

PLN PROFILES

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PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORK PROFILES

Using the Professional Learning Network to Develop Leading Practices for Identification and Recruitment in California

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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 I&R through an investigative mindset wherein we value curiosity and innovation as well as research; (2) making the I&R and improvements to I&R context-specific; and (3) using both qualitative and quantitative data to see whether our improvement efforts are working—and making adjustments 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; is able to 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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PLN PROFILES



Staff members from the 20 subgrantees in California's Migrant Education Program attend two years of a professional learning network in which they make progress on areas of focus. Their focus areas are determined locally and based on their own identification and recruitment data.

What are eligibility criteria for migratory children and youths?

- The child is under 22 years old.
- The child is entitled to a free and public education (or will be once they are old enough).
- The child moved with, before, to join, or as a migratory worker.

What are the criteria for a migratory worker?

- The worker moved during the previous six months due to economic necessity from one residence to another and one school district to another.
- The worker engaged in new seasonal or temporary agricultural or fishing work soon after moving or actively sought qualifying work and has a recent history of moves for qualifying work.



The goal of the Migrant Education Program is to ensure that all migratory children reach challenging academic standards and graduate with a high school diploma (or complete an HSED [high school equivalency degree]) that prepares them for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment. (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021)

Quality identification and recruitment is a cornerstone of the Migrant Education Program (MEP). Recruiting migratory children into the program is the first step to providing the services they deserve to help meet challenging academic standards and graduate from high school or the equivalent despite inequities brought on by the unique challenges of moving frequently and, often, living in poverty.

Each participating state receives an MEP grant from the federal Office of Migrant Education based on educational expenditures in the state and migratory child counts. In California, the Migrant Education Office (MEO) at the California Department of Education uses this grant to provide subgrants to 15 regional MEP offices and 5 direct-funded districts. These subgrants provide funding not only for the educational- and health-related services that eligible children and their families receive but also for the identification and recruitment of eligible migratory children and youths.

Because these funds are limited and allocated for a specific purpose, it is critical that services are provided only to those children eligible to receive them. To ensure that only eligible children are recruited into the program, each state uses quality control checks. In California, the system of quality controls is robust and includes both local and statewide re-interviews of a sample of recruited children; annual statewide and local training and supervision of I&R staff; Certificate of Eligibility (COE) approval and review protocols; and ad hoc technical assistance and support from the state and its service provider, WestEd.

And while it is important that only those children eligible to receive services are recruited into the program, it is equally important that as many eligible students as possible are recruited so that the goal of the MEP can be realized.

To that end, it is no exaggeration to say that identification and recruitment is both art and science. Locating children who move frequently, whose families often work long days in the fields, and who may be reluctant to discuss their children's education with strangers is not an easy feat. Recruiters must do everything from understanding crop patterns in a changing climate to forming relationships with such disparate individuals as school staff, family caregivers, supervisors, and growers. Recruitment is a constant dance of maintaining consistent recruitment practices while navigating changing conditions. These shifting conditions include everything from severe weather events to climate-driven crop cycle changes and the urban development of previous agricultural areas to political forces that influence families' willingness to speak to government officials—never mind the changes forced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because of these wide-ranging factors, and others we may not yet understand, the migratory child count in California began to decline more than a decade ago and

State Profile

The CDE provides subgrants to 15 regional MEP offices and 5 MEP direct-funded districts throughout California. The 15 regional MEP offices serve more than 500 school districts. Forty-seven of California's 58 counties are served by an MEP office.

2021–22 student count: California has the largest population of migratory children and youths in the nation at 74,770.

Major agricultural products: California is the leading producer of vegetables, fruits, and nuts in the nation. Some of the major crops in the state include almonds, grapes, berries and strawberries, walnuts, lettuce, and tomatoes.

Recruitment: Recruitment in California is managed locally at the subgrantee level. Each subgrantee supports recruiters and has a unique recruitment structure. Some subgrantees employ all the recruiters in their regions or districts. In other subgrantees, the regional offices employ some recruiters while local districts employ others. Most subgrantees conduct recruitment through schools and employers (such as growers) and out in their communities.

declined each year from 2008–09 to 2020–21, from a height of 202,298 children to a low of 70,702 children in 2020–21. For the first time since 2008–09, California counts increased, going up by 4,068 to 74,770 children in 2021–22.

Launching the Professional Learning Network Focused on Identification and Recruitment

To help address this decline in migratory child counts over the past decade¹ and to generate leading practices in identification and recruitment, the California MEO, spearheaded by CDE Consultant Jamie Contreras, began hosting in phases a professional learning network (PLN) in partnership with its service provider, WestEd, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service organization.

This paper describes how the PLN was designed and how it operates.

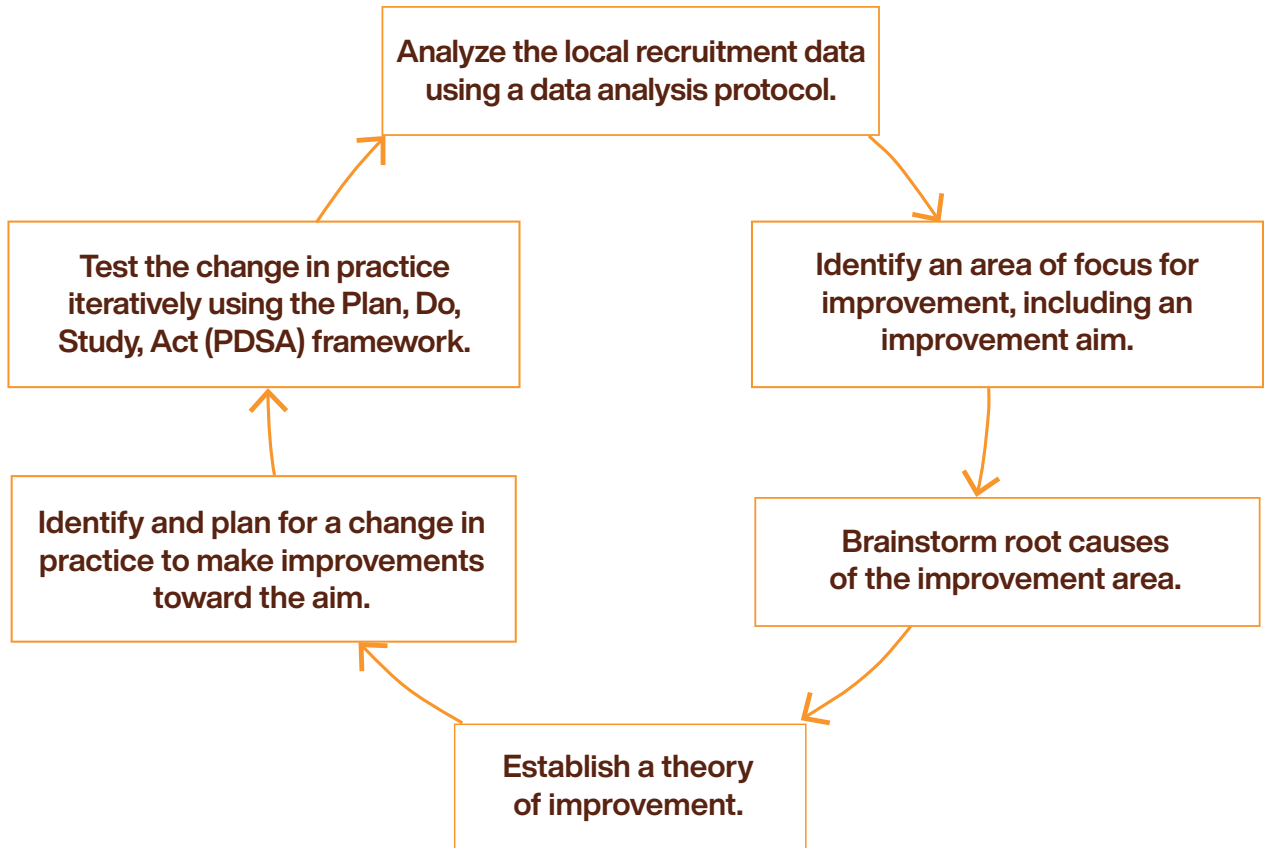
Overview of the Professional Learning Network

The CDE MEO and WestEd launched the first phase of the PLN in 2019. The continuous improvement approach used in the PLN is grounded in improvement science, primarily using the methodology described in *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better* (Bryk et al. 2015). In developing the PLN approach and session content, the PLN designer (WestEd senior program associate Liz Jameyson) consulted and was influenced by key thinkers and leaders in continuous improvement, organizational development, and leadership, including Michael Fullan (Fullan and Quinn 2015), Margaret Wheatley (Wheatley 2017), and Peter Senge and Mette Boel's *Compassionate Systems* series out of the [Center for Systems Awareness](#).

A key principle of the PLN is centering the experiences and voices of those closest to the issues and opportunities. WestEd and the CDE MEO believe in the power of distributed leadership and the capability of people operating in complex systems to solve their own problems. In the PLN, MEP professionals are provided protected time and a structure to examine their systems and make progress on solving problems using approaches that work in their own unique contexts. The content of the PLN was framed around the steps in the continuous improvement process depicted in figure 1 below, while the context was collaboratively created to center the participants.

¹ The PLNs are only one in a web of efforts to increase student counts. These efforts include, among others, coordinating more deliberately with other states on child moves; offering targeted training on using new avenues of recruitment, such as the subsequent qualifying move (see PLN brief [Layered Training to Harness the Power of the Subsequent Qualifying Move](#)); expanding recruitment into previously unexplored geographical areas or qualifying activities; and ensuring there are minimal COEs left unprocessed at data close (see brief *Maximizing Child Counts: A Collaborative Approach*, forthcoming).

Figure 1. The Continuous Improvement Process Occurs in an Iterative Cycle



The PLN was organized into cohorts of teams from approximately five subgrantees. In Year 1, participants meet in their cohorts five times. During each session, subgrantee teams learn about the principles and tools of the continuous improvement approach, then have an opportunity to apply them to their own areas of focus. Each participating subgrantee begins by identifying an area of focus related to identification and recruitment, based on their local data and context. The subgrantees then engage in a disciplined continuous improvement process related to their areas of focus. Following each session, subgrantee teams meet with a WestEd coach to make progress on their areas of focus. In Year 2,

Intended Outcomes of the PLN

Participants and facilitators come together in a spirit of curiosity and inquiry to

- recruit more eligible new students and more eligible students overall into the MEP;
- improve COE quality;
- increase recruitment for subsequent qualifying moves;
- create stronger relationships across subgrantees; and
- deepen understanding of using continuous improvement mindsets, tools, and practices.

participants meet in their cohorts four times and participate in four coaching sessions. The focus of Year 2 is revisiting the principles and tools of the continuous improvement process introduced in Year 1, networking with cohort subgrantees, and making progress on a continued or new area of focus related to identification and recruitment.

Using a Disciplined Improvement Process in the Professional Learning Network

Establishing Working Agreements

In the first session of each year in the PLN, the cohort collectively establishes working agreements. Most recently, WestEd staff member Jocelyne Cardona, who has a degree in psychology and expertise in anti-racist group facilitation, has led the cohorts in establishing working agreements. The purpose of these agreements is to ensure that the participants and facilitators are intentionally working with one another in ways that allow full participation for all. A sample set of working agreements from one of the 2022–23 cohorts is included in the text box below.

Sample Working Agreement

How do we agree to work together?

For the benefit of the group and for you to fully participate,

- be transparent and compassionate with yourself and others;
- use this time to collaborate and share ideas;
- step up, step back;
- practice curiosity (have an open mind, lead into discomfort, learn something new about your team); and
- have fun.

In each session after the first, participants and facilitators revisit the working agreements and typically choose one or more to focus on for that session.

Analyzing Local Recruitment Data Using a Protocol

Immediately after establishing working agreements, each team receives a data packet that shows several figures depicting their I&R data. Analyzing these data packets (which are conceptualized and developed by WestEd staff member Lisa Severino with support from WestEd I&R experts Elvira Raya and Gaby Garibay and WestEd research

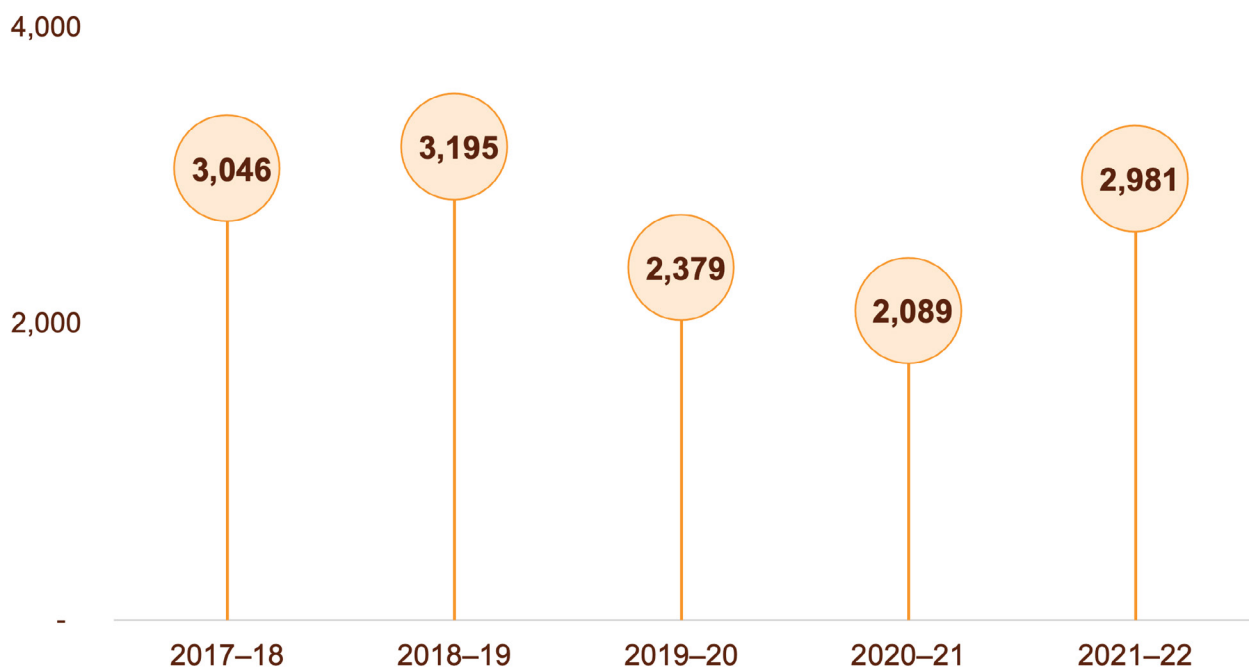
assistant Tuyet Tran) is a critical first step in establishing buy-in from subgrantee participants. The data packets show data visualizations that help subgrantee staff members understand particulars about their I&R component that they may not have examined before.

The data packet consists of five figures that each provide details on a specific aspect of I&R.

Number of qualified migratory children. The first figure included in the data packet shows the number of migratory children in the subgrantee team’s region who are qualified in each performance period for the past several years. This figure allows subgrantee staff members to examine the trend of their overall recruitment numbers.

Figure 2 below shows a sample of the first figure included in the data packet. It is a lollipop chart that shows a slight increase in recruitment in the subgrantee team’s region between 2017–18 and 2018–19 followed by a decline for the next two years before another increase in 2021–22. Not coincidentally, the years of enrollment decline are the two years the state was most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2. Number of Migratory Children Qualified, 2017–18 Through 2021–22



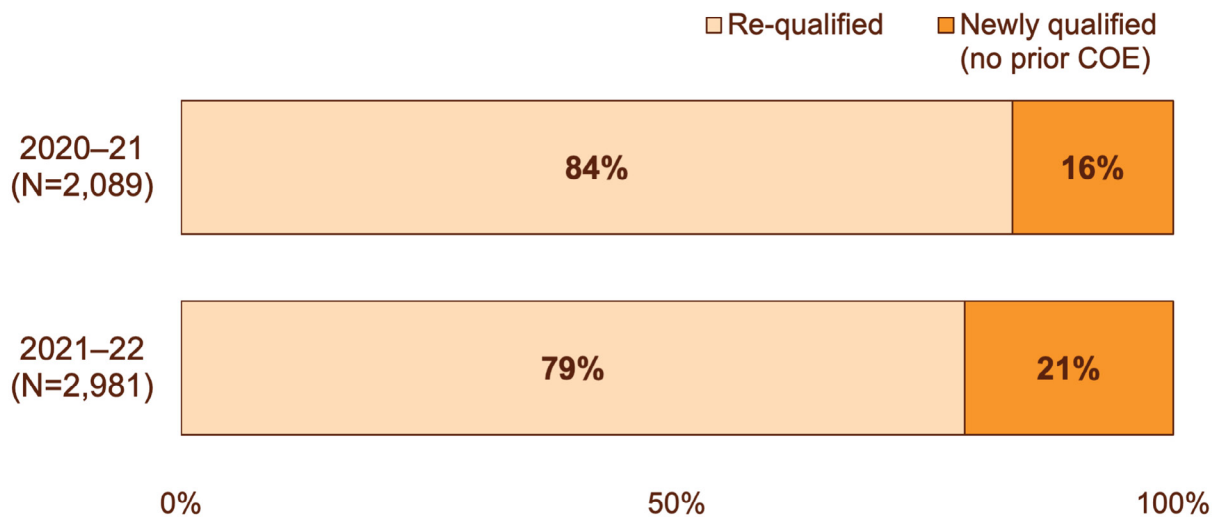
Note: The figure shown above, and all figures modeled after the data packet included in this brief, use fictitious data. The data, however, is realistic in the sense that it is based on actual subgrantee data.

Percentage of newly qualified children. The second figure included in the data packet shows the percentage of children qualified by the subgrantee in a given year who were newly qualified, meaning they have never been enrolled in the MEP before. This data set is important because identifying and recruiting new children into the program is critical to the ongoing success of the MEP. Knowing what percentage of newly qualified children a subgrantee is recruiting over time can also help staff members understand how successful any new avenues of recruitment are.

Figure 3 below shows a sample of the second figure included in the subgrantee team’s data packet. It is a bar chart with two categories: re-qualified children and newly qualified children. In 2020–21, 16 percent of students in the team’s region were newly qualified, while in 2021–22, 21 percent of children were newly qualified, an increase of 5 percent.

While the percentage is important, the overall number of new children recruited is also important. In this case, the overall number (N) of children increased, so the total number of new children qualified is even greater than is suggested by the percentage increase. To illustrate, in 2020–21, 16 percent of the total (2,089 children) is 334 newly qualified children; in 2021–22, 21 percent of the total (2,981 children) is 626 children. This means 292 more newly qualified children were recruited in 2021–22, which is an increase of 87 percent from the previous year. The figures included in the data packet include sufficient information for subgrantees to engage in this type of analysis, helping them gain even greater insight into their I&R outcomes than a cursory view of the figures would suggest.

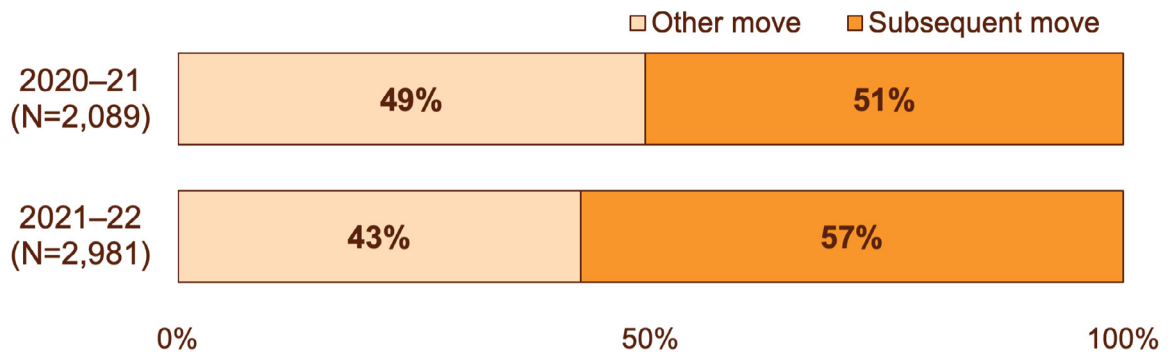
Figure 3. Among All Students Qualified During the 2021–22 Performance Period, 21 Percent Were Newly Qualified for the Program, Five Percentage Points Higher Than the 2020–21 Performance Period



Number of children qualified on a subsequent qualifying move. The third figure included in the data packet shows the number of children qualified on a subsequent qualifying move, or SQM² (see the text box, Understanding the Subsequent Qualifying Move, for an explanation of the SQM). Figure 4, a sample of the third figure included in the data packet, shows a bar chart with two categories: *subsequent move* and *other move*. The term *other move* refers to any qualifying move that is not an SQM.

In figure 4 below, 51 percent of recruitments in 2020–21 were from SQMs; in 2021–22, that percentage increased to 57 percent. Here it is also helpful to look at the subgrantee team’s overall recruitment numbers year to year to gain a more complete understanding of the increase. If we calculate the number of SQM recruitments each year, we see that 1,065 children (51 percent of 2,089) were qualified in 2020–21 using SQMs, while 1,699 children (57 percent of 2,981) were qualified using SQMs in 2021–22—a numerical increase of 634 and a percentage increase of approximately 60 percent.

Figure 4. During the 2021–22 Performance Period, 57 Percent of Children Qualified on a Subsequent Move, 6 Percentage Points Higher Than the 2020–21 Performance Period



Length of time for recruitment. The fourth figure included in the data packet shows the length of time it takes to recruit children from the time they arrive in the subgrantee team’s area (residency date) to the recruitment date. For example, if a child arrived in Fresno on June 16 and was recruited into the program on June 18 of the same year, there was a gap of only two days between residency and recruitment dates. If the child was not identified and recruited until December 15 of the same year, the gap would be almost six months. The gap between residency and recruitment is important to minimize because a child’s eligibility starts on their qualifying arrival date (QAD), not on the day of recruitment, and extends for 36 months. Services for the child, however, cannot start until the child has been identified and recruited. As such, any gap between the child’s QAD and recruitment date is equivalent to the time of missed opportunity to provide the child services.

2 The term *subsequent qualifying move* is unique to California. Many other states call this an *additional move*.

Understanding the Subsequent Qualifying Move

This type of qualifying move was introduced as an avenue for recruitment in March of 2017 in [non-regulatory guidance](#) published by the Office of Migrant Education. This guidance, focused on child eligibility, allowed for a migratory worker to be established and for the child and worker to then make an SQM within 36 months. This move must be from one residence to another and one school district to another for economic necessity. Importantly, the SQM does not require the worker to engage in a qualifying activity after making the move.

For example, a mother and her two children move from Mexico to Salinas, California, in April of 2022 for the mother to find work picking strawberries. She picks strawberries for two months before the season is over. The mother needs to move to find work, so she and her children move to Oakland, California, where she finds work in a restaurant. Since her work picking strawberries qualified her as a migratory worker and her move to Oakland was for economic necessity, her children are eligible for the MEP with a QAD of the date the family moved to Oakland. This is important because children are eligible to receive services for 36 months after their QAD (assuming they have not turned 22 or received a high school diploma or the equivalent in the United States), so the SQM allows migratory children to receive services for a longer period. As such, it is an important avenue of recruitment for subgrantees to explore.

It is worth noting that the percentages of SQMs vary substantially by subgrantee and will be higher in areas that are more urban than others.

This figure consists of an (A) version and a (B) version. The (A) version shows the amount of time between the residency date and recruitment date for newly qualified children (that is, those with no previous COE). The (B) version shows the amount of time between residency date and recruitment date for children who are re-qualified but experienced an end-of-enrollment period (that is, they were no longer eligible to receive MEP services for a period of time) before their most recent recruitment.

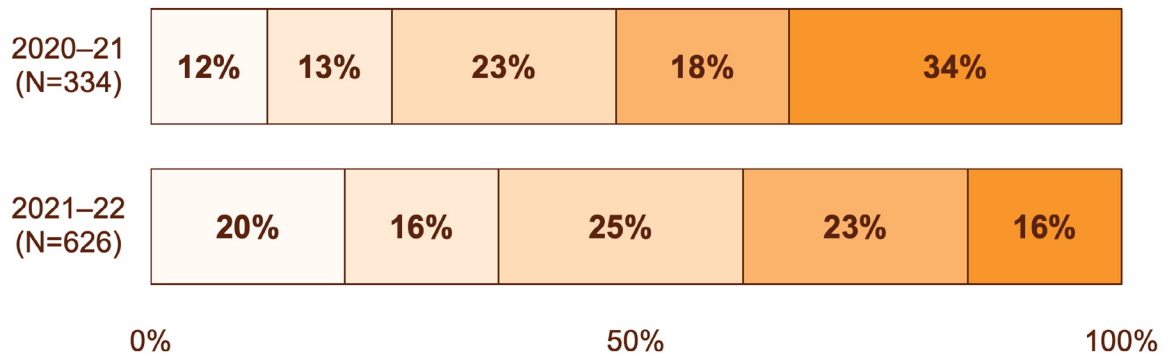
Figures 5A and 5B below are samples of the fourth figure included in the data packet. Each figure shows a bar chart with five categories: less than 30 days between residency and recruitment; 1 to 2 months between residency and recruitment; 2 to 6 months between residency and recruitment; 6 months to 1 year between residency and recruitment; and more than 1 year between residency and recruitment. Figure 5A shows the data for newly qualified children and figure 5B shows the data for re-qualified children with an enrollment gap. Both versions show their respective data for 2020–21 and 2021–22. In 5A, the combined total of the “Less than 30 days” and “1 to 2 months”

segments were larger from one year to the next, while the combined total of the “6 months to 1 year” and “More than 1 year” segments were smaller, signaling a positive movement. In 5B, on the other hand, the combined total of the “Less than 30 days” and “1 to 2 months” segments were smaller in the second year, while the combined total of the “6 months to 1 year” and “More than 1 year” segments were larger.

Figures 5A and 5B. Amount of Time Between Residency Date and Recruitment Date for (A) Newly Qualified Children and (B) Re-Qualified Children Whose Prior QAD Was More Than 3 Years Before the Most Recent QAD

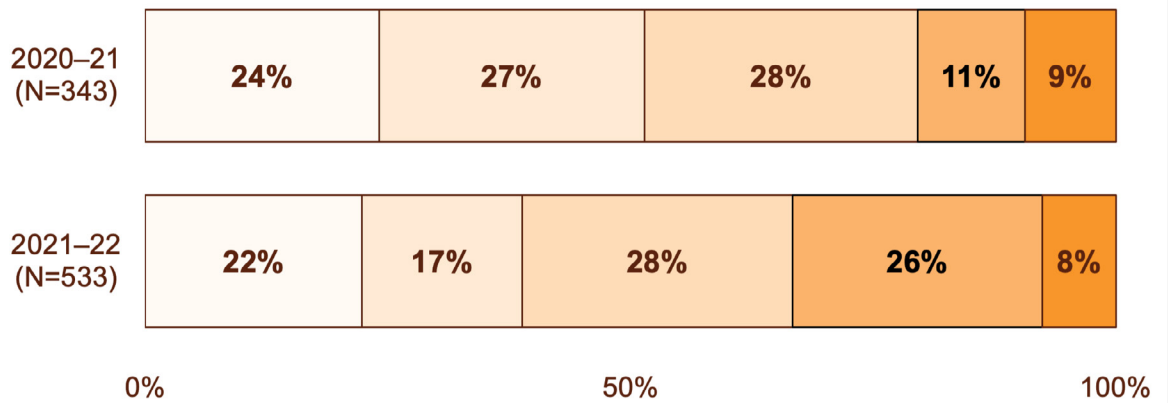
5A. Newly Qualified Children

□ Less than 30 days □ 1 to 2 months □ 2 to 6 months □ 6 months to 1 year □ More than 1 year



5B. Re-Qualified Children

□ Less than 30 days □ 1 to 2 months □ 2 to 6 months □ 6 months to 1 year □ More than 1 year

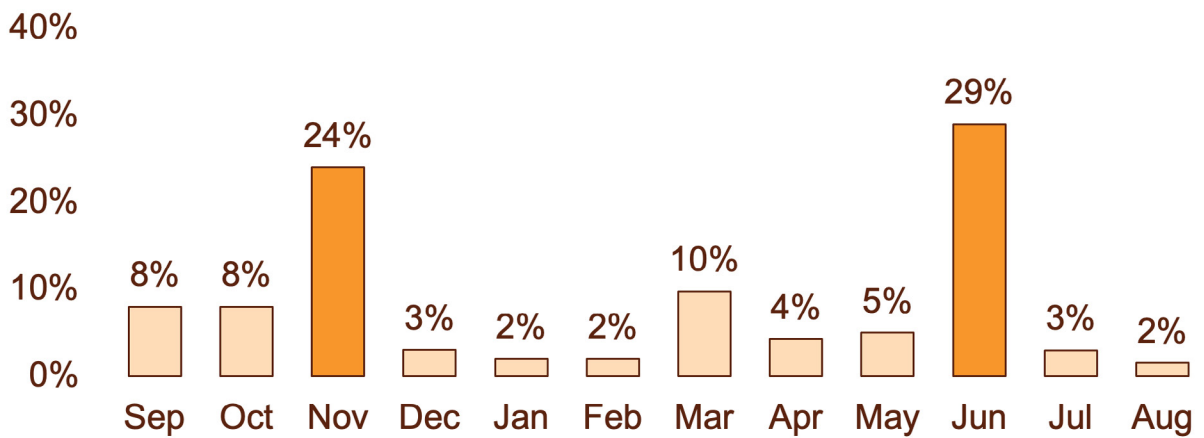


Frequency of worker moves. The final figure included in the subgrantee teams’ data packets show the frequency of worker moves by month. This figure helps subgrantee staff members examine their recruitment practices as they compare to upticks of worker moves. For example, if most worker moves are occurring in September but the largest recruitment pushes are in July and August, the subgrantee may wish to consider adjusting the timing of recruitment pushes.

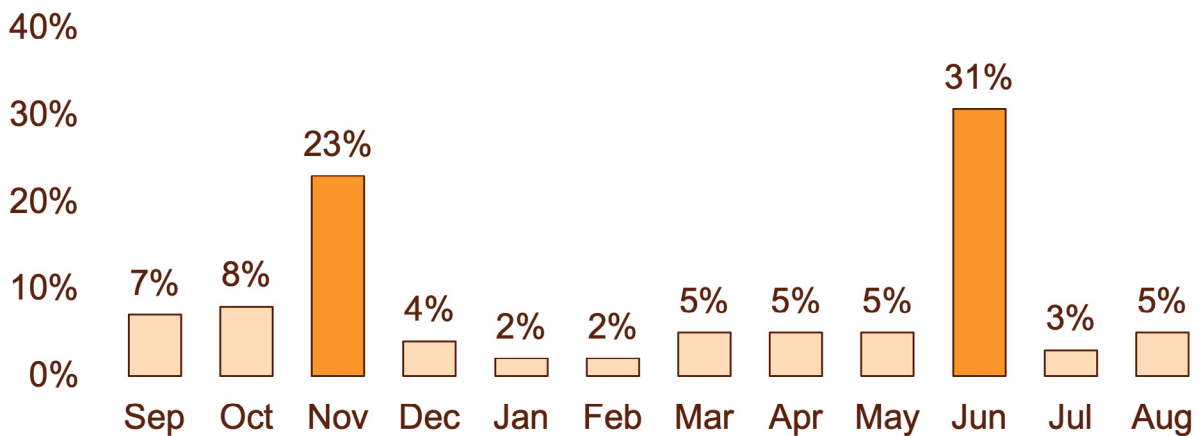
Figures 6A and 6B below are samples of the final figure included in subgrantee teams’ data packets. This figure includes an (A) version and a (B) version, with (A) showing data for 2020–21 and (B) showing data for 2021–22. The figures each include a bar graph with a percentage of worker moves by month. The months with the highest percentage of moves have a darker orange bar, while all other months have a lighter orange bar.

Figures 6A and B. Worker Move Months for the Two Most Recent Performance Periods. Worker Moves During the 2020–21 Performance Period (Figure 6A) Were Most Likely to Have Taken Place During the Month of June, Followed by November, Which Is Similar to the Concentration in Worker Moves in the 2021–22 Performance Period (Figure 6B)

6A. 2020–21 (N=328)



6B. 2021–22 (N=482)



Each team examines the figures in their data packet, using a protocol to guide their thinking. The protocol includes four questions:

- What parts of this data catch your attention? Just the facts.
- What does the data tell us? What does the data NOT tell us?
- What strengths are there to celebrate?
- What are the problems of practice suggested by the data?

From this analysis, the teams move to identify a problem of practice or area of opportunity for improvement. Problems of practice have several characteristics, including that they identify a gap between vision and reality, are feasible and specific, and are based on data.

Understanding the Problem

Before jumping into implementing a solution to the problem of practice, each team follows a process to understand more about what is causing the problem, considering multiple perspectives. The process consists of four steps:

- 1. Brainstorm causes:** The team brainstorms a list of causes, typically using an online collaboration platform.
- 2. Categorize causes:** The team then begins to categorize the causes, naming the categories.
- 3. Document causes:** The team uses a fishbone diagram organizer to document the causes of the problem. Moving the categorized causes into a graphic organizer allows the team to display their thinking in a format that clearly shows a cause–effect relationship.
- 4. Discover root causes:** The team uses a “5 Whys” protocol to further investigate root causes of one or more of the identified causes of the problem.

While this work of understanding the problem of practice begins in a PLN session, participants continue the work at their site in the days and weeks following the session. The postsession work is critical to the success of the PLN process because it allows the subgrantee PLN team to engage more local I&R staff in the process of understanding the problem. A key principle of the methodology used in the PLN is that because each person in a system generally sees a problem only from their individual perspective, it is critical to draw on additional perspectives. Regardless of how insightful, experienced, or well-intentioned an individual may be, a single perspective is insufficient to truly

understand a problem that must be understood from multiple perspectives. The most important perspectives are those closest to the problem. In educational systems at large, this often means the perspectives of students and teachers in classrooms. In I&R, this means the perspectives of recruiters and families. As such, PLN participants must seek feedback and input locally from those as close to or closer to the problem than themselves.

To illustrate how these steps might help a team understand more about the causes of a problem, a sample scenario is included below.

Sample Problem of Practice: Reducing the Time It Takes to Identify and Recruit New Families

Problem statement: About 39 percent of newly qualified students were qualified six months or more after their residency date. We would like to reduce the time it takes to identify and recruit new families into the program.

Brainstorm Causes

- Some schools are not sending enrollment questionnaires quickly enough.
- Some districts are unwilling to provide new enrollee information.
- Families do not want to be interviewed.
- Severe weather challenged recruitment efforts.
- Recruiters do not have time to develop a good rapport with families.
- Families do not believe the program will help their children.
- COVID restrictions limited access to in-person recruitment efforts.
- Staff turnover in the region was high.
- Staff turnover at districts and schools was high.
- Fields are being converted to solar farms.

Categorize Causes

Relationships

- Some districts are unwilling to provide new enrollee information.
- Recruiters do not have time to develop a good rapport with families.
- Staff turnover at districts and schools was high.

Process

- Some schools are not sending enrollment questionnaires quickly enough.
- Staff turnover in the region was high.

Perceived value of the MEP

- Families do not want to be interviewed.
- Families do not believe the program will help their children.

Changing landscape

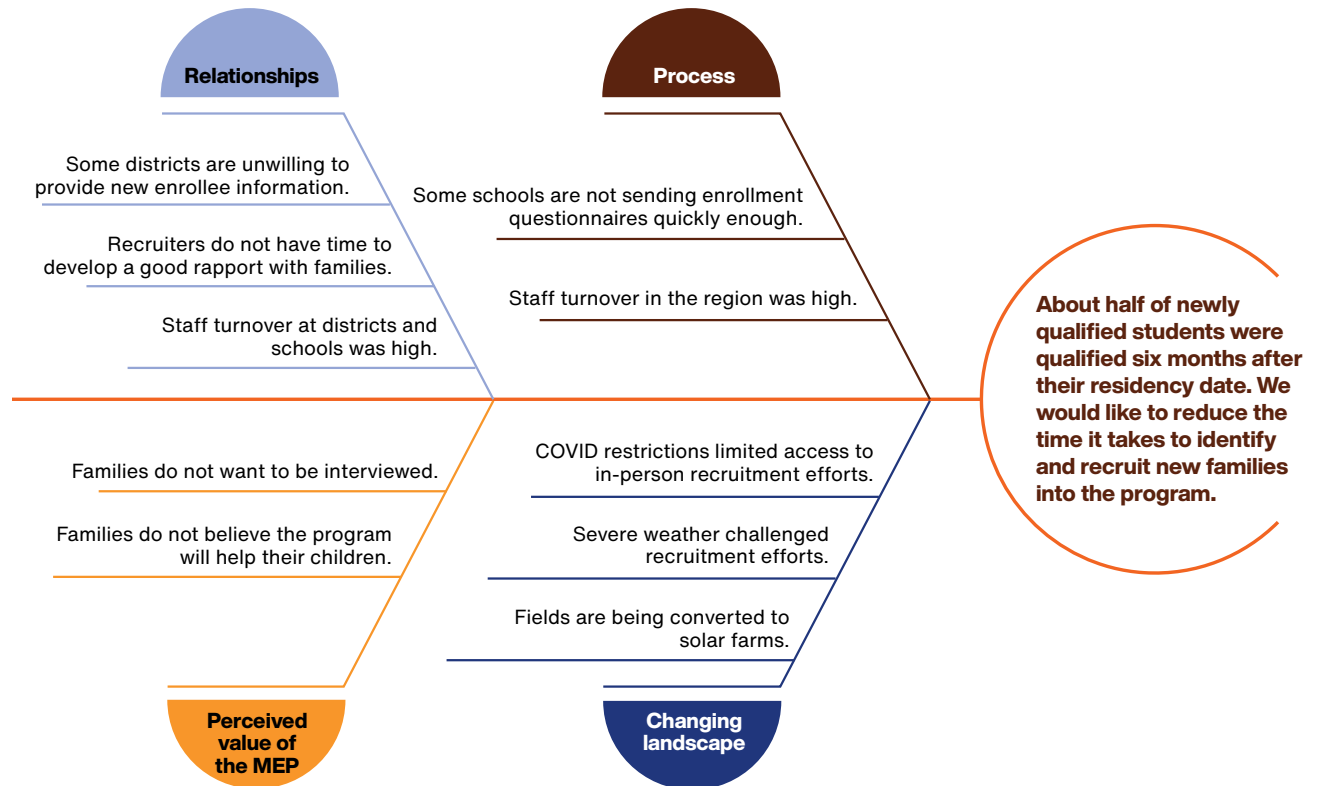
- COVID restrictions limited access to in-person recruitment efforts.
- Severe weather challenged recruitment efforts.
- Fields are being converted to solar farms.

Document Causes (on a Fishbone Diagram)

In figure 7 below, the problem of practice is placed in the “head” of the fish. The large “bones” are the categories. Each smaller “bone” is a brainstormed contributing cause. The information in the figure is transferred directly from the categorized lists above.

Transferring the information to the fishbone diagram is useful because it allows the team to see the categorized causes in a clear cause–effect relationship.

Figure 7. Fishbone Diagram Sample



Discover Root Causes

The team uses a “5 Whys” protocol to further investigate root causes of one or more of the identified causes of the problem.

Cause: Some schools are not sending enrollment questionnaires quickly enough.

Why are some schools not sending enrollment questionnaires quickly enough?

School staff members do not understand how important it is to get enrollment questionnaires in a timely manner.

Why do school staff members not understand how important it is to get enrollment questionnaires in a timely manner?

It is challenging for our team to get a meeting with school staff to explain the importance.

Why is it challenging for our team to get a meeting with school staff?

The school secretaries don’t really know us and so don’t seem to want to help us.

Why do the school secretaries not know us?

We have not met some of them and met others only once or twice.

Why have we not met most of them?

We have not prioritized establishing relationships with school secretaries.

Taking the time to slow down, collect the perspectives of people closest to the problem, document potential causes of the problem, and investigate their root causes is one of the key differentiators between using a disciplined continuous improvement process to solve a problem and taking a more traditional approach. In a more traditional approach, people in positions of power are expected to understand (often intuitively or because of their experience) why a problem is occurring, define solutions (often very quickly), and oversee implementation of a solution. A continuous improvement approach—such as using the 5 Whys protocol as a team—allows for a more inclusive, intentional, and deliberate examination of the problem and its root causes. This allows teams to generate changes in practice that will be more likely to help solve the problem.

Identifying an Improvement Aim

Once a team has established a problem of practice or area of focus, it can move quickly to creating an aim statement. An aim statement is closely related to a problem of practice but has several key differences. First, it is forward looking. While the

problem of practice expresses the situation as it exists, the improvement aim articulates what the team hopes to realize as a result of their improvement efforts. Second, aim statements are time bound, meaning that they are written to be accomplished by a particular date. Like problems of practice, aim statements should be feasible and specific. Subgrantees write aim statements that answer the question *What are we trying to accomplish?* and that clearly specify *How much? For whom?* and *By when?*

Table 1 below shows sample aim statements that subgrantees developed from their problems of practice.

Table 1. Problems of Practice and Aim Statements Are Closely Related

Problems of practice	Aim statement
About half of newly qualified students were qualified six months or more after their residency dates. We would like to reduce the time it takes to identify and recruit new families into the program.	In the 2022–23 school year, we will increase the percentage of students qualified within six months of their residency dates by 10 percent.
Currently, our region’s new families account for about 20 percent of recruitments (an N of 326). We would like to increase the number of new families we recruit.	Our region is aiming to increase by 5 percent the number of new families recruited during the 2022–23 performance period (recruiting at least 342 new children).
Our recruitment numbers have been dropping by 5 to 10 percent each year for the past four years. We would like to reverse that trend.	We will increase the number of migratory students interviewed for recruitment by 10 percent during the 2022–23 performance period.
Currently our region has an average of 86 percent of children identified within one year of the QAD. We would like to have almost all of our children identified and recruited within one year of the QAD.	We will increase the percentage of children identified within one year of the QAD from 86 percent to 94 percent during the 2022–23 performance period.

Establishing a Theory of Improvement

Once the team has crafted an aim statement, the next step is to create a theory of improvement. A theory of improvement communicates why a team thinks a change in practice will help them move toward their aim. The process of creating a theory

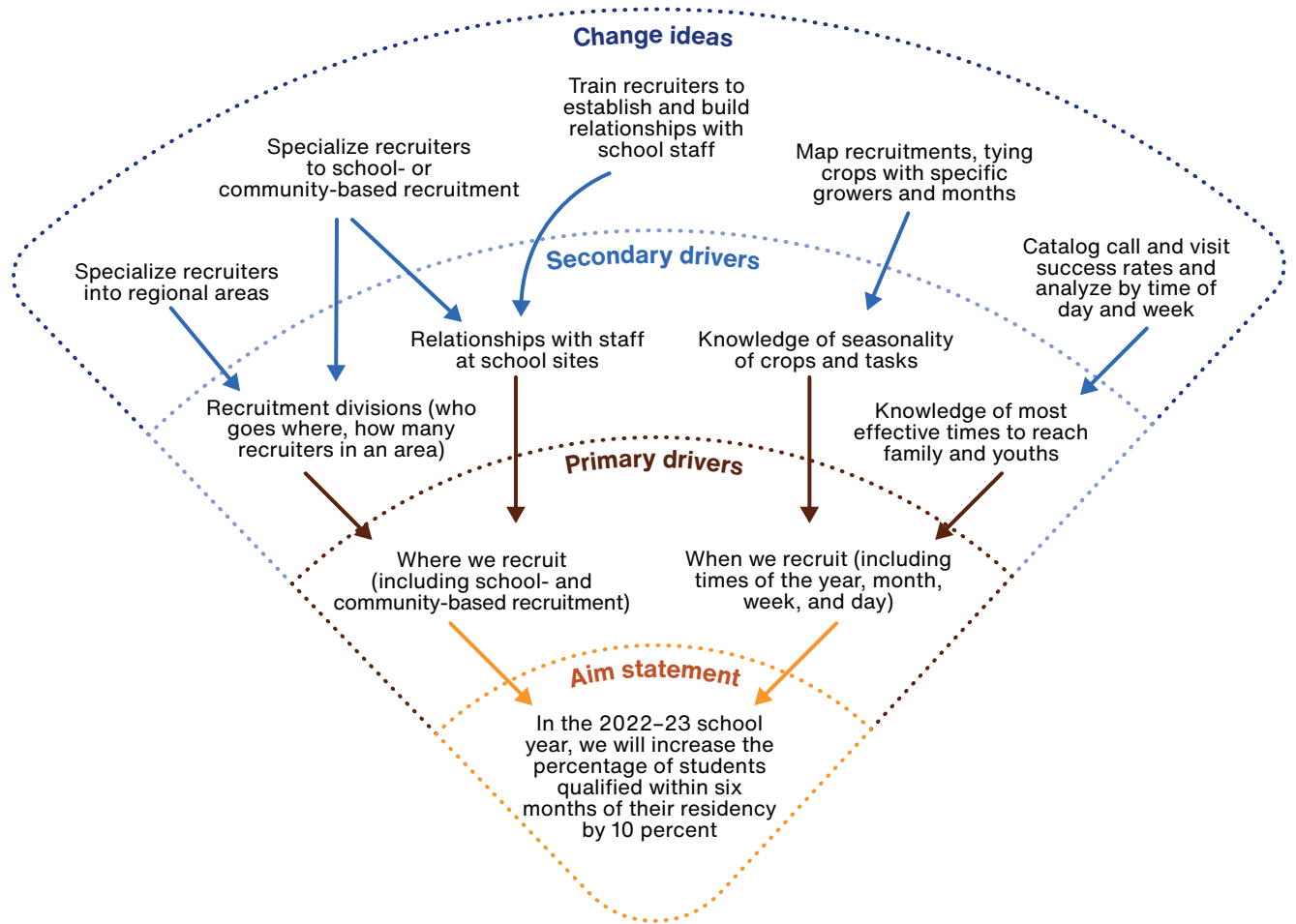
of improvement helps teams move from understanding the reasons for the problem within the system as it currently exists (with the fishbone diagram and root cause analysis) to planning in a deliberate way how they think they can make change within that system. The team does not set aside the fishbone diagram at this point—they use it to remind themselves of what they know about how the existing system is creating the current reality. The team then develops a theory of improvement to help them plan to change that reality to align more with their aim and vision.

The tool used to guide and document each team’s conversation about their theory of improvement is called a driver diagram. This is a planning tool that allows teams to communicate the logic of their change ideas. Like the fishbone diagram, it helps teams slow down and ensure they are acting deliberately rather than jumping too quickly to a solution that seems right but that may not affect the changes they want. The driver diagram has four sections, described below:

- 1. Improvement aim statement:** A statement that communicates what the team is trying to accomplish, communicating *for whom, by how much, and by when*
- 2. Primary drivers:** Main areas of influence that the team believes will “drive” change to meet their improvement aim
- 3. Secondary drivers:** Actions, processes, or components that the team believes will affect one or more primary drivers
- 4. Change ideas:** Changes in process that will affect a secondary driver and, therefore, a primary driver

Figure 8 below shows a portion of a sample driver diagram. The aim statement is in the origin point (or base), the primary drivers are in the first layer, the secondary drivers are in the second layer, and the change ideas are in the outer layer. Arrows point from the outer layer toward the inner layers, communicating which secondary driver a change idea will affect and which primary driver a secondary driver will affect. All primary drivers should affect the aim.

Figure 8. A Driver Diagram Shows the Relationship Between Change Ideas, Secondary Drivers, Primary Drivers, and the Aim



To illustrate how one might explain the logic of improvement within the driver diagram, it is helpful to look at one change idea and how it might influence a secondary driver and how that secondary driver might influence a primary driver. For example: *We believe that training recruiters to establish and build relationships with school staff (change idea) will improve the relationships recruiters have with school staff (secondary driver). Improved relationships with school staff will, we believe, influence both where we recruit and when we recruit (primary driver). When recruiters have stronger relationships with school staff, those staff members are more likely to support recruitment efforts by providing new enrollee lists in a timelier fashion and by welcoming recruiters to recruit at school and community events.*

Identifying and Testing a Change in Practice in a Plan, Do, Study, Act Cycle

Once a team has created a driver diagram, they are ready to select a change idea, test it on a small scale, and collect data to see whether it is an improvement. This planning and testing cycle is a crucial component of improvement work and one of the elements that separates it from more traditional approaches to improvement. In a more traditional approach, a leader or group of leaders will typically identify a change and then roll out that change to all participating staff, hoping for the best. In the continuous improvement model used in the PLN, however, participant teams are encouraged to begin small and test the change in practice before scaling it. This approach helps them ensure the change is working as intended and begin to address implementation issues, or make additional improvements, before taking the change to all participating staff.

The model used in the PLN to implement and test changes is the Plan, Do, Study, Act, or PDSA, cycle. The PDSA cycle allows for short-cycle tests (within a few weeks or even shorter) that allow a team to see how their change in practice is working and make refinements. Each stage in the PDSA cycle is briefly described below.

- **Plan:** The team plans for the change, including planning for logistics (who will do what when, and what tools or training do they need ahead of time?) and planning for data collection using a tool called an *improvement measurement matrix*.
- **Do:** The team implements their change idea and collects data on the initial implementation period.
- **Study:** The team studies the data from the change idea, including observations made by the people implementing the change.
- **Act:** The team determines what to do next. Will they *adopt* the change and scale it (the change was successful and had the intended outcomes)? Or will they *adapt* the change and retest (the change shows promise but is still in need of improvement)? Or will they *abandon* the change and move on to another change idea (the change idea was not successful and did not have the intended outcome)?

Sample PDSA Cycle

To illustrate, below is a description of how a PDSA cycle might play out.

Change Idea

Train recruiters to establish and build new relationships with school staff.

Plan

The PLN team (composed of the I&R coordinator, a recruiter—Ms. Jaramillo—and a data specialist) decides that two recruiters, Ms. Jaramillo and her colleague Mr. Mendez, should test this change idea. While Mr. Mendez is not a core member of the PLN, he has contributed to the team’s work throughout by offering feedback and insights on the team’s fishbone diagram and driver diagram. To help the PLN team plan more thoughtfully what they would like to know about whether the change idea is helping them establish and build new relationships with school staff, Ms. Jaramillo and Mr. Mendez complete an improvement measurement matrix. This tool (adapted for the PLN by WestEd staff member Lisa Severino) allows teams to think through measures for their change ideas, which also helps clarify what tools or training those implementing the change will need to be successful. The team decides to target school secretaries as the school staff with whom they will develop stronger relationships.

The improvement measurement matrix has the following five columns:

- **Improvement questions:** Questions that help us understand what we need to know to understand if our change is an improvement
- **Data sources:** The sources from which we will gather the data
- **Data collection method:** The method or tool used to collect the data
- **Indicators:** The measures that monitor progress and whether things are changing the way we anticipated (They are specific, observable and measurable. These define the evidence we collect.)
- **Timeline:** The timeline for collecting the needed data

Table 2 below shows a sample improvement measurement matrix with one row completed. Typically, improvement measurement matrices will include more than one improvement question.

Table 2. The Improvement Measurement Matrix Helps Teams Plan for Data Collection When Implementing Their Change Ideas

Improvement questions	Data sources	Data collection method	Indicators	Timeline
Do school secretaries become more helpful to our team after we begin to establish relationships with them?	Recruiters	Outreach log	How many secretaries agree to schedule an appointment with a key school staff member (for example, a data specialist or administrator) How many secretaries reach out to the recruiter to inform them of a school or community event where they might recruit	Five weeks

After completing the improvement measurement matrix, the team decides which school secretaries to focus on first and how the two recruiters will begin to establish relationships with school secretaries. The team decides to establish relationships with school secretaries for the schools they have not yet been successful establishing a recruiting relationship with. That is, the recruiters believe there are migratory children at the school, but they have never been successful at getting a meeting with an administrator or being invited to recruit at the campus. The team also decides that each recruiter will target five schools and will use a systematic method to attempt to establish relationships with the secretaries at these schools.

They will first stop by the school (not call) during a less busy time of day (while school is in session either before or after lunch) and introduce themselves and begin to establish rapport, bringing literature about the MEP but not asking for anything. Next, they will stop by the school again a week later and at that time explain more about the benefits of the MEP to students and all the programs offered to families. During this second visit, the recruiter will leave their contact information and request that the school secretary contact them if they know of any school or community events at which the recruiter might be able to meet families. Finally, the recruiter will stop by a week or two later and request to schedule an appointment with an administrator to tell

them more about the MEP. During that time, each recruiter will keep an outreach log in which they will make notes about each interaction and record whether each secretary agrees to schedule the meeting on the final visit and/or reaches out to invite the recruiter to a school or community event.

Do

Over the next five weeks, each recruiter implements the change, keeping notes in the outreach log.

Study

At the end of the five weeks, the PLN team, now including Mr. Mendez, comes together to discuss how well the change worked. They share their outreach logs and the outcomes of their efforts. Of Ms. Jaramillo's five schools, four secretaries agreed to schedule her for an appointment with a school administrator, and one reached out to invite her to a Saturday community potluck at the school where families would be coming together to socialize. Of Mr. Mendez's five schools, three secretaries agreed to schedule him for an appointment with a school administrator, while none reached out to invite him to an event. The team examined the outreach logs to look for any details or patterns in the notes that would help explain why some school secretaries seemed more open than others. One potential pattern they detected in two of three of the cases where the secretary declined to make the appointment during the final visit is that the secretary seemed overwhelmed during the first visit either because the office was very busy or because something out of the ordinary was happening at the school.

Act

Overall, the team feels that the change was a success. They decide to invite two more recruiters to begin to establish relationships with another five schools each, while Ms. Jaramillo and Mr. Mendez continue to visit their five schools and each take on three more. One change they make to their change idea for this next round of testing is to leave and come back another time if the secretary seems busy or overwhelmed during their first meeting. Their theory is that the first meeting is critical to establishing trust and rapport, and without that, the secretary is less likely to be inclined to help. The team also decides to coplan a structure for the upcoming meetings with principals and test how that works, with the intended outcome of receiving new enrollee lists from each school and being invited to events to recruit.

Using the PDSA cycle allows teams to iterate on their change ideas and keep a curious, investigative mindset as they progress toward their aims.

Next Steps

Each California subgrantee progresses through two years of the PLN. In the first year, they learn the principles and tools of continuous improvement to make progress on a problem of practice. In the second year, they continue working on their problem of practice or they establish a new one, depending on individual subgrantee context.

After these two years, we hope that subgrantees continue their improvement work and incorporate not only the tools and processes introduced during the PLN but also a mindset of curiosity and innovation as they continue the critical work of identifying and recruiting as many eligible children as possible into the MEP.

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