

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

— Summary of New Research Released on December 13, 2019 —

The Early Implementation of California's System of Support: Counties, Differentiated Assistance, and the California School Dashboard

By Daniel C. Humphrey & Jennifer O'Day

California's new Statewide System of Support is grounded in the fundamental principles of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), especially its emphasis on the central role of local educators in determining the best approaches to improvement. This report examines the early implementation of the System of Support, with a focus on the work of the county offices of education (COEs) and the experience of the districts identified for differentiated assistance (DA).

COE and district officials held positive views of the key shifts in the SSS, particularly the emphasis on support over compliance and the empowerment of local districts as decision makers in their own improvement efforts. However, COEs differed in the definitions of their role in this new system, depending on the contexts in which they worked. These definitions ranged from being the main source of assistance on all challenges facing their district, to being a thought partner primarily for implementing improvement processes, to brokering sources of support beyond the COE where COE capacity was insufficient to meet district needs. COEs in our case studies had made significant efforts to boost their internal capacity to support their districts and had worked to break down internal silos between various departments. Nonetheless, while officials in our case study districts appreciated the efforts of their COEs, many experienced the support as less than adequate to address their challenges. Both COE and district officials raised concerns about the under-resourcing of the support system.

A major influence on the effectiveness of the SSS is the California School Dashboard. Districts are identified for differentiated assistance based on their performance on the Dashboard, a measurement tool that employs multiple indicators and disaggregates the performance of student subgroups. While interviewees found the Dashboard an improvement over the previous single-measure Academic Performance Indicator (API), they expressed numerous concerns. Among these were that the Dashboard undermines the focus needed for sustainable improvement and generally fails to provide data that are sufficiently timely, valid, and comprehensible to guide improvement. In addition, respondents expressed concerns about the equitable distribution of support and the truncated timeline for assistance.

The SSS is a notable effort by the state to reinvent accountability aligned with the principles of the LCFF. However, it is not yet fully a system, as it is under-funded, fails to draw upon the full range of expertise in the state, and is not well aligned with other accountability components of the LCFF.

The report concludes with five recommendations designed to make the System of Support more robust and comprehensive system to realize the aspirations of the Local Control Funding Formula:

FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SYSTEM OF SUPPORT



The System of Support should include the full complement of expertise in the state, including non-profits, within district teams, universities, along with COEs to assist districts.



The System of Support needs to be a sustained, multi-year, and tiered intervention.



The state should make data on each Dashboard indicator available as soon as possible to better assist districts' and schools' planning and improvement processes.



Districts and COEs should provide stakeholders opportunities for meaningful engagement in developing strategies for improvement that come out of DA.



For the System of Support to be successful, the state must allocate adequate and sustained resources.

To read the report: <https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/early-implementation-californias-system-support>

Leadership for Continuous Improvement: The Vision for County Offices of Education

By Ed Manansala & Benjamin W. Cottingham

County offices of education (COEs) are expected to provide ongoing support to districts and other local education agencies to drive continuous improvement within California's education system. Fulfilling this role has required COEs to transition from their historical role as compliance monitors and develop the necessary mindsets, skills, and structures and process to build the capacity for continuous improvement within their own offices and the districts they serve. This brief highlights three major shifts identified by COE superintendents in partnership with the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association and PACE that must be achieved by COEs to fulfil their role in California's Statewide System of Support:

1. Every layer of the system must assume shared responsibility to improve student outcomes, requiring a mindset shift from the historical role of COEs.
2. To support continuous improvement in districts, COEs must themselves experience and lead through continuous improvement and operate as improvement organizations.
3. To coordinate resources in service of districts, COEs must break down departmental silos and use data to provide reliable, timely feedback.

To read the brief: <https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/leadership-continuous-improvement-vision-county-offices-education>

The Changing Role of County Offices of Education: Survey Results

By David N. Plank, Daniel Humphrey & Jennifer O'Day

This brief summarizes findings from three surveys that sought to learn how county offices of education (COEs) are changing in response to the implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula and the Statewide System of Support (SSS). COEs have been assigned critically important responsibilities in the implementation of these initiatives, and our survey results suggest that most county superintendents are strongly supportive of the state's new policy direction. They are increasingly aware of the scale of change that will have to occur to fully implement the LCFF and the SSS, both in the organization and operation of their own COEs and in their relationships with other agencies, and they recognize that full implementation remains a work in progress.

To read the brief: <https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/changing-roles-county-offices-education-survey-results>