The Changing Role of County Offices of Education in Supporting District and School Improvement

December 13, 2019
Sacramento, California
PACE’s mission: *Improving education policy and practice and advancing equity through evidence*

PACE is an independent, non-partisan research center that bridges the gap between research, policy, and practice, through:

1. bringing evidence to bear on the most critical issues facing our state;
2. making research evidence accessible; and
3. leveraging partnership and collaboration to drive system improvement.

PACE is led by faculty directors at:

[Logos of Berkeley, Stanford Graduate School of Education, USC Rossier School of Education, UC Davis School of Education, and UCLA Ed & IS]
Our goal is to produce research within all levels of California’s education system, with a particular focus on alignment in systems. We focus on the following topics:

- Access, quality and alignment in early childhood education
- K-12 continuous school improvement and support
- College access and postsecondary success

Educational governance & leadership
Education finance
Understanding measuring, & improving student outcomes
Supporting students’ social-emotional, mental & physical health
Educator workforce & effectiveness
Agenda

• Jennifer O’Day and Daniel C. Humphrey present:
  • Early Implementation of California’s System of Support (Daniel C. Humphrey & Jennifer O’Day)
  • The Changing Roles of County Offices of Education: Survey Results (David N. Plank, Daniel Humphrey, and Jennifer O’Day)

• Ben Cottingham presents:
  • Leadership for Continuous Improvement: The Vision for County Offices of Education (Ed Manansala and Benjamin W. Cottingham)

• Reflection: Ed Manansala
• Audience Q&A
Today’s speakers

Ben Cottingham
PACE

Daniel C. Humphrey
Independent Consultant

Ed Manansala
El Dorado COE, CCSESA

Jennifer O’Day
American Institutes for Research
The Early Implementation of California’s System of Support: Counties, Differentiated Assistance, and the New School Dashboard

Daniel Humphrey and Jennifer O’Day

December 13, 2019
Methods / Data Sources

Multi-method study:

- Document reviews (LCAPS, policies)
- State-level interviews (20)
- COE Supt. and Asst. Supt. Surveys
- Case studies
  - 5 counties (50 interviews)
  - 14 Districts (111 interviews)
COE SUPPORT FUNCTION
1. New Support Narrative

COEs and Districts are embracing new accountability and support narrative:

- Capacity building over compliance and sanctions
- Emphasis on relationship-building and trust
- Responsiveness to local conditions and decisions

“We’re fortunate that the county doesn’t come in and try to tell us what to do...We’re trying to address our specific issues, but I feel the county works with us.”

(District Administrator)
2. Varied District Perceptions of Effectiveness of COE Support

District perceptions of support usefulness varied

- Overwhelming praise in 2 counties
- Mixed reviews in 3 counties
- Concerns: light touch, limited depth, incomplete process

“Districts in this county absolutely get the support they need.”

“We felt like we started a process and then it just stalled.”
3. Varied COE Conceptions of Role

COE’s conceptualization and implementation of Differentiated Assistance varies

Three examples

- COE as one-stop shop for process and substantive support (COE A)
- COE as thought partner for continuous improvement process (COE B)
- COE as both provider and broker of services (COE C)

Conceptualizations influenced by:

- County Context
- COE capacity
- Leader beliefs
Survey Results: COE Support for Brokering Role on the Rise

COEs should develop their capacity to provide assistance in all areas relevant to the dashboard and continuous improvement.

COEs should develop strong expertise in one or two areas relevant to differentiated support and partner with other organizations or COEs in other areas.

COEs should help districts identify underlying causes of performance problems and then connect them to sources of high-quality expertise and assistance, wherever it comes from.

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<th>Percentage of COE Superintendents, by Year</th>
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4. COE Capacity

COE capacity to support districts remains a concern despite efforts to increase COE effectiveness

- Steps to build internal COE capacity
  - Recruitment or reassignment of staff
  - PD for COE staff
  - Cross functional teams
Survey Results: COE Changes to Implement New Support Role

- We have made/will make big changes including new hires, staff assignments, and learning to work with the districts in new and different ways.
- We have made/will make some changes in staff assignments and budget allocations to support the System of Support in our county.
- We already had the necessary systems and personnel in place to implement the System of Support.
COE Capacity (self-assessments)

Percentage of COEs rating their capacity at 7 or higher:

• Root cause analysis: 80%

• Instructional alignment, chronic absenteeism and suspension, graduation rate, data systems: 57%-61%

• Evaluating efficacy of interventions (40%), building district structures to support school improvement (49%)

(2019 survey of COE superintendents)
COE Capacity (District Perceptions)

Districts’ assessment of support usefulness was closely tied to their perceptions of COE capacity

• Variation across counties

• Variation across districts within counties, depending on:
  • Level of district capacity
  • Prior district experience with continuous improvement processes
5. An Under-resourced System

Both COEs and districts identify serious financial concerns

- 77% of COE superintendents report inadequate resources to support districts
- New allocations (Budget Act 2018) small relative to district needs
- Budgetary squeeze from pensions and other increased costs jeopardize support system

“With the API, if you were in improvement, there was money. Here with the Dashboard, it is really about improvement and I am excited about that. The issue is there is no money.”

(District Administrator)
The California School Dashboard and the System of Support
The Dashboard’s Strengths

• Multiple Indicators
• Subgroup Performance
• Improvement over API
• New format

“For the first time in my career, finally the data feels like a true representation of our school.”

(School Principal)
The Dashboard’s Weaknesses

Multiple priorities and volatility undermine the focus needed to sustain improvement.

• Too many priorities for districts to address simultaneously
• Multiple areas with a single indicator oversimplifies problems and solutions
• Year-to-year changes in identified subgroups leads to “whack a mole”
The Dashboard’s Weaknesses

Technical problems undermine validity and comprehensibility of measures to guide improvement.

• Low Status Cut-Scores, Weak Measure of Growth
• Yellow Is Not Yellow

“I’m fearful of the day when they adjust the cut points and what that’s going to do to the system.”

(District administrator)
The Dashboard’s Weaknesses

The state’s definition of English Learners limits the Dashboard’s ability to identify needs of current and long-term English Learners.

“So it looks like on average... that people are doing well. You miss the needs of kids who are long-term English Learners.”

(District superintendent)
The Dashboard’s Weaknesses

The timing of the release of the Dashboard presents a key implementation problem.

“We get the data in December... probably letters go out in January, [we] do our data meetings in early February, but that really truncates the timetable for the three meetings, or four, or five depending on the district.”

(COE administrator)
Not Yet A System

System: A collection of organizations that share a common purpose, acts rationally and interdependently to achieve the purpose, and forms a coherent whole.

“When you look at this thing as a system, it felt like it came out in parts. ...I have an LCAP and apparently now I have a Dashboard too...”

(COE administrator)
Not Yet A System

• CDE and CCEE roles are not clearly understood
• Dashboard release is out of sync with district planning and LCAP development
• Disjuncture in the sources of accountability (engagement missing from the system of support)
• Resources are modest
• The system of support does not utilize the full complement of expertise in the state
Recommendations

• Incorporate the full complement of expertise in the state
• Provide year-round support for all districts
• Address Dashboard timing
• Build stakeholder and community engagement into the system
• Provide adequate resources
Leadership for Continuous Improvement
The Vision for County Offices of Education

Ed Manansala
Benjamin W. Cottingham
CCSESA – PACE Collaboration

Phase 1 – Theory of Action

Phase 2 – Building Consensus Around COE Role and Responsibilities in the Statewide System of Support

Phase 3 – Guide Conversations About CCSESA Restructuring
Phase 2 Data Collection

- Conducted Interviews with COE Leaders and Staff and Continuous Improvement Professionals
- Reviewed Mission and Vision Statements of 27 COEs
- Facilitated Conversation with COE Superintendents at the June 25th CCSESA General Membership Meeting
Leadership for Continuous Improvement: The Vision for County Offices of Education

To build consensus around the necessary shifts that county offices must make to fulfil their capacity-building responsibilities within the statewide system of support.
Shift 1: Every layer of the system must assume shared responsibility to improve student outcomes, requiring a mindset shift from the historical role of COEs.

“The challenge in California is to change the culture of the [county office] organization so that it’s focused on creating the conditions for everybody to learn across the system rather than being in a supervisory role... That requires a very different set of skills.”
Shift 2: To support continuous improvement in districts, COEs must themselves experience and lead through continuous improvement and operate as improvement organizations.

- Development of a continuous improvement mindset.
- Learning together with districts.
- Operating COEs as improvement organizations.
Shift 3: To coordinate resources in service of districts, COEs must break down departmental silos and use data that provide reliable, timely feedback.

- Building coherence in service of districts.
- Using data for improvement
Future Questions

How will COEs know if the investments and resources that they are providing to districts are impacting student outcomes?

What data systems track and provide the information that COEs need to make decisions around the support given to districts, or how could these be built?

How will California develop the necessary human capital to lead continuous improvement work at multiple levels in the Statewide System of Support?

Are there examples of COEs successfully leading continuous improvement in their own offices and in support of districts in California that can be learned from and shared with other COEs to guide their own improvement journeys?
Panel Q&A

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