.

" Not only does our Geo Lead provide resources, tools, and trainings, but the teams are just phenomenal to work with! **I so appreciate the workgroups and the time to connect with other COEs** for thought partnerships, which has led to additional discussions on our team for how to support districts in DA. We've been able to hear other models (coaching vs. PD sessions vs. COPs) and we've incorporated a bit of this into a process that's more flexible for our districts. I also think just having our Geo Lead team members available to chat with and ask questions has helped to clarify policies or timelines and has also helped with navigating tricky situations with districts. I'm so grateful not only for their expertise, but also their willingness to always help and collaborate.
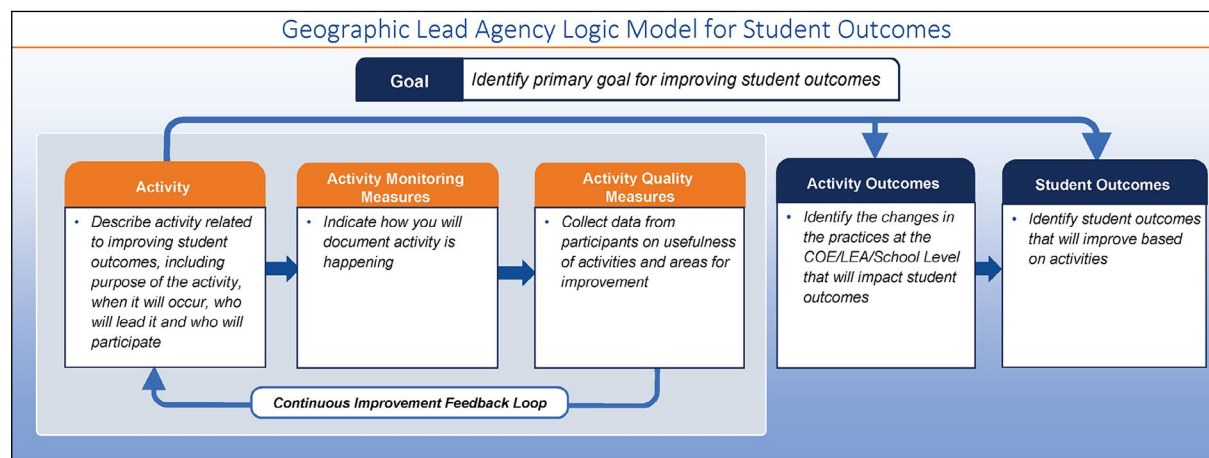
Implementing Logic Models Focused on Student Outcomes

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 Geo Lead/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 DA) to change or enhance practices at the district and school levels that ultimately can lead to improvement in outcomes for students.

While COE staff report many examples of how their work with the Geo Leads strengthens their ability to support LEAs and impact students, it can be difficult to trace a throughline from the Geo Lead work with COEs to the impact of that work on district practices and student outcomes. To provide an opportunity for Geo Leads to demonstrate this impact, RTI worked with state agencies and Geo Lead advisors to develop and pilot a Student Outcomes Logic Model in Spring 2024. Each Geo Lead identified a strand of work to use for their Logic Model pilot. Based on lessons learned from that pilot effort, Geo Leads developed and instituted a full logic model and student impact project in 2024–2025.

A logic model is a road map that tracks the progression from resources through to outcomes. 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 (see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1: Logic Model Template for Student Outcomes

Geographic Lead Agency Logic Model for Student Outcomes

Goal — *Identify primary goal for improving student outcomes*

Activity
- *Describe activity related to improving student outcomes, including purpose of the activity, when it will occur, who will lead it and who will participate*

Activity Monitoring Measures
- *Indicate how you will document activity is happening*

Activity Quality Measures
- *Collect data from participants on usefulness of activities and areas for improvement*

Activity Outcomes
- *Identify the changes in the practices at the COE/LEA/School Level that will impact student outcomes*

Student Outcomes
- *Identify student outcomes that will improve based on activities*

Continuous Improvement Feedback Loop

A Geographic Lead Agency Logic Model in Action

Here we present the logic model and project implementation process for one of the Geo Leads in the 2024–2025 school year. The Bay Area Geographic Leads Consortium (BAGLC) selected the following goal for 2024–2025: *Enhance LEAs' capacity in implementing evidence-based practices, with a targeted focus on reducing suspension for African American/Black students*. They created a logic model that depicted how the formation and implementation of a Networked Improvement Community (NIC) focused on this goal would lead to a reduction in suspensions. The NIC engaged seven schools from five districts to participate. Each of the seven school teams were invited to attend five formal NIC sessions and from four to eight coaching sessions. Each site team collected suspensions data for all students and African American/Black students before and after the NIC interventions.

NIC sessions focused on a range of topics, including foundational concepts related to systems change and school culture; improvement science tools and concepts: analysis of data to inform practice; alternatives to suspension, including inclusionary disciplinary practices; and understanding African American/Black students' experiences of belonging, engagement, and fairness. Each team selected a change idea to implement within their school to reduce African American/Black suspension rates and received support and feedback from the NIC over the course of the school year. Preliminary data indicate that participants were successful in their efforts, with significant decreases in suspension rates for African American/Black students at all but one school site. A weighted average across the seven participating school sites shows a decrease in average suspension rates for African American/Black students from 22% in 2023–2024 to 11% in 2024–2025.[5] BAGLC plans to continue its NIC work in the coming school year, expanding participation to more school sites.

[5]   For more information, see https://www.bayareageoleads.org/publications.

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.