



California County Superintendents Educational Services Association

Promoting, influencing, and advocating for high-quality education.

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Matt Navo, Executive Director
California Collaborative for Educational Excellence
915 L Street, Suite 1430
Sacramento, California 95814

Mary Nicely, Chief Deputy
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, California 95814

Brooks Allen, Executive Director
State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Room 5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Executive Director Navo, Chief Deputy Nicely, Executive Director Allen,

We are writing on behalf of the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) regarding the continuous improvement of California's Statewide System of Support (System of Support). We understand that policy discussions around the continuous improvement of the System of Support are taking place and we appreciate the state agencies' openness to feedback and inclusive visioning of what the system could be. Since the beginning of the implementation of the System of Support, county offices have served a critical role in realizing its ultimate goal of improving the outcomes of California's students. It is within this spirit of service and partnership that we write to you to respectfully provide our observations and recommendations regarding the System of Support from the 58 county superintendents' perspectives.

Our observations and recommendations are as follows:

What is Working Well within the System of Support?

We encourage the continuation and enhancement of two key areas within the System of Support, which are differentiated assistance and relationship building.

Differentiated Assistance (DA)

DA is a great pathway to deliver services and provides input to county offices as we develop county wide professional development opportunities in addition to DA. We have observed that the DA process not only builds the capacity of local education agencies (LEAs) in problem solving but also allows an LEA's DA team members to glean a deeper understanding of their own district's systems (i.e. attendance, suspension, graduation requirements, College Career Readiness, A-G completion, reading interventions, Tier 2 interventions, etc.). Additionally, many non-eligible districts ask their county office for DA level support, which is an indicator that the process is working as intended. We believe that DA provides a structure for innovative thinking and support for risk taking while finding root causes of systems that improve outcomes for students and move districts out of DA.



Relationship Building

Engagement within the System of Support has afforded county offices new opportunities to build and strengthen relationships among: county offices; the local educational agencies we serve; and state agencies and other lead agencies.

Relationships among county offices

County offices connect with one another to support the very individualized and complex work required in continuous improvement. The main inter-county office support comes from county offices within their own CCSESA regions and geographic regions, with significant support from other county offices across the state.

Relationships between county offices and the local educational agencies we serve

The System of Support structure has provided county offices with opportunities to build stronger relationships with their LEAs and have a common language by assisting them to focus on the needs identified in their data. Districts feel they have a safety net from their county offices.

Relationships between county offices and state and other lead agencies

County offices appreciate the new leadership at the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence and are open to feedback and visioning what the system could be. County offices have established stronger working relationships with our local SELPAs to focus on supporting our Students with Disabilities. Across the system, most of our county offices and their geographic leads collaborate and work well with each other and share best practices and challenges with each other freely.

What are the Needs within the System of Support?

We encourage the continuous improvement of two key areas within the System of Support, which are systems alignment/coordination/communication and capacity building.

Systems Alignment/Coordination/Communication

As the System of Support becomes more complex with more moving parts, establishing best practices for articulation across the System of Support and state becomes increasingly important. We believe that more articulation across the system would result in fewer duplicated efforts or initiatives and clearer alignment with all of our shared goals, to improve student outcomes by building LEA capacity. Specific areas of the System of Support in need of better coherence are in the areas of: accessing resources and sharing best practices; lead initiatives and lead agencies; and the roles and responsibilities of the various players in the System of Support.

Sharing the work: Access to Resources and Sharing Best Practices

LEAs do not always know where to go to know what resources are available statewide. We need more communication about what is available, who it is available to, and how to access what is available. For example, having access to evidence-based practices for increasing our foster youths' graduation rates or reducing chronic absenteeism rates among our Native



American students would not only provide much needed access to resources but also have the potential for county offices to develop partnerships in various parts of the state. Currently, we do not know of one centralized location to access resources or make connections on this specific topic of need. Is there a way best practices could be documented and shared more easily? The work that CCEE has begun to develop a “portal” to consolidate the work of the leads within the System of Support is a promising solution to this need and long overdue.

Lead Initiatives and Lead Agencies

The System of Support is lacking a concentrated effort to ensure there is alignment and coherence among the lead initiatives. One recommendation to support coherence is to develop a graphic that displays how each of the lead initiatives and lead agencies could be useful or helpful at each tier. Another recommendation might be to use data from COEs and the California School Dashboard/Data Quest to determine where there are needs for Leads/Initiatives moving forward.

Roles/Responsibilities

The System of Support is lacking clarity in the roles and responsibilities of the various players in the system and how these roles and responsibilities differ or overlap. We recommend the state align and make publicly available all required elements under the System of Support including new plans, programs and requirements with the roles and responsibilities of the state and lead agencies identified in the system.

Capacity Building

As county offices, we see our primary function in the System of Support to help our districts and schools meet the needs of each student they serve, by focusing on building local capacity to sustain improvement. However, to build the capacity of others, county offices need to ensure our own capacity is fully supported.

More Support and Ongoing Support are Needed

Ongoing capacity building within the System of Support model and additional resources for county offices to continue to provide high quality support for DA is needed. County offices need state level support to assist in our refocus on "teaching and learning" and to improve learning environments with the integration of student voice as a way to improve chronic absenteeism, social emotional learning, and behavioral supports.

Investments in Early Intervention and Prevention

Stable support of resources for county offices to be the "boots on the ground" to have local staff capacity to work with districts before they become eligible for DA would be ideal. In our 2022 budget request, CCSESA requested an augmentation to the DA base grant to provide more preventative, tier 1 supports to each of our districts and schools we serve. One specific example of how county offices would utilize an augmented DA base grant would be to support our small, rural and frontier districts (smalls).



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While the System of Support works well as the accountability arm for California, the system excludes smalls from being eligible for DA. Increasing the base for Level 1 is a way to ensure smalls can be included in this important continuous improvement work and would promote a mindset shift from smaller LEAs that they are not a part of the System of Support. Some of our frontier districts will never be identified for DA due to their size, and lack of student group size to make them eligible to be accounted for on the Dashboard.

As county superintendents we acknowledge the importance of our role within the System of Support and are committed to the success of each of the individual students that the system is designed to serve by way of connecting and building the capacity of our LEAs. We appreciate you for your partnership and look forward to continued opportunities to work together to disrupt and dismantle the systemic inequities that are preventing our students from reaching their fullest potentials. Should you have any questions regarding our recommendations, please reach out to Derick Lennox, Senior Director, Governmental Relations and Legal Affairs, CCSESA at (dlennox@ccsesa.org); Judy Flores, Shasta County Superintendent of Schools at (jflores@shastacoe.org); and Dave Gordon, Sacramento County Superintendent of Schools (dgordon@coe.net).

Sincerely,

Dr. Debra Duardo, MSW, Ed.D.
Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools
President, CCSESA

Karen Stapf-Walters
Executive Director, CCSESA

Cc: Chris Hartley, Ed.D., Deputy Executive Director, CCEE
William McGee, Director, Student Achievement and Support Division, CDE
Sara Pietrowski, Policy Director, SBE