

# PLN

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PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORK PROFILES

## Using Data to Revise a Change in Practice

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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 identification and recruitment 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 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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# PLN PROFILES



This profile describes work accomplished by the San Diego County Office of Education Migrant Program, a Migrant Education Program (MEP) subgrantee in California. The San Diego County MEP, known as Region 9, took part in a professional learning network (PLN) in which participants used a continuous improvement process to make progress on an identified area of focus. Region 9 focused on identifying families and youths closer to their date of arrival in the region.

## San Diego County Office of Education Migrant Education Program (Region 9)

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### Counties served:

- San Diego County
- Orange County

**Districts served:** 64 school districts

**2021–22 student count:** 3,924 children

**Major agricultural products:** The top three products are ornamental trees, indoor flowers, and strawberries. Other products include bell peppers, green beans, avocados, oranges, tomatoes, grapes, mushrooms, various lettuces, cantaloupe, onions, blueberries, beehives, lemons, eggs, and fish.

**Recruitment:** The region employs nine recruiters. These nine recruiters are responsible for all community-, employer-, and school-based recruitment within the region.



To be a recruiter in the MEP is to know change. And to be a successful recruiter is to embody flexibility, creativity, ingenuity, and determination. It is the job of the recruiter to identify a population that is, by definition, difficult to locate. On top of the inherent challenge of locating a migratory population, recruiters face untold variables. For instance, in winter 2023, some parts of California were inundated with unprecedented amounts of rain and snow. Many communities and agricultural areas were flooded. These storms came after years of drought, characterized by hot, dry conditions, and brutal wildfire seasons. Severe weather events have greatly affected crops throughout the state. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Climate Hub page, “Growing Seasons in a Changing Climate,” notes the following:

*The effects on seasons of a changing climate are already being seen across the country and vary region to region: temperatures have risen across seasons, growing seasons have become longer, precipitation patterns have changed, and extreme precipitation events have increased in frequency and severity. Because of the sensitivity of agriculture to weather and climate conditions, these impacts can have substantial direct and indirect effects [on] production and profitability.*

These “substantial direct and indirect effects [on] production and profitability” are not just theoretical for migratory families—they affect what jobs are available when and where and, therefore, migratory patterns. These uncertainties, including fluctuating weather patterns that affect crops and changing economic patterns and priorities that lead to the urban development of agricultural land, complicate the job of the recruiter.

Within this changing physical and economic context, the population of children identified for the MEP has been dwindling for more than a decade and, across the state of California, is less than half of what it was 15 years ago.

One important goal of I&R staff is to recruit as many eligible children as possible. To meet this goal, recruiters must be as effective as possible, even though they often have reduced recruitment staff because of declining enrollment, staff attrition, or a combination of both. Within this challenging landscape, the improvement team and recruiters in Region 9 approached this goal with a curious mindset and a tenacious spirit.

### **Establishing the Focus of the Work**

The Region 9 improvement team began their improvement project in the fall of 2019.<sup>1</sup> They began by analyzing local recruitment data for the previous program year.

The team used a data-analysis protocol focused on 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?

During their analysis of the data, the team began to examine how soon they were recruiting children after they made qualifying moves. The gap between the date of the move—known as the residency date—and the qualifying arrival date (QAD) is important because it signifies lost opportunity for children to receive services. To illustrate, if a child made a qualifying move to El Cajon, California, on January 10, 2022, and was identified and recruited on January 20, 2022, that child and their family became eligible for all the programs and services the MEP offers only 10 days after arriving. Conversely, if that child were identified and recruited on January 20, 2023, the child and their family missed out on an entire year of services and the region missed out on

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<sup>1</sup> As a result of significant staff changes in the region, Region 9 participated in the PLN for three years rather than the usual two.

funding for that child. Importantly, a child recruited into the MEP is typically eligible for 36 months from the *residency date* (unless that child turns 22 or graduates from high school or the equivalent in the United States before the 36 months is over). So, an eligible child and their family miss out completely on MEP services for the entire length of time they are in the area and have not yet been identified and recruited.

From their data analysis, the Region 9 team learned that approximately 20 percent of their newly qualified children (those with no prior certificate of eligibility [COE]) were recruited within two months of moving to the area, while 28 percent were recruited more than one year after moving to the area. For those children who had been in the MEP before but whose enrollment had lapsed, the numbers were better: 33 percent were qualified within two months of moving to the area, and only 8 percent were recruited after one year.

Based on their data analysis and their understanding of the importance of identifying and recruiting eligible children as soon as possible after they arrive in the region, the team established an aim of increasing the percentage of children qualified within 60 days of their residency dates.

After establishing this aim, the Region 9 team began analyzing the root causes of the gap between the child's residency date and the QAD.

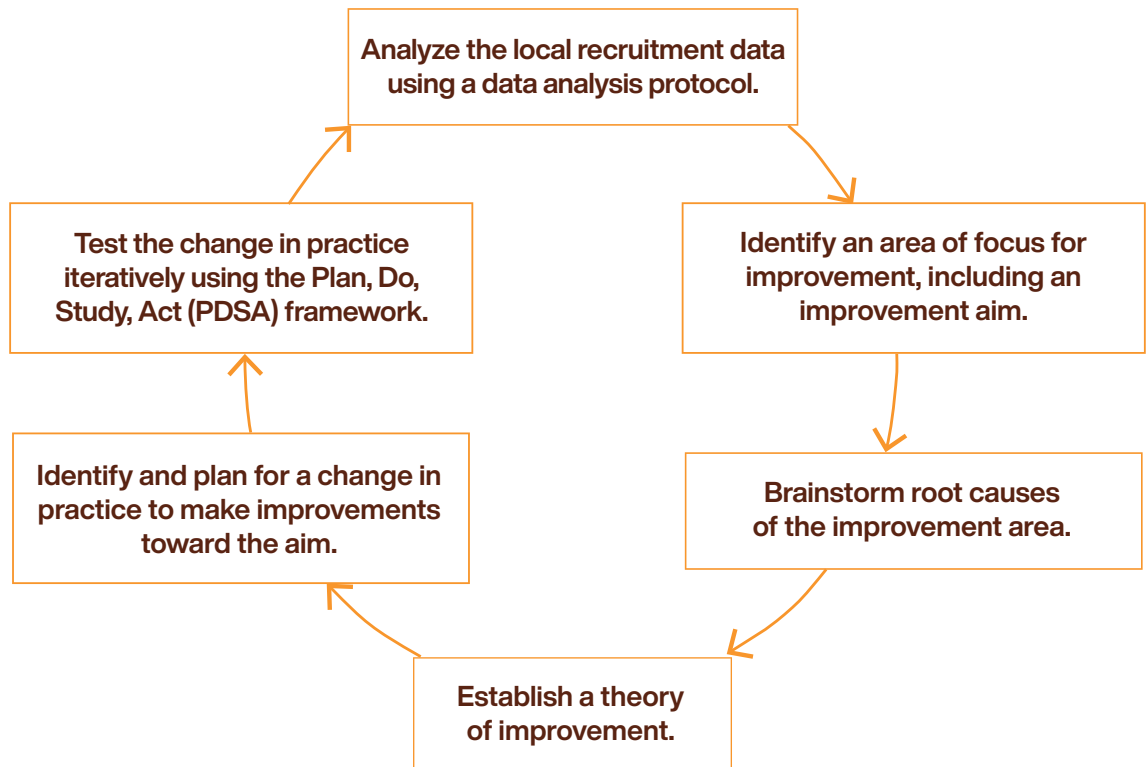
## Using a Continuous Improvement Approach to Inform the Subgrantee Professional Learning Network

The PLN is the result of a partnership between the CDE and its service provider, WestEd, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service organization.

The CDE and WestEd launched the PLN in 2019. Each year, a cohort of teams from five subgrantees comes together several times to collaboratively engage in continuous improvement. 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).

The PLN sessions were framed around the steps in the continuous improvement process depicted in figure 1 below. During each session, subgrantee teams learned about the principles and tools of this continuous improvement approach and then had an opportunity to apply them to their own areas of focus. Each participating subgrantee began by identifying an area of focus related to I&R, based on their local data and context. The subgrantees then engaged in a disciplined continuous improvement process related to their areas of focus. Following each session, subgrantee teams met with a WestEd coach to make progress on their areas of focus.

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



## Identifying and Implementing Changes in Practice

From this root-cause analysis, the Region 9 team determined that one of the main barriers to identifying newly arrived children was related to the region's enrollment-sharing agreements with districts. Because the region does not rely on recruiters employed by school districts, regional recruiters are responsible for conducting school-, employer-, and community-based recruitment. The region, therefore, must rely on school districts to provide them with lists of newly enrolled children. School districts can decide whether to provide these lists to the regional MEP office. When these lists are available, the region can use them to contact newly arrived families and screen them for potential eligibility to receive services. When a district chooses not to share lists of newly enrolled children (which happens for a variety of reasons, including districts being protective of student data), the region does not have the benefit of learning that potentially eligible children have moved to the area and enrolled in school.

### Establishing Data-Sharing Agreements

The first change in practice the region implemented, then, was to establish data-sharing agreements with more school districts. The theory of change for this idea was that if the region established data-sharing agreements with more school districts, those districts would share lists of the newly enrolled children, and the MEP region would be able to use those lists as the basis of contacts for screening for potential eligibility.

The team faced unexpected barriers when trying to implement this change in practice, including resistance from some school districts. Nearly three years after beginning to implement this change in practice, it is still a work in progress. While the team has had some success establishing relationships with school districts, this idea as a driver of change has not yet fully come to fruition. With the helpful support of the regional director and the county office, the team hopes that by the 2023–24 school year, the region will have data-sharing agreements with many of the districts, through which the districts will share new enrollee lists twice a year.

Because the team faced substantial obstacles when implementing this change idea during their first and second years of engagement in the PLN, they regrouped, went back to determining root causes of the gap between residency date and QAD, and determined a different change in practice. The team decided to focus on something they had more direct control of, which was fully utilizing the new enrollee lists they were receiving, even if those lists were not from as many districts as they needed.



### **Implementing “Call Parties”**

The second change in practice the team implemented was evening and weekend call parties, where recruiters and other MEP staff members convened to use the new enrollee lists as the basis for contacting and screening as many potentially eligible children as possible. While engagement in these call parties was high, the recruiters encountered two substantial challenges when implementing them. First, some of the new enrollee lists were unfiltered. That meant that the lists were thousands of names long and did not necessarily identify student demographic information that may indicate potential eligibility (for example, the date of entry into the school is the same as entry into the district, the student was formerly in the MEP, the student is Hispanic). These unfiltered lists were tedious to process and resulted in a very low recruitment success rate of less than one recruitment per thousand calls. The other challenge was that the lists had not been reviewed to ensure duplicate contacts were removed. As a result, a potential family might be contacted multiple times during a single call party, which was confusing and frustrating for both the families and the recruiters. After two call parties, the team realized that this change idea should be paused until the existing lists could be cleaned and filtered and, ideally, until the region was receiving new enrollee lists from more districts.

Implemented changes in practice that do not result in the intended outcome may initially be disappointing, but they are a natural and necessary part of any continuous improvement effort. The lessons that the team learned testing these ideas will be carried forward to inform their implementation of both ideas in the future, likely with more success. When establishing relationships and data-sharing agreements with districts, for example, the team learned that relying on the existing network and relationships that the regional MEP director and county office have with districts to make contact is a more fruitful approach than having recruiters or other MEP staff members approach districts directly. For the call parties, the team learned that they need to use criteria to prioritize contacts on lists and vet the lists' quality before conducting call parties. These learnings will benefit the team in the future by increasing the efficacy of implemented changes the second time around.

### **Shifting Toward Community-Based Recruitment**

After stopping the call parties, the team again regrouped and returned to their list of root causes, identifying a third change in practice. They decided to shift their focus entirely by moving away from change ideas directed toward school-based recruitment. Instead, they turned their focus to the community, with the goal of diversifying and intensifying their employer- and community-based recruitment efforts. At the time of

this third implementation change, restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had begun to be lifted. This allowed the team to work together to get out into the community in every way they could think of, participating in more than 80 events in a single school year. These events included visiting the Mexican and Guatemalan consulates, attending community college outreach events, visiting clinics and vaccination sites, and connecting with local growers. One recruiter has visited the Department of Labor website to identify potential grower contacts and even followed food trucks to find out-of-school youths during their lunch breaks.

The team kept record of their visits by populating a roster for each event, including a description of the event, the contact name and number of the person or group hosting the event, the number of contacts the recruiters made, the number of qualifications resulting from those contacts, and notes on potential families identified at the event. These rosters are housed in a cloud software system that all team members can access. The team plans to use this roster to inform next school year's events.

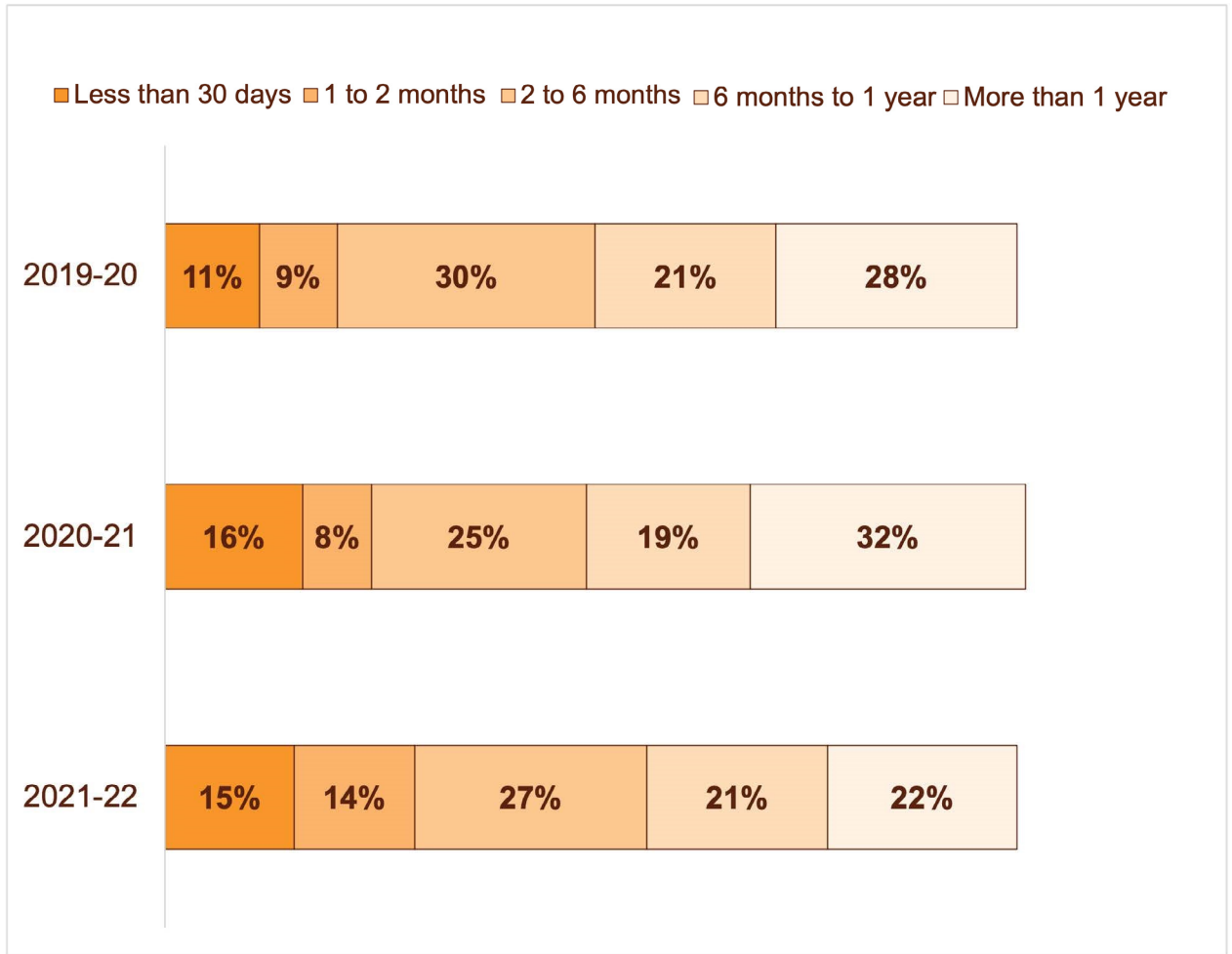
Diversifying and intensifying employer- and community-based recruitment efforts was more successful than the team's previous two change ideas and resulted in large recruitment numbers. For example, during a single visit to one grower, the team recruited 17 self-qualifiers.

The team emphasized that their success was a group effort and a result of their persistence, collaboration, and commitment to the children in the MEP. Critical to the team's success was their resilience in the face of obstacles.

### **Outcomes from the Changes**

Through the team and recruiters' flexibility, ingenuity, and determination, Region 9 increased the percentage of newly recruited children who were enrolled within two months of their residency dates. Figure 2 below is a bar chart that shows the percentage of newly qualified children whose residency dates and QADs were less than 60 days apart. The percentage increased from 20 percent in 2019–20, to 24 percent in 2020–21, to 29 percent in 2021–22.

**Figure 2. Region 9 Increased the Percentage of Newly Recruited Children Qualified Within 60 Days of Their Residency Dates**



In addition to increasing the percentage of children qualified within two months of their residency dates, the region also decreased the percentage of newly qualified children who were enrolled more than one year after their residency dates, from 28 percent in 2019–20 to 22 percent in 2021–22 (after an increase to 32 percent in the intervening year, 2020–21). In the most recent performance period for which complete data is available, the region also increased their overall number of recruitments from 1,261 children in 2020–21 to 1,519 children in 2021–22, an increase of approximately 20 percent.

## Next Steps

Possibly more important than the regional I&R staff's success in closing the gap between children's residency dates and their QADs is the knowledge the Region 9 team gained during their engagement in the PLN. Some of the knowledge they acquired was related directly to their change ideas. For example, they learned about the benefit of leveraging existing relationships to establish data-sharing agreements and the importance of reviewing new enrollee lists before conducting call parties. They also deepened their ability to persevere in the face of obstacles and trust one another to continue to innovate, test their changes, and learn from their efforts in a cycle of continuous improvement. This knowledge and the skills with which Region 9 recruiters and other I&R staff members approach their work will benefit future improvements, whether related to obtaining and utilizing new enrollee lists, increasing the efficacy of employer- and community-based recruitment, or something else altogether.

## References

Bryk, Anthony S., Louis M. Gomez, Alicia Grunow, and Paul G. LeMahieu. 2015. *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better*. Harvard Education Press. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED568744>

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