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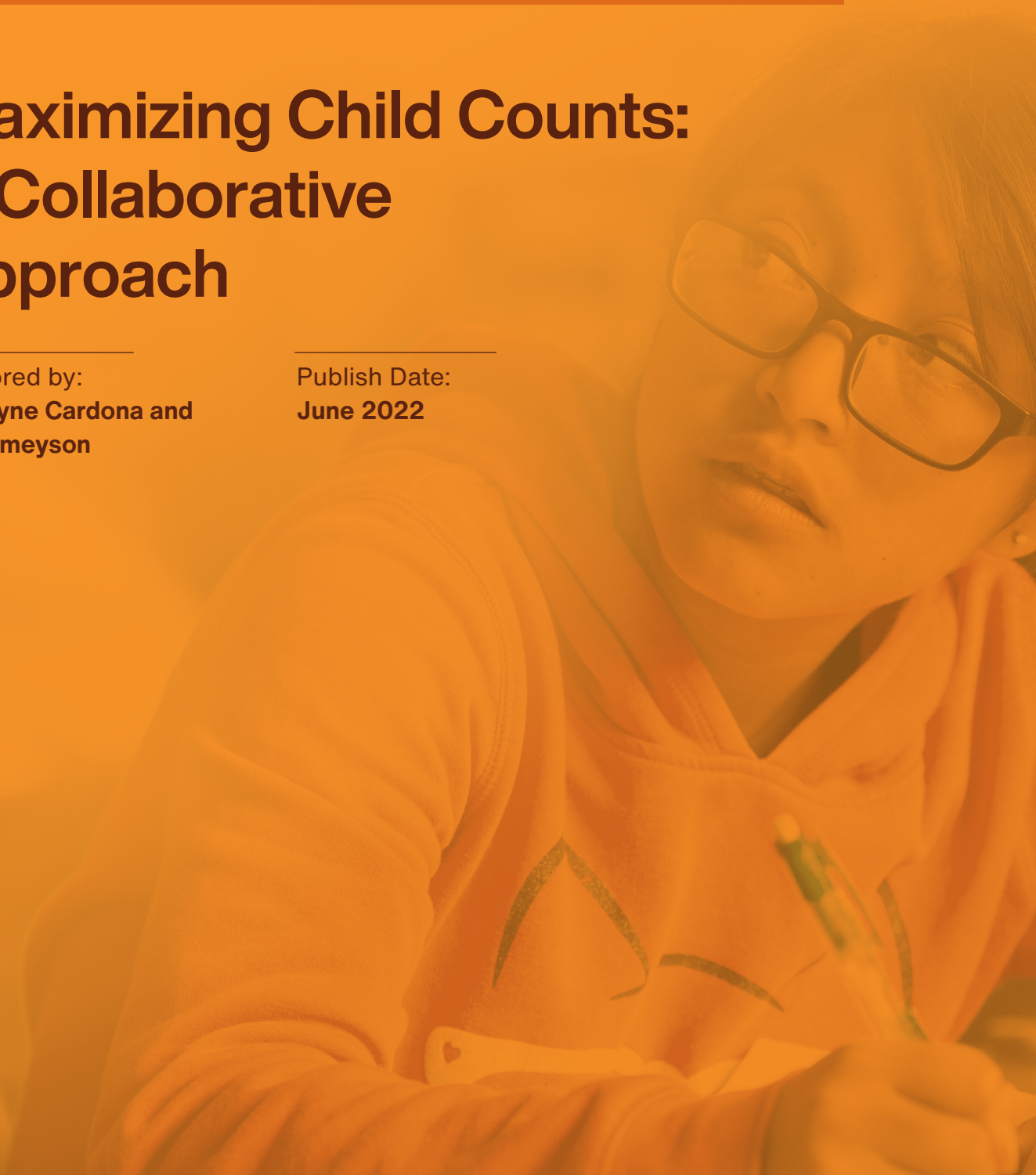
## Maximizing Child Counts: A Collaborative Approach

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Authored by:  
**Jocelyne Cardona and  
Liz Jameyson**

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## A Note on the Partnership Between the California Department of Education and WestEd

WestEd provides technical assistance and support to the California Department of Education (CDE) to cultivate the highest quality identification and recruitment (I&R) practices across the state. In California, each subgrantee takes local responsibility for its I&R efforts. The partnership between the CDE and WestEd is committed to continuous improvement, including (1) approaching identification and recruitment through an investigative mindset wherein we value curiosity and innovation as well as research, (2) making improvements to identification and recruitment context-specific, and (3) using both qualitative and quantitative data to see whether our improvement efforts are working—and adjusting if they are not.

The partnership is driven by a commitment to fostering equity and building systems that support and sustain diverse learners in many different contexts. We work toward the goal that each student receives the support and opportunity to succeed in school and beyond; can choose from a wide variety of postsecondary options; and comes through the experience of schooling feeling valued, validated, and like a fundamental, contributing member of the school community.

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**This profile describes a collaborative effort to maximize child counts to ensure that as many eligible children and youths as possible are enrolled in the Migrant Education Program (MEP) before the end of each performance period. This work was accomplished by the Migrant Student Information Network team at WestEd in collaboration with the California Department of Education Migrant Education Office and MEP subgrantees.**

### **Background**

Once an eligible migratory child or youth is recruited into the Migrant Education Program (MEP), they can begin receiving health and education services to meet their unique needs. Each performance period which extends from September 1 to August 31, all eligible students are counted. MEP child counts at the end of each performance period determine the funding for future years. The level of funding influences the quality and breadth of programs and services provided to eligible children and youths.

## Identification and Recruitment in California

In California, identification and recruitment (I&R) activities are accomplished at the subgrantee level. Through the grant from the Office of Migrant Education at the U.S. Department of Education, the California Department of Education (CDE) provides subgrants to 20 agencies, known as subgrantees. These subgrantees include five districts that are funded directly as well as 15 regions that serve multiple districts. Most of these 15 regions reside within county offices of education. Each of these subgrantees is responsible for their own I&R component.

A main goal of the I&R component is to find and enroll in the MEP as many eligible migratory children and youths as possible. Dedicated professionals at the CDE, at WestEd, and in California's 20 subgrantees collaborate to accomplish this goal. These professionals are personally invested in supporting the academic and health needs of all eligible migratory children and youths, who are an integral part of our community and student population in California.

## Data Close

Each year in September, MEP student child counts from the previous performance period are finalized in a process known as *data-close*. The CDE and a team of professionals from WestEd with I&R and technical expertise actively collaborate each year to support subgrantees with data-close activities. Throughout this profile, this team is referred to as the *data-close team*. Toward the end of each performance period, the data-close team focuses on ensuring that Certificates of Eligibility (COEs) are documented correctly in the Migrant Student Information Network (MSIN) system and that all eligible COEs are processed before the deadline.

For three recent performance periods (2018–19, 2019–20, and 2020–21), the data-close team provided training and worked alongside subgrantees to improve data quality and completeness by supporting them to process all eligible COEs before data close. Through a successful process of continuous improvement, these efforts have maximized child counts across all 20 subgrantees, increased data quality, and collaboratively engaged subgrantees in monitoring their own data.

## The Process of Improving Data Close

In the 2018–19 performance period leading up to the time of data close, the data-close team noticed two items that sparked their curiosity.

First, subgrantees were not reviewing all COEs prior to the data-close deadline, missing opportunities to maximize child counts. In these cases, the COEs had been completed by a recruiter but not yet reviewed and validated by a local designated state education agency (SEA) reviewer. Until a COE has been reviewed and validated by the SEA reviewer, the children or youths on that COE are not counted for funding purposes and cannot receive services.<sup>1</sup>

Second, some recruiters had entered a combination of data elements in the COE form that were incompatible with eligibility. For example, some recruiters incorrectly recorded a move date for a child prior to the move date that established the migratory worker. However, all move dates that establish the qualifying worker must be before or the same as the child's move date, but never after.<sup>2</sup>

### Actionable Steps Toward Improvement

For each of these two areas of improvement (unreviewed COEs and COEs with eligibility errors), the team established an aligned improvement goal and actionable steps to achieve that goal. Table 1 below lists each area of improvement, its aligned goal, and the actionable steps the team took to achieve the goal. These steps and their timelines are described in more detail following the table.

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1 Unless the child or youth has remaining eligibility from a prior COE they cannot be counted for funding purposes and cannot receive services until their most recent COE is validated by the SEA reviewer.

2 This situation would result in the date that establishes the migratory worker being after the child's move date, which would invalidate the COE based on the eligibility factors stated in the [non-regulatory guidance for the Education of Migratory Children under Title I, Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Success Act \(ESSA\) of 2015](#).

**Table 1. Each Improvement Area Was Aligned with a Goal and Actionable Steps**

Improvement area	Improvement goal	Actionable steps
<p><b>COEs not processed by data close</b></p>	<p>Reduce the number of COEs left unverified by data close.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review the unreviewed COEs in the queue.<sup>3</sup></li> <li>▪ Create a process to inform subgrantees of the number of COEs in their queue and support them as needed to resolve any issues at the local level.</li> </ul>
<p><b>COEs incompatible with eligibility</b></p>	<p>Reduce the number of COEs incompatible with eligibility by notifying and requesting local I&amp;R coordinators to review COEs and invalidate those with errors.</p>	<p>Run a query in the MSIN system to identify possible COEs with discrepancies and notify the subgrantee when the following occurs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A child’s QAD is documented as occurring before the worker’s move date.</li> <li>▪ The required information is not documented on the COE in a case when the worker did not engage in qualifying work but sought qualifying work and had a history of engaging in qualifying work (a “prior history” move).</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> The term *queue* refers to a folder in the MSIN system that acts like a group inbox. Each subgrantee has their own queue. In this case, the queued folder for the COE workflow contains all COEs that are ready to be reviewed. Subgrantee SEA reviewers can claim the COEs, as needed, to add them to their own work lists.

Because the actionable steps required changes in processes and practices, communication about those changes, and changes in behavior across all subgrantees, the data-close team knew that it would take time to fully implement these steps. Accordingly, the data-close team made incremental improvements across three years.

### **Improvements in Year 1 (2018–19)**

The data-close team began by addressing the COEs that were created with a combination of data elements that were incompatible with eligibility (see table 1 above). They reached out to subgrantees who had either of the following two error types:

- COEs with the QAD before the worker’s date
- COEs without required comments for “prior history” moves

This information allowed subgrantees to correct errors to maintain accuracy in eligibility decisions or to request that the COE be marked as ineligible. Two-way communication between the data-close team and the subgrantees continued until all COEs were corrected or marked ineligible. Correcting these errors helped ensure that subgrantees produced high-quality COEs and reduced the risk of ineligible children and youths erroneously being counted. By the 2018–19 performance period’s data close, subgrantees had reviewed over 200 COEs and corrected or requested assistance from the data-close team to mark the COEs ineligible in the MSIN system (Raya, Garibay, and Medina 2022).

The data-close team communicated these results to the CDE and to subgrantees. For the CDE, they created a report card of sorts that included analysis and recommendations. For the subgrantees, they presented a snapshot of data points that provided locally specific information for data-close activities during an I&R Coordinators Network meeting in fall 2019. While subgrantees had successfully resolved all COEs incompatible with eligibility, there were additional opportunities to maximize child counts for future performance periods. Since the data-close team knew they were going to address this issue in the next year’s data-close process, they included an overview of activities and the results of the data close in the meeting presentation to make subgrantees aware of the issue. With this information, the team shared with subgrantees several opportunities to maximize child counts for the following performance period. This included three main activities:

1. Reviewing COEs for specific errors and resolving errors throughout the year
2. Reviewing COEs in the local queues and processing them
3. Reviewing duplicate child records and resolving them

### Improvements in Year 2 (2019–20)

During the 2019–20 performance period, the team supported subgrantees in improving data quality and child counts by identifying potential issues. Approximately one month before the 2019–20 data close, the team began proactively sending weekly email communication to I&R coordinators and MEP directors from each subgrantee. This communication included details that were similar to information from the 2018–19 performance period but that also included up-to-date data, such as the number of unreviewed and unprocessed COEs remaining in each subgrantee’s queue.<sup>4</sup>

Through the weekly status communication from the data-close team, subgrantees had near real-time understanding of their local data-close activities. The data-close team reported that subgrantees were addressing errors faster and processing COEs before data close, leading to more accurate child counts within the performance period.

### Improvements in Year 3 (2020–21)

After seeing positive results from their efforts in 2019–20, the data-close team reflected on other improvements that would maximize child counts. They decided to implement three refinements to further improve outcomes in the 2020–21 performance period.

First, the data-close team broadened the recipients of email communication to all subgrantees regardless of whether they had unprocessed COEs. This created awareness among all subgrantees of their progress and contribution to data-close activities.

Second, the data-close team included in this communication the number of potential children and youths in the deduplication process.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the data-close team realized that by informing subgrantees of the number of pending COEs in their recruiters’ local queue, this could help in processing more COEs by data-close. They began drilling down into the data to examine COEs that had not yet been submitted by each recruiter across the state. By including these COEs, in addition to those in fix status or review status,<sup>6</sup> all unprocessed COEs could be reviewed by the subgrantees.

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4 Only those subgrantees with unprocessed COEs were sent a data-close activity status reminder.

5 As explained in the user guide *Resolving Duplicate Child Records in the MSIN* (2019), to ensure every child is uniquely counted in the submission to the Department of Education, the MSIN system has a comprehensive child matching protocol that includes dozens of matching tests to identify potential duplicates. After a COE is completed, the deduplication process allows California to confidently determine unduplicated child counts for the Department of Education, state reports, and local subgrantees.

6 *Fix* status is a status assigned to a COE that sends it back to the recruiter who created it for corrections or clarifications. *Review* status is a status assigned to a COE that sends it to the Queued folder in the subgrantee’s COE workflow so that local reviewers can then claim and review them.



The data-close team continued to send notifications and communication to the I&R coordinators of each subgrantee to inform them of the number of unprocessed COEs at the local level (Raya, Garibay, and Medina 2022). The I&R coordinators then followed up with their recruiters and reviewers to ensure timely COE submission and processing. As a result, each subgrantee worked toward processing and verifying as many COEs as possible before the data-close deadline.

Table 2 below shows the start date of the team’s communication, the audience to whom the communication was sent, and the frequency of communication by performance period.

**Table 2. Communication Details to Support Subgrantees’ Timely Completion of Data-Close Activities**

Performance period	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21
Data-close deadline	October 11, 2019	October 9, 2020	September 17, 2021
Date that the team began sharing via email with subgrantees	Communication started in September	Communication started in September	Communication started in August
Data included in the emails	COEs with errors	COEs in <i>review</i> and <i>fix</i> statuses COEs with errors	COEs in <i>create</i> status <sup>7</sup> COEs in <i>review</i> and <i>fix</i> statuses Number of children and youths in the deduplication process in MSIN COEs with errors

<sup>7</sup> *Create* status is a status assigned to a COE while it is still being edited by the recruiter who created it. A COE in *create* status is not ready for review.

Performance period	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21
<b>Recipients</b>	Email sent only to subgrantees with COEs with errors	Emails sent to directors and I&R coordinators of regions with more than a certain number of COEs in the queue	Emails sent to all I&R coordinators regardless of the numbers of COEs in the queue
<b>Frequency</b>	Varied and only sent to subgrantees with COE error types	Weekly (until a week before data close) Monday, Wednesday, and Friday the week of data close	Weekly (until a week before data close) Monday, Wednesday, and Friday the week of data close

**Supporting a Collaborative Approach**

After the conclusion of each performance period, the team presented the preliminary findings to the CDE and the I&R coordinators at the November I&R Coordinators Network meeting. The team facilitated a review and reflection process to encourage all partners (the CDE, the data-close team, and local I&R coordinators) to reflect, collaborate, and plan how to improve for the following year. During these reviews, the data-close team encouraged subgrantees to run their own reports throughout the year on MSIN to proactively catch errors and train local staff.

The data-close team adapted its communication processes over the three performance periods, moving from responding to identified data issues in Year 1 to proactively rolling out a communication plan with a subset of I&R coordinators and directors in Year 2 to including all subgrantees in the communication plan along with additional data points to support data-close activities in Year 3. After the 2019–20 performance period, the WestEd team received feedback from subgrantees indicating that all subgrantees should receive communication to help them understand their local data and have ownership of their own improvement process. Subgrantee staff overseeing and completing data-close activities asked to be the primary points of contact, taking ownership of their subgrantees’ improvement efforts. This collaborative, flexible, and adaptive approach to improvement resulted in greater trust, buy-in, and investment in the improvement process.

## Outcomes

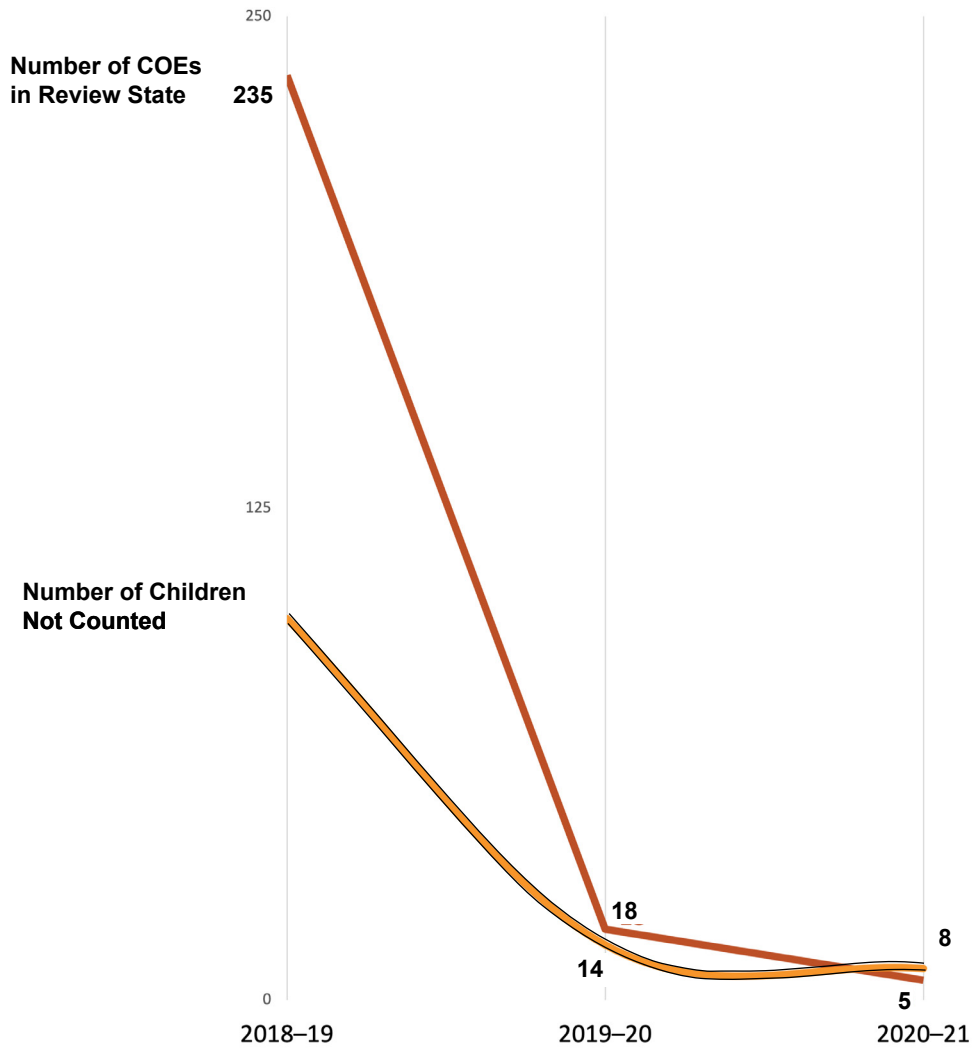
The process of creating reminder emails and engaging in two-way communication with subgrantees resulted in several positive outcomes. The California MEP subgrantees, the CDE, and the data-close team collaboratively maximized child counts, allowing the MEP to serve as many eligible children and youths as possible.

After the team implemented regular status communication, the number of unprocessed COEs—and, thereby, the number of children and youths not counted—decreased in each consecutive performance period (see figure 1 below). During the 2018–19 performance period, there were 235 COEs unprocessed at data close. By the 2020–21 performance period, the number of COEs unprocessed at data close decreased by 98 percent, leaving only five unprocessed COEs across the state. The number of eligible children and youths not counted due to unprocessed COEs decreased substantially as well, from 97 children in the 2018–19 performance period to only 8 children in the 2020–21 performance period.

*Subgrantees were able to take ownership of opportunities to maximize their child counts and ensure eligible migratory children and youths were recruited into the MEP by (1) correcting errors on the COEs, (2) reducing the number of potential children and youths in the deduplication process in the system, and (3) processing COEs prior to data close.*

**Figure 1. The Number of Unprocessed COEs and Children Not Counted Reduced Substantially**

Since the 2018–19 performance period, subgrantees have had substantially fewer unprocessed COEs at the time of data close as well as substantially fewer children not counted because of those COEs.



*Note: This data visualization was created by Lisa Severino and published in Raya, Garibay, and Medina (2022), “Identification and Recruitment Data Close Activities.”*

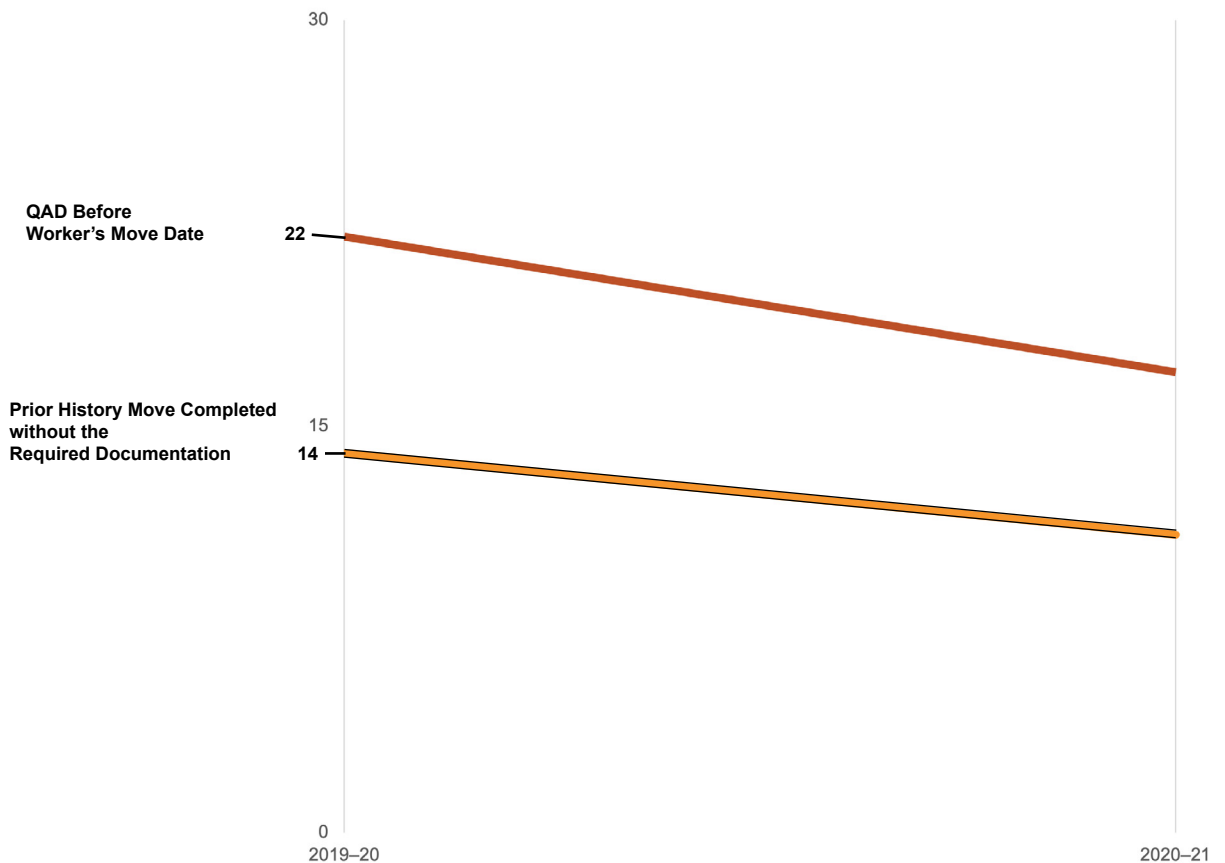
With the data, communication, and collaboration that the data-close team provided, subgrantees were able to take ownership of opportunities to maximize their child count and ensure eligible migratory children and youths were recruited into the MEP by (1) correcting errors on the COEs, (2) reducing the number of potential children and youths in the deduplication process in the system, and (3) processing COEs prior to data close.

The data-close team noticed that as they continued the improvement process, subgrantees became more involved. Subgrantees started to ask how to run the reports that the data-close team produced for them during the data-close activities. The subgrantees then began to monitor their own data at the local level throughout the year instead of waiting to be prompted by the team. This allowed for the local subgrantees to take a proactive approach and start their own continuous improvement steps.

An additional success of all of these efforts was the decrease in COEs with errors. Figure 2 below shows the number of COEs with errors by error type, including QAD before worker’s move date and “prior history” move completed without the required explanation. Both error types decreased from the 2019–20 to the 2020–21 performance period.

**Figure 2. Decrease in the Number of COEs with Errors**

**Subgrantees have had fewer COEs with errors at the time of data close.**



The decrease in these two types of COE errors is important for two reasons. First, in a time when identifying and recruiting eligible students has become more challenging,<sup>8</sup> timely COE creation allows for a longer eligibility period for the student. Second, finding and correcting errors before a COE is finalized helps maintain the accuracy of eligibility determinations and the integrity of local and state I&R efforts. After sharing the results of the data-close activities in trainings, local designated SEA reviewers reported paying more attention to these two error types. For example, during the 2019–20 performance period data-close activities, one I&R lead explained, “This issue was brought to us last year and we have been more careful when reviewing the COEs, especially in...[the prior history moves] part of the COE. Since then, we haven’t come across [COEs] with that issue anymore” (email communication, 2020).

### **Conditions That Supported Improvement**

To create the report card for the CDE and weekly communication to each subgrantee, the data-close team took many steps and relied on team members with varied expertise. Interviews with the data-close team revealed that certain conditions supported the success of the improvement effort.

Two of these conditions are the dedication of the data-close team to the MEP and the team’s trust in one another. Each member truly cares about the program and the MEP community. Several are former MEP students and others have worked in regional offices as recruiters, I&R supervisors, and in other capacities. They proactively examined the relevant data, welcomed collaboration, used their various personal and professional perspectives to nurture diverse opinions, and, ultimately, improved results.

Additionally, the data-close team approached the identified problems holistically. They worked closely with subgrantees and the CDE—whose diligence, responsiveness, and leadership supported all improvement efforts. It took support and input not only from I&R experts but also from those who understood the programming of the MSIN system and how to run reports. These reports gave incredibly important insights to potential actionable steps and considerations to keep in mind when collaborating with the subgrantees to address the problems. The intentional support from team members with strong interpersonal skills who could communicate the data helped spark curiosity in the subgrantees.

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<sup>8</sup> Several factors have recently made I&R activities more challenging, including the COVID-19 pandemic; climate change and its impact on geography, including crops; and wariness from the migratory community as to how safe it is to register for a program.

In the words of Gabriela Garibay, I&R Training and Technical Assistance Specialist at WestEd, “This work would not have been impactful if it was not for everyone’s contribution.”

It was exciting for the team to see the subgrantees take ownership of their data and be curious about seeing how they could further understand and tackle the issues locally. The data-close team members hope subgrantees will continue to take opportunities to implement their own continuous improvement practices locally.

### **Next Steps**

The data-close team plans to continue their reflection and data analysis, searching for ways to improve during the next performance period, 2021-22. They will continue to send reminders to local I&R coordinators, and they hope to work with the MSIN system developers to enhance the COE component by adding logic checks that help recruiters prevent COE errors. In addition, they hope that the data continues to create opportunities for the CDE to support subgrantees and, as a result, continue to identify, recruit, and serve the maximum number of migratory children possible.

### **References**

Raya, Elvira, Gabriela Garibay, and Heather Medina. 2022. “Identification and Recruitment Data Close Activities.” Meeting presentation, WestEd MEP Team Meeting, remote via Zoom, United States.