

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT STAKEHOLDER CONVENING

October 3-4, 2017
Sacramento, California



Continuous Improvement Stakeholder Convening

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Convening Summary

Convening Goals and Participants

The Continuous Improvement Stakeholder Convening (funded by the Stuart Foundation) brought together a diverse group of stakeholders across the California education landscape in order to explore the potential for collective action in promoting continuous improvement across the state. Participants included district leaders, state officials, county office leaders, support providers and researchers working in the area of continuous improvement (for a complete list of participants see Appendix A).

The goals of the convening were to:

- Build consensus about what “continuous improvement” means in practice
- Lay out the California landscape, including the existing strengths and challenges in implementation of continuous improvement
- Work towards a plan to support Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in this work

Prior to the convening, the organizers produced a brief that outlined existing definitions of continuous improvement and summarized key challenges in implementing continuous improvement in California (see: [Continuous Improvement in Practice](#)). The brief was created through a scan of the literature on continuous improvement organizations across many fields and interviews with diverse education stakeholders in California. Information presented in the brief was used as a launching point for conversations during the convening.

In addition, leaders of two continuous improvement organizations—School District of Menomonee Falls (SDMF) and Cincinnati Children’s Hospital and Medical Center (CCHMC)—were invited to present case studies of their organization’s efforts. Participants read a case study about CCHMC as a pre-reading (for a complete set of convening materials see [Convening Materials](#)). These examples also served as a launching point for conversations about continuous improvement in California.

Part I. Toward a Common Definition of Continuous Improvement

The first part of the convening involved a set of activities that were designed to help build towards a shared definition of continuous improvement (see Appendix B for the full convening agenda).

In the initial scan of the literature included in [Continuous Improvement in Practice](#), four distinguishing features of a continuous improvement approach were identified (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distinguishing features of a continuous improvement approach

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes a systems perspective • Focuses on redesigning processes to improve outcomes • Uses a disciplined methodology • Engages the front-line in actively solving problems |
|--|

Generally speaking, participants agreed to these distinguishing features and identified additional elements of continuous improvement. Participants emphasized:

- The importance of connecting continuous improvement efforts to the pursuit of educational justice.
- The deep human/relational aspects of continuous improvement endeavors and the need to connect these to the technical components. Participants noted that the features as written appeared to be mostly technical.
- The importance of partnerships across a wide range of stakeholders.

Continuous Improvement Organizations

In a second activity, participants self-assessed their organizational improvement capacity using a rubric (Table 2) that was adapted from a tool used in healthcare ([Improvement Capability Self-Assessment Tool](#)).

Table 2. Organizational improvement capacity self-assessment tool

Areas	Scale
Leadership for Improvement: The capability of the leadership of the organization to set clear improvement goals, expectations, priorities, and accountability and to integrate and support the necessary improvement activities within the organization	1 = Just Beginning 2 = Developing 3 = Making Progress 4 = Significant Impact 5 = Exemplary
Results: The capability of an organization to demonstrate measureable improvement across all departments and areas	
Resources: The capability of an organization to provide sufficient resources to establish improvement teams and to support their ongoing work and success	
Workforce and Human Resources: The capability of an organization to organize its workforce to encourage and reward active participation in improvement work, clearly define and establish improvement leadership roles, and ensure that job descriptions include a component related to improvement work	
Data Infrastructure and Management: The capability of an organization to establish, manage, and analyze data for improvement in a timely and routine manner to meet the objectives and expected results of the organization's improvement plan	
Improvement Knowledge and Competence The capability of an organization to obtain and execute on the skills and competencies required to undertake improvement throughout the organization	

The purpose of the activity was two-fold. First, the self-assessment was intended to surface whether the participants agreed to what constituted a continuous improvement organization. Participants generally did agree to the importance of each of the elements as they related to developing continuous improvement organizations in education. Second, the self-assessment also provided a picture of where the participant organizations were in building organizational improvement capacity. Participants’ self-assessments of their own organization, broken down by organizational type, are presented below in Figure 1. We found that respondents rated their own organizations relatively low, with averages across all 6 elements less than 3 “making progress.” We also found some variation by organization type, with those at state agencies rating their organizations lower than others.

Figure 1. Self-assessment of organizational improvement capacity – averages by organizational type



During the convening, participants also had the opportunity to hear from two leaders of continuous improvement organizations—Pat Greco of SDMF and Uma Kotagal from CCHMC. These two organizations were purposefully selected from outside the state to launch and inform the conversation about continuous improvement in California.

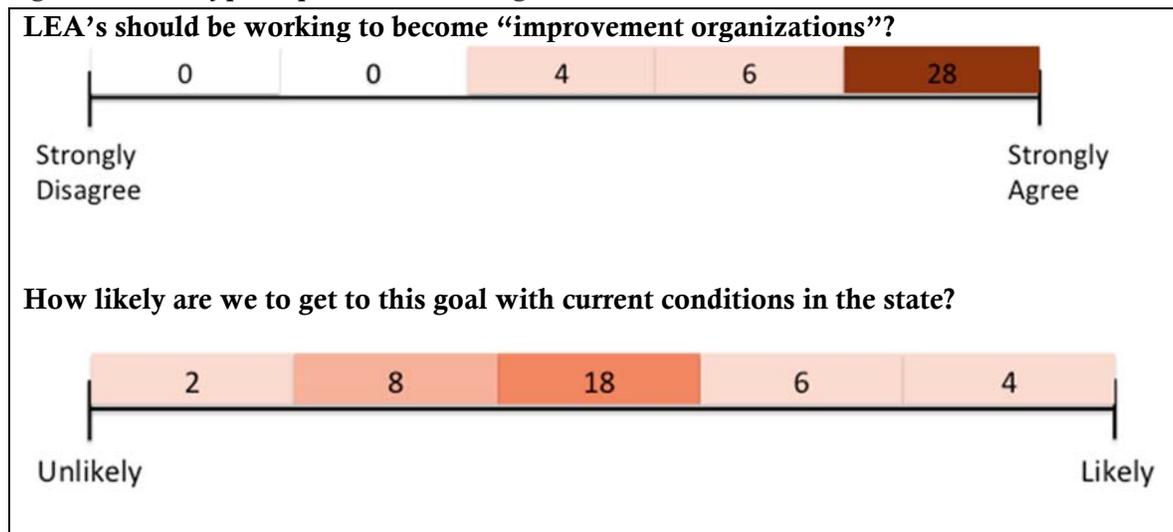
Through these conversations, the following agreements emerged:

- California’s goals with regards to continuous improvement should be for LEAs to be continuous improvement *organizations*.
- Continuous improvement organizations build improvement capability across the entire organization.
- Case examples are useful for understanding what continuous improvement organizations look like. Chances to learn from districts within the state would be particularly valuable.
- The state policy context has set the stage for continuous improvement by building excitement and interest; however, the current conditions in the state are likely insufficient, with local capacity for

continuous improvement as a key limiting factor. This has the danger of continuous improvement being done superficially and becoming the “next flavor of the month.”

The first day ended with “human voting” where participants indicated their level of agreement with a variety of statements by physically moving along the continuum from one side of the room to the other. Figure 2 represents the collective sense of the group.

Figure 2. Results of participant “human voting”



Part II: Supporting Continuous Improvement at Scale in California

The conversation on the second day of the convening shifted to how we might take collective action, particularly in addressing some of the current barriers to continuous improvement that exist in the state. Through the pre-convening interviews, four key challenges in implementing continuous improvement were identified in California:

1. There is a lack of clarity concerning what “continuous improvement” means in practice and how to achieve it.
2. Increasing capacity is a known necessity, but strategies and supports to grow capacity are lacking.
3. Districts struggle to prioritize continuous improvement when facing constraints of time and resources.
4. There is variation in the availability and use of timely, relevant data to support continuous improvement.

Defining the Problem

To address these challenges, participants divided into six groups: one group focused on time, three groups focused on capacity, and two groups focused on data. Each group read excerpts from interviews conducted by PACE/WestEd about its given focal area and together articulated challenges associated with that area. While each group focused on a different area, there was a fair amount of overlap in the identified barriers. Table 3 represents a summary of the barriers articulated across the groups.

Table 3. Key barriers in across the challenge areas

Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple priorities create multiple initiatives; eight priorities are too many • Identifying priorities is difficult; must determine what to address in order to achieve desired outcomes
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current culture/belief system does not support continuous improvement; accountability puts pressure on schools and districts to provide immediate results so there is no time or space to take risks and potentially fail • Hard to make cultural shift to become a learning organization; requires safety, vulnerability, freedom to fail • Lack of effective “teams” in districts; work happens in silos • Top down leadership approach still prevalent; doesn’t support continuous improvement
System & Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff turnover limits ability to build organizational capacity • Lack of onboarding process for new staff • Limited collaboration across systems around work; lack of collaborative, facilitative, shared leadership at all levels • Lack of deep connection between key site and district stakeholders
Resources/Time & Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough time or resources to do everything (“we’ve built a system where every space is filled”) • Lack of implementation know-how; gap between what needs to get done and knowledge of how to do it • Not all County Offices of Education (COEs) have necessary expertise to support districts • Not all leaders (superintendents, principals and assistant principals) have mindset or skills to lead continuous improvement work • Leaders do not know what they don’t know; some believe they have some continuous improvement in place but this is not the case in actuality
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of usable data; do not know what to measure • Data not available to schools and districts in real time • Schools and districts do not have capacity or necessary support to use data to understand problems, track progress, and evaluate performance • Do not have data teams/departments in some districts
Stakeholders & Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to communicate priorities to stakeholders • Hard to engage stakeholders in priority-setting, while maintaining coherent strategy • Disconnect between how LCFF was/is communicated and how stakeholders interpret/ed it

Prototyping Solutions to Key Problems

Groups were then asked to select a problem identified during their conversation and to generate a list of potential ideas for addressing it. The group then selected one idea to further develop and created a prototype. These prototypes were shared during a gallery walk with all the participants during which participants had votes that they could allocate to ideas they deemed worthiest of pursuing. The list of ideas (with peer feedback and voting) can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. Proposed ideas from prototyping activity

Idea	Goal	Additional details	Who it involves	Questions
<p>Leadership training and/or certification on continuous improvement for school boards given by state</p> <p>19 votes</p>	<p>Provide support for districts engaging in continuous improvement by training school board members in CI</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ways to incentive participation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Add LCAP requirement for boards to get trained in continuous improvement to build capacity – Engage LEAs that are achieving continuous improvement as instructors and leaders in order to promote visibility of training/certification – Seek money from foundations to support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDE • CCEE • CSBA • LEAs • School boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you ensure that CI stays non-partisan and does not become a political issue that people run against?
<p>“Centers of Excellence” in all eight priority areas in each region; each COE adopts CI approach and brokers expertise from the centers</p> <p>9 votes</p>	<p>Provide content and improvement support for districts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centers staffed by experts in priority areas, provide workshops and trainings on research-based strategies • Each COE adopts a CI model that is customer service-based and evaluated by LEAs • LEAs choose COE that best fits their needs rather than being required to go to their own • Allows for greater flexibility and choice at local level • Removes burden on COEs to know/do it all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COEs • LEAs • TA providers • CCEE • Board of Education • Higher education • Community groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you determine what counts as expertise? • What are the implications if some providers are more expensive than others or if COEs have relationships with certain providers but not others?
<p>“CA Regional Improvement Collective” (network of districts) focused on specific problems of practice</p> <p>11 votes</p>	<p>Support districts in developing new mindsets and skills; move beyond isolated learning and action and pockets of success through network approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional networks formed around a specific problem of practice (e.g. middle school math); • CCEE serves as hub; district teams comprised of diverse set of representatives • Network learns together about continuous improvement, data use, etc; shares resources and success stories • Network agrees to a common set of measures with shared accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCEE • LEAs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who decides what the problems of practice are? • What is the scaling mechanism? How does the work spread through the participating districts beyond the initial district team and to other districts? How is learning shared?

Table 4. Proposed ideas from prototyping activity (continued)

Idea	Goal	Additional details	Who it involves	Questions
<p>Create system-level (state) measures</p> <p>7 votes</p>	<p>Get feedback on LCAP process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create feedback loop (surveys, focus groups, etc.) around whole LCAP process • Identify and reach consensus on goals for the state; create state-level LCAP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDE • CCEE • COEs • LEAs • Various stakeholder groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who takes leadership of developing and monitoring this system? • What kind of data is most useful to track at the state level regarding process?
<p>Promote sustained focus on few, key LEA priorities</p> <p>15 votes</p>	<p>Narrowing priorities reduces diffusion of resources and time across multiple priorities and initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent messaging from the state and the COEs that emphasizes focus on a few, key priorities • Create alternative tools/templates, aligned to the LCAP template, that allow greater flexibility and encourage focus on a handful of priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDE • CCEE • COEs • LEAs • Various stakeholder groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you manage potential pushback from various advocacy groups?
<p>Identify “bright spot” counties that have successfully supported LEAs; draw on knowledge and align efforts of other state agencies</p> <p>20 votes</p>	<p>Provide high quality support to LEAs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In documenting practices in “bright spot” counties, focus on concrete practices and processes that could be spread. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDE • CCEE • COEs • LEAs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What counts as success? • Who decides which COEs are the exemplars?

Other Proposed Solutions

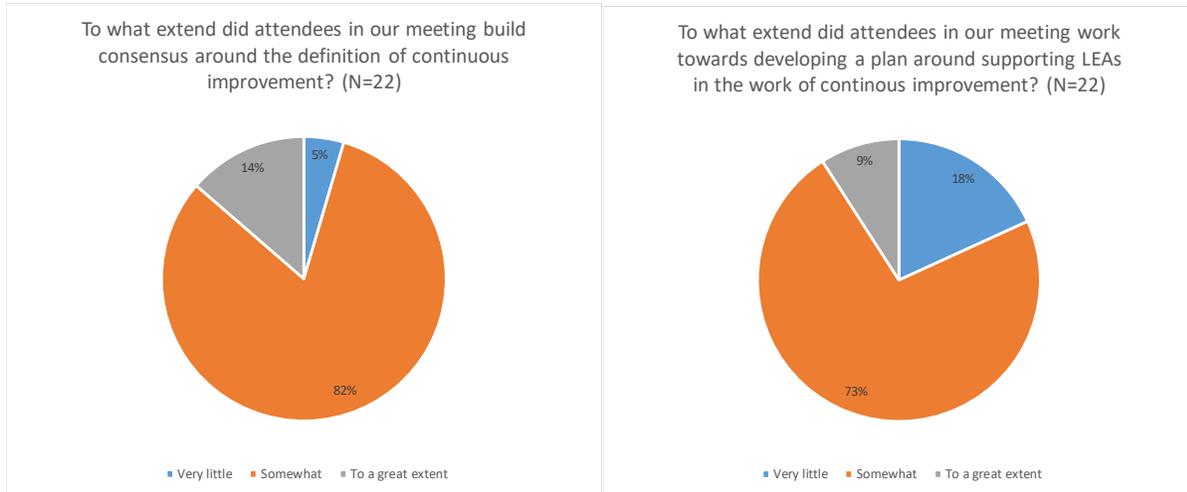
While each team selected just one idea to flesh out and share with the other groups, there were many good ideas that arose from the small group prototyping sessions, including:

- Learning from “bright spots” districts/schools
 - Have district and school teams visit “pockets of excellence” to learn about what those organizations are doing.
 - Create case examples to serve as models for schools and districts.
- Developing cross-functional leadership teams and training opportunities
 - Form county or district “leadership cohorts” that represent a cross-section of the system (teacher leaders, principals, district leaders, board members, representatives from community based organizations). Cohorts participate in yearlong training on facilitative leadership and improvement science to help leaders develop necessary mindsets and skills.
 - Form regional leadership academies.
- Develop resources to encourage continuous improvement around LCAP data
 - Pick one problem with good data (e.g., chronic absence, suspension) and show how data is used and informs the continuous improvement process. Provide protocols for 1) How to analyze the data to understand variation; 2) going deeper to understand the problem in schools; 3) where you go to find ideas for how to solve it (including both research and “bright spots” analysis within your district and outside); 4) how you test/measure if your intervention is working (including using frequent data).
- Incentivize investments in continuous improvement
 - Offer challenge grants to encourage district transformation (with training/coaching/staff) to build local capacity and examples.
 - Create state-level entity that matches available support with district support needs regarding continuous improvement efforts.
- Building capacity at the state level to support continuous improvement
 - Provide comprehensive training to COE, CDE, CCEE together to build capacity in facilitation, needs analysis, etc. and to ensure alignment and coherence in the support they provide to districts.

Part III. Continuing the Conversation

The Continuous Improvement Stakeholder Convening, and subsequent conversations, generated many ideas and positive momentum. Respondents seemed eager to continue the conversation and the forward momentum, with 100% of evaluation respondents saying they wanted to be involved in future events and next steps. We had ambitious goals for the meeting (building consensus, charting a path forward), and the majority of our attendees reported that we met these goals “somewhat” (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2. Convening evaluation results



Suggestions from attendees on what they would like to focus on in future discussions about continuous improvement in California grouped into three primary categories:

- 1) better understanding “best practices” in continuous improvement here in California;
- 2) thinking about how to solve a particular problem; and
- 3) continued development connected to state system of support and action planning.

With the support of the Stuart Foundation, PACE and WestEd are now working to develop a plan to continue this work, with an eye toward building on existing approaches in the state, such as the Alliance for Continuous Improvement and the California Collaborative for District Reform.

The goal for the future is to introduce strategic opportunities to advance implementation of continuous improvement in California in a way that is meaningful and sustainable. In particular, efforts may focus on identifying districts demonstrating “best practices” in continuous improvement practices and contributing to structures that advance the state’s development of a system of support.

Appendix A: Convening Participants

Tom Adams
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Sacramento City USD

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California State Board of Education

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California Collaborative for Educational Excellence

Melissa Bazanos
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Riverside COE

Peter Birdsall
Executive Director
California County Superintendents Educational
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Teri Burns
Legislative Advocate
California School Boards Association

Ruthie Caparas
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Ben Daley
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High Tech High

Michael Davies-Hughes
Assistant Superintendent
Eureka City Schools

Christina Dixon
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Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of
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Pat Greco
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School District of Menominee Falls

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Improvement Collective

Carrie Hahnel
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Glen Harvey
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Natasha Hoehn
Founder & Senior Partner
California Education Partners

Bill Honig
Founder & President
Consortium on Reading Excellence

Heather Hough
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Dan Humphrey
Educational Consultant
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Keith Irish
Associate Superintendent
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Taryn Ishida
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Adela Jones
Associate Superintendent
Sanger Unified

Mike Kirst
State Board President
California State Board of Education

Julie Koppich
President
Julia Koppich and Associates

Uma Kotagal
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Kelsey Krausen
Senior Research Associate
WestEd

Jannelle Kubinec
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Sylvia Kwon
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Jean Madden-Cazares
Assistant Superintendent
San Diego COE

Rigel Massaro
Staff Attorney
Public Advocates

Efrain Mercado
Director
Children Now

Amanda Meyer
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Derek Mitchell
Chief Executive Officer
Partners in School Innovation

Aida Molina
Director
California Collaborative for Educational Excellence

David Montes de Oca
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Oakland USD/CORE Districts

Laura Mulfinger
Project Manager
Policy Analysis for California Education

Michelle Nayfack
Senior Researcher
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Sara Noguchi
Associate Superintendent
Twin Rivers USD

Jennifer O'Day
Founder and Chair, California Collaborative on
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Sandra Park
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Chris Steinhauser
Superintendent
Long Beach USD

Ilene Straus
Vice President
California State Board of Education

Tia Taylor
System Transformation Specialist
WestEd

Jason Willis
Director of Strategy & Performance
WestEd

Appendix B. Participant Agenda

Day 1 - October 3, 2017

Time	Topic
12:30-1:30	<i>Optional lunch as attendees arrive</i>
1:30-2:00	Session 1: Introductions and overview of the meeting
2:00-2:30	Session 2: Improvement activity
2:30-3:30	Session 3: Toward an operational definition of “continuous improvement”
3:30-3:45	Break
3:45-4:45	Session 4: Better understanding the “improvement organization”
4:45-5:00	Session 5: Wrap-up and prep for tomorrow
5:00-6:30	Break
6:30 - 8:30	Dinner, Firehouse Restaurant (1112 2nd Street, Sacramento, CA 95814)

Day 2 - October 4, 2017

Time	Topic
8:30-9:00	Arrival and breakfast
9:00-9:30	Session 6: Recap from yesterday
9:30-10:30	Session 7: Building capacity for improvement
10:30-11:00	Session 8: Overview of California’s existent/emerging policy and support structure
11:00-11:15	Break
11:15-12:30	Session 9: What are current opportunities and challenges in implementing continuous improvement in California?
12:30-1:00	Lunch
1:00-2:15	Session 10: How can we work toward realizing the vision of continuous improvement?
2:15-2:30	Closing