Promising Practices for Differentiated Assistance

Learning From County Offices of Education Across California

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- Fresno County Superintendent of Schools
- Merced County Office of Education
- Riverside County Office of Education
- Sacramento County Office of Education
- Tulare County Office of Education
- Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools

**School Districts**

- Alameda Unified School District
- Berkeley Unified School District
- Big Oak Flat/Groveland Unified School District
- Buckeye Union School District
- Byron Union School District
- Castro Valley Unified School District
- Center Joint Unified School District
- Clovis Unified School District
- Dinuba Unified School District
- Dos Palos Oro Loma Joint Unified School District
- Fresno Unified School District
- Galt Joint Union Elementary School District
- Gustine Unified School District
- Los Banos Unified School District
- Moreno Valley Unified School District
- Mt. Diablo Unified School District
- Perris Elementary School District
- Rescue Union School District
- San Jacinto Unified School District
- Strathmore Union Elementary School District
- Washington Unified School District

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- Merced County District Attorney’s Office

This report draws directly from the promising practices developed by COEs across California and is intended to be a resource “by the COEs, for the COEs.” The authors thank all the COEs and districts who participated in this research for their openness in sharing their learnings with others across the state. Without these leaders, this report would not have been possible.
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Introduction

The Geographic Leads (Geo Leads) partnered with WestEd to research, summarize, and disseminate information on promising practices for providing differentiated assistance (DA). This partnership is part of the Geo Leads’ continuous efforts to encourage collaboration among county offices of education (COEs) and enhance statewide capacity for DA.

This report summarizes the findings from this research, which involved two components:

1. **Mixed-methods research.** The WestEd team leveraged quantitative analyses to identify nine COEs whose DA-eligible school districts demonstrated notably positive student outcomes (by outperforming statistical expectations, i.e., “beating the odds”). The methodology also considered school districts’ ratings of COE’s DA support; COEs were more likely to be selected if districts consistently rated their support as high quality.\(^1\)

   The research team then interviewed these COEs and a sample of their districts that had experienced notably positive student outcomes. The purpose of these interviews was to learn more about each COE’s promising practices for DA and districts’ related improvement work. This mixed-methods research enabled the research team to conduct an in-depth exploration of DA practices within a selection of COEs in which DA-eligible districts have been experiencing success.

2. **A statewide survey of COEs.** To learn more about promising practices employed by COEs all across California, the research team administered an open-ended survey to all 58 COEs.

This research took place during the 2023/24 school year. The findings from the mixed-methods research are featured in the first half of this report, and the findings from the statewide survey are featured in the second half.

Since 2018, the [Differentiated Assistance Facilitation Guide](#) (published by the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, now the California County Superintendents) has served as a foundational resource for COE DA providers. The Facilitation Guide shares guidance, tools, and resources for providing DA support, and it centers the collaborative use of continuous improvement processes with local education agency (LEA) teams.

Because many COEs have adapted and enhanced their processes for providing DA over time, this research report intends to build upon existing DA resources, such as the Facilitation Guide. It highlights some of the key features and practices that COEs and districts believe are central to effective DA.\(^2\) By spotlighting promising practices taking place across the state, this report aims to serve as a resource for COE leaders as they work to continually improve their DA support, and, ultimately, strengthen the capacity of LEAs to ensure academic progress and social–emotional well-being for all students.

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\(^1\) The research team leveraged California School Dashboard data from 2019, 2022, and 2023; DA eligibility data from the same three years; and LEA ratings of their COE’s DA quality from a survey that WestEd conducted for its 2022 [Evaluation of California’s Differentiated Assistance](#). More details on the quantitative research methodology are summarized in Appendix A.

\(^2\) Because charter school LEAs have only recently begun receiving DA support, the vignettes illustrating DA promising practices within this report take place within school district contexts. However, these promising practices are intended to enhance DA support provided to both school district and charter school LEAs.
Overview of Key Findings

The nine COEs featured in this report represent a diverse range of geographic and enrollment contexts, ranging from rural Tuolumne County, which serves under 6,000 students countywide and borders Yosemite National Park, to Riverside County, which serves over 420,000 students across a diverse span of communities in Southern California. Yet across these COEs, the research team observed more commonalities than difference in their promising practices for DA. The following overview summarizes the most notable differences and the common themes that arose across the featured COEs.

Key Difference: Variation in the Adherence to a Formal Differentiated Assistance Process

The most notable difference that surfaced across the nine COEs was the extent to which they employed a “tight” versus “loose” model of DA—that is, the extent to which they adhered to a structured DA process versus offered more flexible technical assistance. For example, some COEs shared detailed step-by-step continuous improvement processes that they facilitate for all LEAs, with customization as needed. By contrast, some COEs de-emphasized structured continuous improvement processes—particularly if LEAs were already engaging in such work or had done so recently—and focused more on providing instruction-focused professional development and supporting implementation.

The legislative requirements for DA activities are quite broad and high-level, providing COEs with substantial opportunity not only to differentiate DA on an LEA-by-LEA basis, but to adopt a core DA model (e.g., suggested timelines, team structures, key activities, etc.) that varies greatly from county to county. Given that DA-eligible LEAs have demonstrated positive outcomes and rated their COEs’ DA quality highly within both structured and less-structured contexts, it appears that either model can be successful.

However, leaders from interviewed COEs and LEAs consistently noted that COEs—including those with both “tight” and “loose” models—have evolved their DA processes over time to become less prescriptive, more responsive to LEAs’ needs, and more cognizant of LEAs’ other improvement efforts, so that DA support is complementary rather than redundant.
Key Commonalities: Promising Practices for Effective Differentiated Assistance

Across the featured COEs, the promising practices that leaders highlighted as the most impactful fell under the following six themes.

1. **Building a positive relationship with each LEA and becoming a trusted partner.** Although DA guidance has long emphasized the importance of building positive relationships with DA-eligible LEAs, the featured COEs and their LEAs shared concrete strategies and examples of the efforts that COEs have taken to build trusting relationships.

2. **Ensuring that DA is truly a value-add and expands LEAs’ resources.** Through DA, the highlighted COEs offered valuable resources beyond the facilitation of continuous improvement processes. For example, by providing tailored content expertise, professional development requested by LEAs, and/or implementation grants, the COEs helped LEAs recognize DA as a genuine asset.

3. **Connecting DA to the classroom.** Given that practices at the school and classroom level are what directly affect student outcomes, COEs and LEAs emphasized the importance of DA approaches that engage principals and teachers and build their capacity to improve school practices.

4. **Coaching LEAs in the use of continuous improvement tools and processes.** Continuous improvement has always played a central role in DA, but the interviewed COEs and LEAs offered specific examples of how effective facilitation and coaching in continuous improvement tools and processes have enabled LEAs to make transformative system changes.

5. **Supporting effective implementation of improvement strategies.** Beyond facilitating a systems or root cause analysis, the highlighted COEs provided ongoing support to assist LEAs with implementation of selected strategies and progress monitoring.

6. **Promoting system coherence and alignment of initiatives.** Given the variety of initiatives, accountability processes, and other improvement efforts underway within each LEA, the identified COEs took steps to create connections—and, where possible, reduce redundancy—across LEAs’ efforts.

This report offers illustrations of COEs’ promising practices within each of these six key themes. Each theme’s section includes several short vignettes, each of which highlights the work of a specific COE in relation to the theme. In these vignettes, district leaders also share insights about their DA experiences and how DA has influenced their district’s ongoing improvement work.
Theme 1: Building a Positive Relationship With Each LEA and Becoming a Trusted Partner

This section features promising practices that COEs have leveraged to build trusting partnerships with their DA-eligible LEAs.

Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools (TCSOS)

Featured strategies: understanding districts’ unique contexts, going the extra mile to host in-person meetings, actively listening to learn more about (and appreciate) districts’ current work, and sharing strategies that are realistic for each district’s context

For TCSOS, one of the most important factors for building supportive, trusting relationships with LEA staff is making an effort to understand districts’ and schools’ unique contexts. TCSOS serves 11 very small, rural districts and one charter school, and each district serves between 160 and 1,000 students. Some districts are very geographically remote. Local district superintendents, such as Wynette Hilton of Big Oak Flat/Groveland Unified School District, tend to juggle multiple roles, including school principal, Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) writer, community partnership coordinator, and more.

Understanding the many demands on these leaders' time, TCSOS staff work around their schedules and meet them individually on school campuses—even when it means driving up a long, winding road to geographically remote districts such as Big Oak Flat/Groveland Unified. Then, TCSOS staff start DA meetings by asking superintendents to share about the district's current strategies and initiatives. "Instead of saying, 'These are the things you need to do,' we say, 'What are you working on already?''' explained Diana Harford, TCSOS Deputy Superintendent of Educational Services. "And we give them lots of positive feedback, because they're trying really creative, unique strategies to support their students." Actively listening, honoring district leaders' expertise, and celebrating districts' efforts and successes have been critical for setting a positive tone and empowering district leaders to "really take ownership of the meeting," Harford shared.

Furthermore, Harford explained that TCSOS staff, while guiding DA teams through reflective conversations on outcome data, root cause analyses, and strategy selection, take into consideration districts' local contexts, stating, "Let's be realistic when we're talking about strategies that could work for your students." For example, in the smallest and most isolated districts, DA teams would not "try to apply the same strategies that we would use at a district in downtown Sonora."

In addition, TCSOS DA providers previously served as local high school principals, equipping them with firsthand understanding of how proposed strategies might be perceived by teaching staff. As a result, when DA teams explored alternatives to suspensions, TCSOS staff understood that some teachers would have major concerns. TCSOS staff then supported district leaders with developing communications to message these strategies' benefits and proactively address concerns.

In the end, such efforts to reduce suspensions paid off. For example, Big Oak Flat/Groveland Unified's implementation of social–emotional supports reduced the need for disciplinary action. As a result, the district's suspension rates have improved to "green" on the 2023 California School Dashboard, and the district is no longer eligible for DA. Most importantly, students are staying in class and are learning.
Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE)

**Featured strategies:** framing DA as a positive collaboration, using an improvement coaching model, and keeping consistency among the COE staff supporting the DA team

When introducing district leadership and teams to the DA process, SCOE staff authentically express that DA is an opportunity for collaborative partnership, not a punitive measure. Leadership from Center Joint Unified School District and Galt Joint Union Elementary School District emphasized that the way SCOE framed initial DA meetings set a positive tone for the subsequent work. As Superintendent Lois Yount of Galt Joint Union Elementary recalled, the message of SCOE’s team was, “How can we support you? We’re in this together.” They listened. It was very, very collaborative.”

Beyond the initial meetings, SCOE continued its positive, collaborative approach to DA by supporting eligible districts through an improvement coaching model. Kuljeet Nijjar, Director of Educational Services at Galt Joint Union Elementary, explained, “Even though they had an agenda to keep us on track,” neither the DA process nor SCOE staff guidance felt prescriptive. “It really did feel like a coaching model, where I’m going to listen to what you’re saying. I’m going to get you to your goal, and this is how we’re going to get there based on your strengths, your needs, and your resources.”

Superintendent Scott Loehr of Center Joint Unified shared that the stability of the SCOE DA team was another notable factor in SCOE’s ability to serve as an effective, trusted partner. “They have stayed with us for the whole time . . . and to me, that’s a huge thing, because we don’t skip a beat trying to get to know each other and see how we work.” Along with avoiding interruptions and enabling seamless continuity of the work, this stability helps the district feel that “they are invested in us,” Loehr noted.

The trust built through these consistent relationships has also proved essential in allowing SCOE to guide districts through challenging data conversations. As Loehr described, “Using them to look a little more critically at our data and everyone being open and honest, it’s hard. And when it’s your own data, you look at it, you come up with a lot of reasons why it is.” But Loehr appreciated that SCOE, as trusted partners, “would call us out on it: ‘Well, okay, but this is the data.’”

Loehr noted that he and his district team see such value in SCOE’s collaborative partnership that, even beyond DA eligibility, he hopes they can continue working together through a similar model.
Fresno County Superintendent of Schools (FCSS)

**Featured strategies:** creating a DA process that balances structure with plenty of room for customization based on individual district needs, codesigning the work with district leaders, and adjusting each district’s process as needed

As is the case in many large counties, FCSS’s districts vary widely in size, ranging from single-school districts to Fresno Unified School District—the state’s third-largest district, which serves over 72,000 students. Consequently, FCSS staff have made it a priority to create a DA process that includes intentional, well-developed activities, but that also allows plenty of room for customization and flexibility. FCSS staff developed their process through empathy interviews and cycles of feedback; this input from districts helped FCSS understand how best to balance demands on district time while maintaining the necessary momentum and commitment to move the work forward.

Annie Sharp, FCSS’s Senior Director of Data Strategy and Improvement, explained that the customization of each district’s improvement journey begins with a thorough onboarding stage consisting of three meetings. First, FCSS staff introduce the DA process through an individual meeting with each district’s leadership. The second DA meeting focuses on an initial data dive; a key outcome for this meeting is to determine which indicator and/or student group on which to focus. In the third meeting, the FCSS DA lead and district DA lead discuss who should participate on the DA team, what the general flow of the work will look like, expectations for the district team, and expectations for the COE.

Following this onboarding and direction-setting, FCSS meets with the full DA team monthly. Sharp noted that, previously, DA teams met on a bimonthly or quarterly basis and had longer meetings each time, but FCSS intentionally shifted to shorter, more frequent meetings in order to provide more timely support that aligns with districts’ on-the-ground work.

Despite leveraging a structured approach to the DA process, FCSS offers substantial flexibility to meet the unique needs of its district partners. For example, Robyn Snyder, Clovis Unified’s Director of Accountability, described how FCSS adjusted the DA process to align with Clovis Unified’s decentralized, site-based leadership model. "While our [districtwide] goal is to decrease suspensions, every school site is choosing their own change ideas to try out as they're on this improvement journey to decrease suspension rates," she explained. To build a robust connection between site-level improvement work and the district’s DA team meetings, FCSS also coached district leadership in leading Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles at the site level; see p. 16 for more details.

In addition, FCSS staff recognize that some districts’ conditions demonstrate a greater readiness for systemic improvement than others. For example, Sharp shared that if a district has been experiencing long-term instability within its leadership, the “district may not be at a place where they can get teachers to come to the table to help change systems.” In such cases, FCSS can help districts focus on establishing some of the foundational conditions for improvement. For example, to work toward this aim, they encourage district leaders to use a rounding protocol to visit school sites, learn more about each site’s work and circumstances, and build relationships with school leadership and staff.
Another key element of FCSS’s DA approach is that FCSS staff codesign DA activities with district leadership, and DA teams are empowered to make adjustments to the process as the district’s improvement journey evolves. For example, Edgar Pelayo, a manager with Fresno Unified School District’s research, evaluation, and assessment department, described how the district shifted its improvement focus midway through the systems investigation. Initially, Fresno Unified decided to focus on improving outcomes for foster youth, and the DA team’s system investigation included a strong focus on care coordination and other supports specifically for foster youth. However, over the course of this system investigation and reflection, the DA team realized that larger system conditions were affecting other student groups alongside foster youth. As a result, Pelayo explained, “Instead of coming in through a lens of supporting a student group specifically,” the team’s focus shifted to “how do we look at our practices as a [broad] system . . . with a focus on these identified student groups, to make sure we don’t lose sight of them as well.” FCSS’s DA process offered the flexibility for the DA team to lead the work in this new direction based on DA team members’ newfound understanding of their district’s systems.
**Theme 2: Ensuring That Differentiated Assistance Is Truly a Value-Add and Expands LEAs’ Resources**

This section features promising practices that COEs have leveraged to ensure that LEAs genuinely view DA as a value-add to their work—particularly by expanding LEAs’ resources.

**Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools (TCSOS)**

- **Featured strategies:** drawing from both internal and external expertise to provide expansive professional development opportunities, contracting with an external expert to provide in-depth data support, connecting districts to grants that support their key improvement strategies, and inviting all districts to participate in professional development that is funded and/or prompted by DA (while explicitly noting that the opportunities are available thanks to DA).

According to Superintendent Wynette Hilton of Big Oak Flat/Groveland Unified School District, the wealth of supports that TCSOS has offered through DA—including professional development, communities of practice, and hands-on technical assistance across a variety of content areas—has been tremendously valuable for her district’s leaders and educators. She noted that accessing such supports would otherwise be “too costly for us to do as a small rural school district,” as is the case with the many other small districts that TCSOS serves.

Drawing from both in-house and external expertise, TCSOS has offered its districts’ school staff access to in-depth trainings in math and ELA instructional strategies, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), and trauma-informed practices. Through an introduction from the local Geo Lead (Placer and Sacramento County Offices of Education), TCSOS contracted with an outside expert to provide detailed data reports that enhanced DA teams’ understanding of their data and helped them communicate district improvement goals to their local school communities. Recognizing that nearly all of their DA-eligible districts are seeking to reduce chronic absenteeism and suspension rates, TCSOS partnered with The New Teacher Project (TNTP) to host a biweekly community of practice on improving student engagement, increasing attendance, and providing alternatives to suspension. In addition, TCSOS hosts a community of practice focusing on social–emotional learning.

Hilton shared that Big Oak Flat/Groveland has embraced a whole-child approach for decades, but that TCSOS’s resources have expanded and deepened their efforts. For example, prior to DA eligibility, Big Oak Flat/Groveland had already established community partnerships to provide economically disadvantaged students with clothing, shoes, school supplies, and other necessary resources. But, after partnering with TCSOS for DA and identifying the need for additional social–emotional supports, the district has benefited from the array of capacity-building opportunities that TCSOS has made available to address this need. In addition, TCSOS has guided the district toward relevant state grants and programs to expand the district’s resources, including the Learning Communities for School Success Program (LCSSP), CalHope Schools Initiative, and Student Behavioral Health Incentive Program (SBHIP).
Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools (TCSOS) continued

Although DA provides TCSOS with insight into districts’ most pressing needs for support, TCSOS’s Diana Harford noted that the COE invites all of its districts, not just those that are eligible for DA, to benefit from the professional development and other opportunities that result from DA. “What we’re trying to emphasize is that there’s value added in being eligible for DA,” Harford explained. TCSOS explicitly tells districts that these opportunities are available thanks to DA funding. “We’re trying to say: Look, luckily, we have some districts [eligible for] DA, and now we can benefit everyone through the work that we’re going to be doing with them.” TCSOS’s intentionality around this messaging reduces the stigma around DA eligibility and helps districts recognize DA—including those who aren’t eligible—as an asset.

Merced County Office of Education (MCOE)

**Featured strategies:** investing in content coordinators who serve as content-specific instructional coaches and establishing a robust partnership with the county district attorney’s office to proactively address chronic absenteeism

Like TCSOS and other COEs, MCOE has invested in internal and external resources that address key needs identified by DA-eligible districts but that are accessible to all districts across the county. One such investment has been MCOE’s expansion of its continuous improvement team to include a large number of content coordinators—specialist staff who serve on DA teams and who also serve as instructional coaches for districts’ school staff. According to Adrienne Nau, MCOE’s Director of Continuous Improvement, MCOE currently employs about 11 full-time equivalent (FTE) math content coordinators and 5.5 FTE English language arts coordinators. Emily Tietjen, MCOE’s State and Federal Senior Program Coordinator, noted that each content team follows a consistent pedagogy and coaching process to ensure that content coordinators offer not only content knowledge, but also effective coaching. “When they’re onboarding coordinators, they have a very specific method in which they work with districts that’s very relationship-forward, but also focused on what it is that we’re trying to build for learners,” she explained.

Laura Andrews, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services at Dos Palos Oro Loma Joint Unified School District, described that with MCOE’s hands-on coaching model, “Rather than a ‘sit and get,’ where I’m going to sit here and tell you what to go do in the classroom, it’s more of a demo.” Content coordinators then model the instructional strategies within teachers’ classrooms, and they return in future weeks to observe teachers, provide feedback, and offer additional support. Andrews observed that this coaching model “has been very supportive of teachers getting over that ‘knowing-doing gap.’” Recognizing the value of the coaching that MCOE’s content coordinators offer as part of DA, districts then often contract with MCOE for larger-scale, longer-term coaching support.
As an example of external resources that MCOE brings in to support its districts, MCOE has established a collaborative partnership with the Merced County District Attorney’s Office. Andrea Valtierra-Gongora, an investigator from the district attorney’s office, serves as the attendance liaison for all school districts in Merced County.\(^3\) Valtierra-Gongora, who has a master’s degree in social work, brings a social services lens to her support. As MCOE Superintendent Steve Tietjen described, the goal of MCOE’s partnership with the district attorney’s office is “to create a social safety net for parents that need help and for districts that need some direction” with the aim of reducing barriers to student attendance.

Although Valtierra-Gongora’s role officially is linked to the School Attendance Review Board (SARB) process, she also provides proactive support for districts, schools, and families to improve attendance and reduce the need for SARB referrals. For example, Valtierra-Gongora and MCOE co-organize an annual attendance and engagement conference for local district and school employees, including principals, vice principals, attendance clerks, and counselors. This popular, well-attended conference includes a review of countywide attendance data, presentations on attendance and engagement strategies, and an opportunity to learn from local “bright spot” districts that have demonstrated substantial improvements in attendance. Valtierra-Gongora described that, in addition, “We [have] about 13 different county agencies at the back of the room,” such as Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services and the Merced County Human Services Agency. Inviting representatives from these agencies provides school staff with “an opportunity to meet them and be reminded of what services are available” to support schools, students, and families.

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3 MCOE and school districts share the cost of this contract.
Promising Practices for Differentiated Assistance

Theme 2: Ensuring That Differentiated Assistance Is Truly a Value-Add and Expands LEAs’ Resources

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools (FCSS)

**Featured strategies:** facilitating networked improvement communities for districts with the same DA focus areas and bringing in external cross-agency partners

One of FCSS’s key strategies has been to invest time and resources into cultivating robust networked improvement communities (NICs) that center on districts’ DA topics of focus. For example, several DA-eligible districts chose to focus on improving systems to support foster youth, so FCSS launched a NIC focusing on this student population.

As with MCOE’s cross-agency effort to address chronic absenteeism, FCSS recognized the value of bringing in cross-agency expertise to build districts’ capacity—and collective, countywide capacity—to support foster youth. As a result, FCSS engaged external partners, including the Fresno County Department of Social Services, Fresno County’s Juvenile Dependency Court, and several community-based organizations, and invited them to participate in the NIC alongside district staff.

Bringing these different agencies together enabled NIC participants to identify opportunities for coordination and collaboration. As Edgar Pelayo of Fresno Unified recalled, the group began by asking, “Where are some gaps in identification, in transitions, and in understanding when is it viable for a site to have [input] on the possibility of a move of a foster child?” By improving coordination between agencies and improving the district’s ability to anticipate when foster youth will move schools, the district and local partners can then “try to create some stability in that environment and apply some of our resources” to create a smoother transition for each student.

Leveraging the group’s collective knowledge, NIC participants identified four key, measurable drivers linked to foster youths’ outcomes: stability, care coordination, attendance, and literacy. Although foster youths’ stability rates are largely outside of districts’ locus of control, all participating districts are committed to monitoring data for these four drivers and working to improve the latter three. Within the NIC, participants created concrete plans for data collection and progress monitoring, and FCSS offers DA-eligible districts a dedicated data analyst to provide hands-on data support.

The NIC also provided opportunities for districts to build collaborative relationships with staff from external agencies. For example, FCSS’s Annie Sharp shared that, as part of this work, FCSS “set up a process where the social workers from the department of social services and the social workers from Fresno Unified would meet together on a regular basis to talk about the students that they serve in common” and collaborate to improve care coordination.
Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE)

*Featured strategies:* connecting districts to expertise across COE divisions and developing professional development based on districts’ identified needs

To connect districts to the specific content expertise they need, RCOE fosters strong cross-divisional collaboration and coordination (described in greater detail on p. 28) and considers DA to be a COE-wide effort. It was not always this way; initially, DA was considered the responsibility of RCOE’s Assessment, Accountability and Continuous Improvement team. But that changed when “We had a conversation about how it really needs to involve everybody from the organization that can contribute to elevating outcomes for students in these districts,” explained Amanda Corridan, RCOE’s Chief Academic Officer.

RCOE staff recruited engagement from their internal colleagues with expertise in student wellness, student support services, specific student populations, and other key areas. When providing support to districts, “We’re not trying to answer questions that come from a space that we don’t live in on a daily basis,” noted Corridan.

For example, to support Moreno Valley Unified School District’s work to improve outcomes for students with individualized education programs (IEPs), RCOE provided a coach who had expertise working with this population as well as experience as a school counselor. Based on data analysis, the DA team had observed that many students with IEPs were not meeting graduation requirements, and the team identified this as a focus area for improvement. Moreno Valley Unified’s Chief Academic Officer, Esperanza Arce, explained that the coach then “provided professional learning and development to every single special education teacher in our district, teaching them [to understand] the transcripts” and to actively help address or prevent the gaps and repeated courses that often appeared in those students’ transcripts.

Arce explained that the coach also helped district and site leaders understand the experiences and trajectories of students with IEPs as they moved through the system. “We realized that in order for us to change the future, we’ve got to start in the past,” Arce explained, and so the coach suggested strategies for improving vertical alignment and strengthening support for students with IEPs earlier in their academic careers. For example, the district began providing professional development to strengthen elementary school teachers’ capacity to identify and address instructional areas in which students with IEPs needed additional support.

In addition to having content experts offer individualized support throughout districts’ improvement journeys, RCOE staff provide professional development based on districts’ specific needs. For example, leadership at San Jacinto Unified School District described how RCOE developed a training series that helps principals use an improvement science approach when writing their school plans and leading site-level improvement work. John Roach, San Jacinto Unified’s Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, expressed appreciation that RCOE staff “were able to tailor the training to the needs of the district.”
Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) continued

Corridan noted that, early in the DA process, RCOE staff express to each DA team that the COE’s goal is to provide genuinely valuable, tangible support to help the district achieve its aims. Corridan explained that RCOE staff tell district teams:

We know how it is working in a district. And you’ve just earned 10 more employees for free to help you execute the work that you already want to do. So we roll up our sleeves. What can we do to help?

Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE)

Featured strategies: providing a dedicated coach to each DA-eligible district and providing district staff with opportunities to learn from peers through a collaborative network and through direction connections

To emphasize the value of improvement work for all its districts, TCOE hosts an in-person, improvement science-focused community of practice. Known as the Continuous Improvement for Equity (CIE) network, this community of practice is open to both DA-eligible and non-eligible districts. At CIE network meetings, COE staff with improvement science expertise serve as process facilitators for each table, accompanied by COE staff with content expertise. However, each DA-eligible district also receives a free, dedicated improvement coach to support the district’s improvement journey, whereas non-eligible districts can either pay a fee to have a coach or participate without a coach.

This model helps districts understand that continuous improvement is something everyone should participate in—and that DA is an opportunity to access additional resources that others genuinely value and pay for. Notably, TCOE’s coaches bring not only improvement science and education systems expertise, but also previous coaching experience. Leadership from DA-eligible districts described how the coaches’ warm, encouraging, and humble coaching stance made a difference. For example, Superintendent Lily Shimer of Strathmore Union Elementary School District noted that the “nurturing” demeanor of her district’s TCOE improvement coach “always makes educators feel a little bit more open to the ideas” that the district team proposes. Shimer also described that TCOE’s coaches were intentional in collaborating with the DA team to coplan and copresent professional development sessions for school staff—a strategy that helped build DA team members’ capacity.

All of TCOE’s DA-eligible districts receive an improvement coach regardless of whether they opt to participate in the CIE network. Most do participate, but TCOE Leadership Support Services Administrator Lisa Lemus noted that a few do not—particularly, small districts, because they have more difficulty sparing their leadership and staff for offsite meetings. In the case of these DA-eligible districts, a TCOE coach travels to each district to facilitate the same activities that take place in the CIE network. The coaches’ individualized onsite support, which includes meetings with the DA team as well as engagements with school staff, is another layer of support that all DA-eligible districts receive regardless of CIE network participation.
Districts that participate in the CIE network also receive additional benefits, including learning from their peers. Lemus shared that she wishes she could “bring the wisdom of the room with me” when she, one of TCOE’s lead coaches, visits nonparticipating districts onsite. Jesse Sanchez, Administrator of Expanded Learning Opportunities and School Safety for Dinuba Unified School District, affirmed that his district’s team greatly valued the opportunities to learn from peers through the CIE network. In particular, the team appreciated the opportunity to compare strategies with districts that had similar schools and similar focus areas, and which were starting to see progress. Sanchez also appreciated that TCOE staff helped facilitate these connections outside of the CIE network. For example, he shared that if some of Dinuba Unified’s sites had a specific question about how other districts were handling a topic, “The county office or our coach was very helpful in saying, ‘Hey, I’m going to get back to you. I don’t know the answer, but let me reach out to another school district [with similar circumstances].’”

Lemus described how TCOE’s DA approach, with its emphasis on coaching and the added value of the CIE network, has helped build a countywide culture of improvement, and has empowered districts to more actively seek out the COE’s support—an indication that they see authentic value in DA. Lemus described that when districts are no longer eligible for DA, they often still want to continue a high level of engagement with the COE. In such cases, the TCOE team assures districts that even though they “don’t have access to free support in these particular ways [through DA], they do have access to all of this free base support.” Fortunately, TCOE’s CIE network offers districts a valuable, ongoing structure to support their continuous improvement work as they transition in and out of eligibility.
Theme 3: Connecting DA to the Classroom

This section features promising practices that COEs have leveraged to connect DA directly to school- and classroom-level practices, particularly by building school staff’s capacity for improvement.

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools (FCSS)

**Featured strategies:** recruiting teachers and support staff to participate in DA teams and NICs and coaching district leaders to lead continuous improvement activities with school site teams

Although DA focuses on creating districtwide change, FCSS staff emphasize the importance of having teachers deeply involved in DA teams and DA-related improvement teams. As Annie Sharp of FCSS explained, teachers usually play the most significant role in implementation, “And so we want the teachers there to make the decisions about how to change their systems.”

After identifying the district’s area of focus during initial DA meetings, district leaders invite teachers who are most closely connected to that area to join the improvement team. For example, Sharp explains that improvement teams focusing on early literacy include principals, academic coaches, teacher representatives from each of the early grade levels, and reading intervention teachers. Improvement teams focusing on special education include principals, special day class teachers, and school-level special education support staff. To support teacher participation, districts typically provide teachers with a stipend to participate, and improvement teams meet immediately after school.

As Alicia Sanborn, Director of Early Literacy and Assessment for Washington Unified, described, “Our cycles of improvement for our teachers in early literacy are literally built on what they’re asking for.” Sanborn described that having teachers play a leading role on improvement teams has been essential for selecting the right strategies, building broader buy-in across schools’ teaching staff, and providing responsive support throughout implementation. For example, teachers on the improvement teams “are able to hear teachers’ questions around strategies that we’re implementing in the classroom [and] questions around our instructional block for literacy. They’re able to really be onsite and hit the ground running with those questions and lead that work.”

As another strategy for ensuring strong connections between DA improvement activities and school-level change, FCSS staff coach district leaders to lead continuous improvement activities with site-level teams. For example, Sanborn described that FCSS staff initially supported her in leading Washington Unified’s early literacy improvement team, which conducted a literacy-focused root cause analysis. Now, Sanborn leads the district’s Early Literacy Strategic Team, which consists of teachers who support implementation onsite and uses many of the same tools that FCSS introduced to the improvement team.

In the case of Clovis Unified, FCSS’s role in coaching district staff to lead site-level continuous improvement activities has been particularly central to the DA team’s work due to the district’s site-based leadership model. Honoring this model, Clovis Unified empowered each school leadership team to choose their own site-specific goal and change ideas.
Since then, each site’s team has been conducting Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles, and Clovis Unified staff “go out to the school sites every two to three weeks and meet with them, and we run a 15- to 20-minute huddle which is focused on their PDSA,” explained Robyn Snyder of Clovis Unified. Snyder explained that, over time, the ownership and leadership of these improvement activities has shifted closer and closer to the classroom level.

Initially, FCSS led the site-level PDSA cycles while coaching district staff on how to take over that role, Snyder explained. Clovis Unified staff then began facilitating the site-level work. More recently, as school teams have become more comfortable and confident with the process, site leadership members have begun leading the PDSA cycles themselves. This coaching model, with an intentional, gradual shift of leadership responsibilities from the county to the district to the school level, has enabled DA’s continuous improvement activities to fully become part of schools’ operations.
El Dorado County Office of Education (EDCOE)

**Featured strategy:** hosting collaborative learning networks focusing on concrete, classroom-level practices and inviting teachers to drive these networks’ improvement work

Similar to FCSS, after an initial set of DA meetings to identify each district’s area of focus, EDCOE invites districts to build improvement teams—with robust teacher participation—to drive the long-term continuous improvement work. District improvement teams then have the opportunity to participate in one or more of the collaborative learning networks that EDCOE has established in response to districts’ common areas of focus.

EDCOE currently hosts three countywide networks: two networks focusing on math (one on preK–3rd grade math and one on 8th–9th grade math) and one network focusing on chronic absenteeism. Within these networks, improvement teams dive into the details of instruction and assessment. For example, within the network focusing on 8th–9th grade math, improvement teams examined some of the 8th grade state assessment items that were publicly released. This led improvement teams to identify the level of rigor during 8th and 9th grade math as a key gap to address.

However, in order to increase the level of rigor, the district teams realized they must also examine and reevaluate their grading policies. “If it’s going to be rigorous enough, it’s not enough that you just get one chance to demonstrate your mastery of a subject. You may have to have more opportunities,” explained Gigi Marchini, EDCOE’s Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Accountability. Teachers also realized they needed to provide students with more timely feedback on missed test questions and use test data to identify commonly missed questions that they needed to spend more instructional time addressing.

Halfway through the year, improvement teams showed EDCOE the common assessments that they had decided upon, which they planned to administer at least once a month. “They showed us the rigor. It was shocking to see the difference in the rigor of what they’re going to have the kids do. They all shared their grading policies. Every single one of the teachers now allows multiple opportunities for the kids to pass, and they have activities that they’re doing to help kids with their learning. We are seeing D and F rates drop.”

Kevin Monsma, EDCOE’s Deputy Superintendent of Educational Services, pointed out that having teachers drive improvement teams’ work has been a key factor in having DA effect on-the-ground change. EDCOE staff noted that when they first began providing DA support in 2017/2018, they used a more traditional model that focused on district-level systems analysis. Recognizing the necessity of grounding the work more closely in school- and classroom-level practices, EDCOE began de-emphasizing the initial, formal DA systems analysis component and invested heavily in the COE’s professional learning networks. “These schools are substantively changing their systems, which is nothing we ever saw in DA before,” Monsma observed. “We would talk about system change: ‘Yeah, we’ll do that. Yeah, I’ll start my diet tomorrow.’” Whereas, now, “this is down to the classroom level that we have teachers going, ‘I’m going to help change the system.’ And the principal and superintendent are sitting there and going, ‘Good, let’s change the system.’” And, evidenced by the changes in classroom instruction and instructional policies that these schools have put in place, “You feel the system change.”
Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE)

**Featured strategy:** *supporting district and school staff to engage teachers in continuous improvement activities and to learn from the experiences of teachers, parents, and students*

As with FCSS and EDCOE, TCOE staff emphasized that deeply engaging site leaders and teachers in the continuous improvement process—including the data analysis and brainstorming of change ideas—lays a critical foundation for effective implementation. Districts include site leaders on their DA teams—in particular, site leaders for schools that are eligible for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) or Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI). Although teachers don’t typically participate directly on DA teams, TCOE’s improvement coaches work with district and site leaders to engage school staff in key components of the continuous improvement process.

For example, Superintendent Lily Shimer of Strathmore Union described how, after her district’s DA team studied chronic absenteeism by grade level, TCOE’s coach supported the team in walking schools’ teaching staff through a similar analysis. The DA team had predicted that the highest chronic absenteeism rates would appear within 7th and 8th grades, so they were surprised to find that the highest rates actually appeared within transitional kindergarten and kindergarten. “Once we broke the data down and they saw that, then we got to brainstorm.” The DA team sought teachers’ insight into both potential barriers to young children’s attendance and potential solutions. “Really bringing them in as part of the process, I think, was very, very helpful,” Shimer remarked. Beyond this session with the full teaching staff, Strathmore Union’s DA team also set up “kind of a subcommittee of the differentiated assistance team,” which included school representatives such as the mentor teacher, counselor, site leadership, and attendance clerk, Shimer described. This group continued to provide school-level insight to inform the selection and implementation of strategies, ensuring a close connection between school- and district-level work.

Leadership from both Strathmore Union and Dinuba Unified also described that TCOE equipped their district and school staff to collect qualitative data from students and parents. Both districts’ DA efforts focused on chronic absenteeism, particularly for students with IEPs. Jesse Sanchez of Dinuba Unified reported that on each school site, counselors and other staff held empathy interviews with students to learn about barriers to attendance. In Strathmore Union, site leaders hosted parent nights that included information about the importance of attendance and opportunities to engage with individual families about attendance barriers. These engagements informed both districts’ strategies to improve attendance, including communications with families and targeted interventions.

Along with ensuring that insight from teachers, parents, and students inform district-level improvement work, Shimer shared that the close link between schools and DA has had a profound effect on developing teachers’ growth mindsets. She shared that this collaborative improvement work has “definitely opened the doors. Now we have teachers asking, ‘Can I go to this PD? Can I purchase this book? Can I look into this?’ . . . The fact that we’re becoming learners again, and wanting to grow, has been a huge change. And I think it’s a result of DA.”
Theme 4: Coaching Local LEAs in the Use of Continuous Improvement Tools and Processes

This section features promising practices that COEs have leveraged to strengthen LEAs’ capacity for using continuous improvement tools and processes.

Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE)

- **Featured strategies:** setting clear expectations to calibrate internal staff’s DA support delivery, offering user-friendly continuous improvement tools, and holding frequent check-ins throughout DA teams’ PDSA cycles

A striking feature of ACOE’s DA approach is the COE’s internal calibration and consistency of DA support. Juwen Lam, ACOE’s Chief of Accountability Partnerships, shared that, in order to ensure the “quality and consistency of DA experiences,” ACOE has established a set of guiding principles and expectations for the DA support that staff provide.

For example, to ensure high-quality facilitation of continuous improvement activities, ACOE staff receive training on best practices for adult learning. There’s also an expectation for staff to show up to DA meetings with concrete resources, including tools, evidence-based strategies, and relevant research, to support DA teams’ continuous improvement work.

When developing tools or other materials to support DA teams’ continuous improvement work, ACOE also maintains high-quality standards for the design, visual appeal, and user-friendliness of each product. Nia Rashidchi, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services for Castro Valley Unified School District, confirmed that the quality of these materials makes a difference. Rashidchi noted, “Sometimes when you get things from the state or federal government, they’re not always [user-friendly]. One of the great things that ACOE does is that they make [resources] more digestible . . . and they’re really good visuals, very descriptive and clear. I think that’s powerful.”

ACOE staff also set clear goals for how far DA teams can aim to progress their continuous improvement work each year. For example, during a one-year cycle of DA support, ACOE aims for districts to complete a root cause analysis and two PDSA cycles. Lam shared that ACOE tries to help DA teams maintain their momentum by holding “efficient meetings and more frequent check-ins between meetings,” and that this enables ACOE to provide more timely support for teams’ data-driven decision-making.

Kirsten Zazo, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services for Alameda Unified School District, agreed that this frequent, timely support was a valuable part of ACOE’s partnership. Her team appreciated “that midstream work of documenting our actions, what we were going to do, helping us check the metrics on those actions to push the next step forward. . . . They’re not telling you what to do, but they’re holding your team to what you said you were going to do, because things fall off track.”

ACOE Superintendent Alysse Castro pointed out that “the DA window is pretty short, even though it’s going to be extended to two years.” As a result, ACOE takes intentional steps to help DA teams make the most of their time and propel their districts’ improvement work forward.
Contra Costa County Office of Education (CCCOE)

**Featured strategy:** helping districts use improvement science tools to gain a deep understanding of their systems and the various drivers at play

Although CCCOE’s DA approach takes care not to dwell too long on the systems analysis phase, district leaders reported that its use of improvement science tools helped deepen DA teams’ understanding of their systems and important contextual factors. CCCOE’s approach includes encouraging districts to focus on one high-priority area at a time. Debbie Neighbors, Curriculum and Assessment Coordinator of Byron Union School District, noted that this was particularly helpful for her district, which serves about 1,250 students and consequently has a very small leadership team.

Neighbors explained that Byron Union’s DA team chose to focus on chronic absenteeism, both based on performance data and “because we know that if we can get students in seats, then often improvement in academic areas is going to follow.” CCCOE coached the team on using improvement science tools, including data analysis protocols, empathy interviews, and process mapping, to gain a greater understanding of the various drivers at play. As is the case in many districts, Byron Union then discovered that within the single focus area of chronic absenteeism, different populations and different types of absences required different strategies.

For example, in some instances, students missed school for family vacations. To address this, Byron Union helped its attendance clerks, site leaders, and families understand that California law now allows short-term independent study contracts for students that plan to be out for three days (previously five days). In other instances, such as many of the absences among students with IEPs, students encountered other barriers to attendance. To help address these barriers, Byron Union’s student services coordinator included more intentional discussions about attendance during IEP meetings, and the district strengthened communication with families of students with IEPs. Using ongoing attendance data, the district also identifies students who are at-risk for chronic absence, and the district’s family and community liaison reaches out to those students’ families to see how the district or school might help.

Jennifer Sachs, Chief of Educational Services for Mt. Diablo Unified School District, agreed that CCCOE’s DA approach helped her district’s leaders gain a deeper understanding of their system and area of focus. She added that CCCOE’s intentional sequencing of activities helps teams see “This is how these [activities] build on each other;” with each activity providing insight into another layer of the problem, or how factors might vary across student groups. With this fuller understanding, teams can then make more informed and thoughtful decisions in their selection of change ideas, including considerations about equity.
Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools (TCSOS)

**Featured strategies:** asking specific, probing questions to facilitate DA teams’ reflective inquiry process, suggesting specific strategies that could work within the districts’ contexts, and empowering district leaders to lead their in-depth root cause analyses locally with site leaders

When TCSOS equips districts to engage in reflective inquiry, delving into the details is key. For example, TCSOS’s Diana Harford described the types of specific, probing questions that TCSOS staff asked district members of a DA team who were investigating their district’s high suspension rates among students with IEPs. TCSOS staff prompted the DA team to pinpoint the times and locations when these students’ behavioral incidents were most frequently occurring. Then, based upon the root cause analysis findings, TCSOS offered specific change ideas to try. For example, if students with IEPs were mostly getting suspended during recess or lunch, “Can you reassign a para[professional] to be in a classroom so that if a student feels like they’re having a meltdown, they have a place to go for support during that time?”

Another DA-eligible district, Big Oak Flat/Groveland Unified, implemented similar strategies as alternatives to suspension; among its efforts was the establishment of a trauma-informed “refocus room.” The refocus room offers a space for students to calm down when their emotions are escalating, to seek social–emotional support, to have daily check-ins if needed, and to catch up on work after absences. Big Oak Flat/Groveland Superintendent Wynette Hilton credits the refocus room and its lead educator as likely having one of the “biggest impacts on attendance, suspension, and discipline” within the district.

When supporting districts to brainstorm strategies, Harford also draws from her experience as a high school principal. She offers DA teams the example of how her district had a discipline policy that suspended students for a type of offense that should not have required a suspension. “After a while, we asked, why are we doing this? Why don’t we have a Saturday school as an alternative to suspension?” Such a solution “makes way more sense. You’re building up families instead of tearing them down. The students are spending more time at school instead of less.”

Yet, although TCSOS staff delve into the details when it comes to reflective inquiry, specific change ideas, sample materials, and other hands-on support, they avoid being too hands-on with a specific schedule of DA activities. Instead, as Harford explained:

“We’re giving them the tools in that [DA] meeting; we’re helping them break down what they should be looking at. And then, they’re primarily saying, “Okay, we want to dive into this further with our math coordinator who has been working with teams of teachers regularly in their staff meetings, and she’s been able to lead some root cause analysis over math scores.”

That is, TCSOS aims to model effective continuous improvement processes, but they then empower DA teams to lead the more in-depth work locally with school staff, rather than centering the work at the district level.
Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE)

**Featured strategy:** modeling an improvement mindset by gathering continuous district feedback and using these data—as well as observational data—to continually improve the pacing and structure of DA activities

A key feature of TCOE’s DA support is that TCOE staff model an improvement mindset in how they structure—and continuously improve—their DA support. For example, Gina Ramshaw, Director of State and Federal Programs for Dinuba Unified, described how TCOE collects feedback at the end of each DA team session and consistently shares how they use it to inform the next session. When presenting this information to the team, “They would say, this is the feedback we got, and this is what we’re doing to change it up,” she described.

TCOE’s Lisa Lemus explained that using DA teams’ feedback is particularly important in enabling TCOE staff to design and adapt each CIE network session to meet the needs of all DA teams, just as teachers use student data to inform their instruction and help them meet the needs of all learners. For example, Lemus explained that district teams come with wide variation in knowledge of continuous improvement tools and methods: “We’ve got teams that have completed a root cause . . . they could teach classes on root cause [analyses]. And then we’ve got teams in the room that are like, what is a root cause?”

But, as Lisa described, “I love a good challenge that’s universally designed to the edges. And we call it that . . . We call out that we’re not going to be able to meet everybody’s needs every time, but we sure are trying. And we have a visual for when we report out [their feedback] every session . . . So when we didn’t meet somebody’s needs, they were outside the edges. We did not achieve that universal design that day for two people.” Nevertheless, TCOE staff use districts’ feedback to keep trying again.

In addition to informing each DA team session, these data have informed larger structural characteristics of TCOE’s DA approach. For example, based on both district feedback and COE staff observations, TCOE sped up the pacing of the PDSA cycles for districts participating in the CIE network. (Lemus noted that DA-eligible districts receiving individual, onsite improvement coaching for DA tend to proceed at a slower pace, partly due to contextual factors.)

Consequently, districts in the CIE network now implement two-week action cycles; as was the case in ACOE, TCOE staff reported that having shorter action periods and more frequent check-ins has helped maintain districts’ momentum and has enabled more timely support. Lemus acknowledged that “one thing we were worried about is that we didn’t want the systems analysis to feel rushed. That’s the opposite of what we want to do.” But, Lemus continued, “I think we continue to underscore that we’re going to keep digging into our system as the time goes on. But there comes a time when . . . we have to dig into a priority area and start [implementation].”
El Dorado County Office of Education (EDCOE)

*Featured strategy: finding ways to complement the existing continuous improvement work within high-capacity districts*

As described earlier, EDCOE’s deepest investment in DA support is through its three-year collaborative learning networks; these networks offer district teams the opportunity to leverage continuous improvement tools while also diving into the details of school- and classroom-level implementation.

However, EDCOE staff also recognized that some of their districts were fully invested in continuous improvement work prior to DA eligibility, and EDCOE respected those districts’ preexisting continuous improvement processes. Two such districts were Buckeye Union School District and Rescue Union School District, two of the largest districts in the county.

Prior to DA eligibility, both districts had already embraced the use of continuous improvement tools and processes. But Rescue Union Superintendent Jim Shoemake noted that the team appreciated EDCOE staff’s thought partnership and conversations about how to strengthen the district’s continuous improvement work. “We all just approached it from [an attitude of], ‘We don’t know what we don’t know,’” Shoemake shared.

Along with supporting the district’s reflective inquiry process, EDCOE invited Rescue Union leadership to visit Estacada School District, an improvement science model district in Oregon, to participate in an Improvement Science Walkthrough Workshop. The visit was facilitated by an external consultant with expertise in improvement science. After Rescue Union leadership expressed interest in building upon their learning from the visit and incorporating it into their own district’s work, EDCOE helped sponsor a three-year contract for the consultant to provide Rescue Union with improvement science coaching.

In the case of Buckeye Union, EDCOE found that continuous improvement was even more deeply engrained in the district’s culture already. Prior to DA eligibility, district leadership had already led a root cause analysis focusing on the district’s most pressing area for improvement. The district already had routines for collecting and analyzing data. It already had a collaborative structure in place for engaging school site leaders in continuous improvement work. But, as Superintendent David Roth of Buckeye Union shared, EDCOE made an effort to be “complementary in its approach.” Rather than require additional activities for DA, EDCOE provided thought partnership and additional data support to enhance the district leadership’s reflective inquiry process. In addition, EDCOE provided Buckeye Union with a grant so that teachers could invest time into developing common interim assessments that are closely aligned to state standards—a systemic change idea that Buckeye Union has been working to pilot.
Theme 5: Supporting Effective Implementation of Improvement Strategies

This section features promising practices that COEs have leveraged to support LEAs with ongoing implementation of improvement strategies.

Contra Costa County Office of Education (CCCOE)

Featured strategy: using implementation science to help DA teams plan for effective and sustainable implementation

After using improvement science tools to walk teams through a systems analysis and selection of strategies, CCCOE grounds the next stage of DA in implementation science. Implementation science is a central feature of the COE’s DA approach, and the CCCOE team views implementation science as what’s often the “missing piece” in support for districts’ improvement efforts, described Dave Fendel, CCCOE’s Coordinator of Social Emotional Learning Support. After all, moving from identifying change ideas to making sustainable changes in practice is complex, given all the factors that can influence implementation.

“Implementation is our Achilles’ heel in education; we don’t always get that right,” explained Julie Dooley, CCCOE’s Director of Curriculum and Instruction. “We don’t plan well enough for it. We race too quickly to put solutions into play without really testing and scaling. . . . So really, being intentional about implementation and going slow and really planning for that, it’s really critical.”

This includes helping districts consider their enabling contexts: the capacity, culture, resources, and other conditions that support effective implementation. Fendel explained that considering systems' enabling contexts is essential. He noted that, often, districts “have these effective innovations that they’ve put in place, and they know they’re research based, they know that they’ve worked in other areas . . . [but] people are frustrated that the needle’s not moving.” As a result, CCCOE guides DA teams in reflecting on what conditions currently exist within their systems, including strengths and barriers. Throughout teams’ PDSA cycles, the DA teams continue to use implementation science to study the factors influencing implementation. Dooley pointed out that once a change idea is functioning well, using implementation science also helps districts plan for scaling the promising practice more successfully.

CCCOE staff shared that their DA approach previously focused more on the traditional improvement science processes, but that their focus on implementation has strengthened over time. Jennifer Sachs of Mt. Diablo Unified expressed appreciation that CCCOE’s DA activities supported concrete work that the DA team could engage in with her school and district teams.

Having already begun participating in systems improvement work with the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), Mt. Diablo Unified’s team was eager to move forward with changing school practices. Sustainable implementation has been a priority for the district; therefore, it has invested in structures to support long-term systemic change with regard to improving instruction.
Contra Costa County Office of Education (CCCOE) continued

For example, after a districtwide effort to calibrate for instructional coherence, principals have been implementing classroom visits to gauge and support teachers’ progress in making the desired instructional changes. “Having principal and teacher leaders spend time walking through classrooms, making note of the instructional rigor, and providing immediate feedback to teacher teams has been a major game-changer,” Sachs noted. “You can imagine what it takes to have principals do walkthroughs monthly.” In addition, the district has established PLCs to build teachers’ instructional capacity and has empowered them to start participating as leaders—again, keeping an eye toward sustainable implementation.
Merced County Office of Education (MCOE)

- **Featured strategies:** supporting districts with testing change ideas and providing ongoing instructional coaching to districts’ teaching staff

Although MCOE guides districts through a thorough root cause analysis process, including the structured use of improvement science tools and protocols, MCOE’s Emily Tietjen noted that this is only the “first step” of DA. These activities are viewed as the general “requirements” of DA, based on the typical interpretations of California Education Code language, but “we want to see that districts are doing a learning practice, learning cycles, and spreading and scaling [effective strategies],” Tietjen explained. “That might not happen just based on the requirements alone.”

As a result, MCOE continues to meet with district teams as they test change ideas, assess outcomes, and adjust their plans based on the observed outcomes. For example, Superintendent Brian Ballenger of Gustine Unified School District described how the DA team leveraged implementation science in the district’s efforts to make systemic changes focused on improving attendance. First, the team process-mapped the district’s system for attendance checks: “How did we check in with families? What was the follow up?” After testing change ideas, Ballenger explained, the team reconvened and examined, “Here’s where a change happened, and here’s where a decision is made. And we spent a couple of DA sessions really fine-tuning that process . . . so that we were checking in with kids and families and providing supports at particular inflection points.” Ballenger reported that these strategic, data-driven changes have “led to fewer students being absent and chronically absent.” Indeed, Gustine Unified’s chronic absenteeism rate fell by 11.3 percent between 2022 and 2023, demonstrating twice as much improvement as the statewide average.4

In addition, regarding academics, MCOE’s content coordinators have offered instructional coaching to support schools’ teaching staff throughout implementation. Several Merced County districts, including Gustine Unified, Los Banos Unified, and Dos Palos Oro Loma Joint Unified, identified a lack of consistent, districtwide curricular materials as a root cause and potential driver for improvement. After working to create more consistency and alignment in the curricula used across their districts, each district has invested in staff and/or structures to support teachers with implementation. For example, Los Banos Unified has built PLCs to build teachers’ collective efficacy and to balance teacher autonomy with instructional support. MCOE’s content coordinators have also supported school staff in each district, including through long-term (three- to five-year) coaching contracts which extend beyond DA.

MCOE’s Adrienne Nau noted that “Improvement science isn’t something that’s reactive; it’s also proactive, looking at the future.” As a result, MCOE prompts each DA team to think about their district’s improvement work as part of a “three- to five-year visionary plan,” rather than a one- or two-year effort that focuses on year-to-year changes in Dashboard data.

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4 Data from the California School Dashboard; statewide, chronic absenteeism fell by 5.7 percent between 2022 and 2023.
El Dorado County Office of Education (EDCOE)

- **Featured strategies:** de-emphasizing the “DA label” and traditional DA process, hosting three-year collaborative learning networks that focus on districts’ key areas for improvement, and using a predictive data dashboard to help districts launch improvement work at the start of the school year

For EDCOE, the least important part of DA is the traditional, formal set of meetings, in which a COE guides the DA team through a data review and root cause analysis. Although EDCOE staff still meet with DA-eligible districts to support these activities, EDCOE staff expressed that they consider districts’ implementation activities to be the true, pivotal work of DA.

As described on p. 17, based on districts’ DA areas of focus, EDCOE hosts two countywide networks focusing on math (each focusing on a different grade span) and one focusing on chronic absenteeism. EDCOE staff facilitate the chronic absenteeism network, and each math network is facilitated by an external TA provider that EDCOE selected based on the provider’s specific content expertise.

Although these networks leverage continuous improvement principles—including reflective inquiry, testing change ideas, and cycles of data collection and monitoring—they also dive into the fine details of implementation. “What we’re seeing is this high level of engagement from principals, superintendents, [and] teachers participating on districts’ improvement teams,” shared Kevin Monsma of EDCOE. “And it feels like we’ve kind of hit a nice stride for DA, because we don’t really call it DA anymore. It’s just like, ‘This is the work that we’re doing.’”

EDCOE’s Gigi Marchini also noted that districts’ participants express appreciation for the networks’ three-year commitment. “They’ll say, ‘I’m so happy this is three years.’ . . . They don’t want to do the quick ‘one and done.’ A lot of them see this is valuable, to put the time in and to really systematize things.”

Another feature of EDCOE’s DA approach that prioritizes implementation is its earlier timeline. Through a partnership with the CORE districts, EDCOE adopted the CORE Insights Dashboard, and EDCOE staff use this tool to predict districts’ DA eligibility and key areas for improvement at the start of the academic year. As Monsma explained, “We asked our districts, if we could predict your Dashboard [results] in September and you knew what you needed to work on, would you start working on it right away? And they said yes, they would.” This enables districts to align their improvement work with the academic year calendar.

Superintendent David Roth of Buckeye Union School District emphasized the value of launching improvement work as early as possible, rather than waiting for the California School Dashboard results. Roth shared that Buckeye Unified has a long-standing culture of examining local data; by summer 2022, the district’s leaders already recognized that chronic absenteeism was becoming a growing issue. “So, we jumped in before we were in differentiated assistance. Nobody really cared whether we were going to be in differentiated assistance or not.” Although Buckeye Unified launched its chronic absenteeism-focused continuous improvement work prior to even starting DA-related conversations with EDCOE, Roth identified this early, proactive approach as critical to the district’s success in improving student outcomes.
Theme 6: Improving System Coherence and Alignment of Initiatives

This section features promising practices that COEs have leveraged to help LEAs create connections—and, where possible, reduce redundancy—across the many initiatives, accountability processes, and improvement efforts that they have underway.

Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE)

*Featured strategies: building strong internal understanding of districts' various strands of improvement work, tracking districts' touchpoints with different COE staff and departments, and leading districts through initiative mapping to streamline their efforts*

A cornerstone of RCOE’s approach has been to build a clear, comprehensive understanding of each district’s various initiatives and strands of improvement work, both internally within the COE and across the district’s staff. By establishing and maintaining this fuller picture of the district’s work, RCOE staff can actively support each district in creating alignment between initiatives, reducing redundancies, and using DA time and resources to strengthen their existing efforts.

RCOE staff employ several strategies to build and document their internal understanding of each district’s multifaceted work. First, RCOE staff ask about the district’s existing initiatives during the initial DA meetings. RCOE staff noted that they intentionally bring a large, cross-divisional COE team to these initial meetings to ensure that the conversations cover the district’s work across a variety of focus areas. RCOE staff then collaborate with each district to map out a plan for the COE’s support, ensuring close alignment with the district’s key priorities and existing work.

This planning also takes into account other previous or ongoing accountability processes to ensure that DA support can deepen, not duplicate, the district’s work in these areas. For example, “Let’s say they were part of the Compliance and Improvement Monitoring [CIM] for special education. We don’t want to replicate what they did for CIM. We want to build from what they did through that process,” described Melissa Bazanos Hutton, RCOE’s Executive Director of Accountability, Assessment, and Continuous Improvement. “So let’s take what they learned through CIM. They’ve identified these high-leverage practices. Well, what are the ways that RCOE can support them in implementation of some of those practices?”

RCOE also has internal, cross-divisional collaboration opportunities focusing on DA, including an internal DA PLC for all staff across RCOE who support DA. During the DA PLC’s monthly collaborations, staff discuss the cross-divisional support being provided to each DA-eligible district.

In addition, RCOE staff use Microsoft Planner to record information about RCOE-facilitated support provided to each district, and to ensure that different RCOE departments are aware of all these ongoing touchpoints. “Every time a team member goes into a district to provide PD or do anything that a district is requesting, we put it in the planner so that we can always have a visual of what’s already going on in that district,” described RCOE’s Amanda Corridan.
**Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) continued**

Coridan shared that this information-sharing tool has been essential in helping RCOE staff enhance district staff’s understanding of work taking place within their own systems. “What we found this most helpful for is that [some] districts weren’t talking within themselves,” she explained. As a result, district staff sometimes requested that RCOE staff provide technical assistance that would duplicate or overlap with existing work that the district staff weren’t aware of. As Coridan stated, in such cases, RCOE would tell the district, “We’re happy to contract with you, but [first] let’s have this conversation, because this is what is already going on in your district. I’m not sure you need another thing.”

In some cases, as part of DA, RCOE has extended these alignment efforts by assisting districts with detailed initiative mapping. This initiative-mapping process involves documenting all district initiatives, listing outcomes related to each initiative, and highlighting any overlaps. Superintendent Bruce Bivins of Perris Elementary School District identified this initiative mapping as a valuable activity, noting that if districts have “too many initiatives, then nothing goes deep, and you don’t get the impact. So, I think that process of really trying to streamline and prioritize which initiatives are going to have the greatest impact [is important].” Bivins also appreciated that, during initiative mapping and beyond, RCOE has supported the district team in thinking through how to ensure connections between their initiatives. For example, he explained that when planning for implementation, “We’re always looking at ways that the work integrates and overlaps. How does literacy support math? How does SEL support literacy and math? . . . So, it’s this idea of a layering approach versus siloed initiatives.”

**Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE)**

*Featured strategy: using initiative crosswalks and other tools to help districts prioritize initiatives, reduce redundancies, and maintain a deep focus on their key improvement priorities*

Like RCOE, ACOE is intentional about knitting together various initiatives, including DA, as part of a broader system of support for districts, schools, and students. Kirsten Zazo of Alameda Unified observed that, in order to take a whole-systems lens to supporting districts’ improvement work, ACOE makes sure that its internal staff are well-versed in districts’ priorities and various strands of work. Zazo noted that ACOE staff use this knowledge to make connections to DA throughout their multiple touchpoints with the district, including LCAP development, School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) development, and data support. She described that, as a result, “There’s a throughline, so people don’t see [DA] as a separate group, separate work.”

ACOE staff have also developed tools and processes to help districts improve alignment across their initiatives and focus areas. For example, ACOE helps DA teams use initiative crosswalks to connect their LCAP, DA, and SPSA focus areas and actions. Honing in on the schools that are struggling to support the student groups that the district’s DA work is focusing on, ACOE staff then help districts examine the degree to which schools’ actions align with the district’s actions and goals and discuss opportunities to deepen support for school-level efforts.
Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE) continued

Jill Hoogendyk, Associate Superintendent of Educational Services for Berkeley Unified School District, described how ACOE’s support with aligning the district’s initiatives and plans helped narrow the focus for the DA team’s analysis and implementation work. ACOE staff transferred all the district’s many goals, actions, and plans into a single spreadsheet. Hoogendyk shared that this exercise helped her team realize, “We’ve got a landscape of initiatives that are important to people for lots of important reasons, but we’re really setting up a system to not be effective” by spreading their focus across so many separate initiatives.

Next, ACOE staff helped to categorize the initiatives into key buckets of work, such as professional development. As Hoogendyk described, the team then discussed, “Can we start to see whether or not there are some redundancies? When you have affinity- or program-based resolutions or initiatives, [staff and educational partners] tend to say things like, ‘Provide PD for this particular thing.’ Well, what’s the root of why they wanted that PD?” Instead, the team considered, “Is there a different way for us to be thinking about that?” For example, if multiple initiatives aim to affect the same student outcomes, then narrowing the district’s focus to a smaller set of initiatives to address those priorities can allow for more effective implementation, Hoogendyk explained.

Nia Rashidchi of Castro Valley Unified also appreciated the tools ACOE shared to support alignment between DA, various district plans, and existing initiatives. Building upon the team’s alignment conversations with ACOE, Rashidchi created additional materials to communicate with school sites about the district’s DA eligibility by school, student group, and indicator, and how the district’s DA focus area—chronic absenteeism—connects with districtwide priorities. Rashidchi reported that these materials helped the district maintain its focus and “make sure that [this focus area is] in the LCAP, and make sure that it’s in the SPSA. And then really do that work, targeted and unrelenting. It was like every school meeting, every principal meeting, every leadership meeting, we were hitting on it.” Rashidchi reported that maintaining this focus has allowed the district to go deeper into implementation and progress monitoring.

Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE)

Featured strategy: collaborating across departments (and with the county Special Education Local Plan Area [SELPA]) to provide interdisciplinary perspectives, content expertise, and aligned support for DA and other improvement initiatives

SCOE staff have worked to make cross-departmental collaboration a core part of how they operate. Through cross-departmental meetings, district-level initiative mapping, and other internal structures, staff with diverse expertise across the COE coordinate support for a variety of initiatives—including DA, other accountability processes, and content- or population-specific initiatives—rather than having each initiative housed in a single department. Channa Pitt, SCOE’s Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, described, “It’s happening really on every level of how we operate. No one department at SCOE is considering itself like, ‘Oh no, I’m just the ELA team,’ or, ‘I’m just the equity team,’ or, ‘I’m just the data team.’”
Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) continued

Kuljeet Nijjar of Galt Joint Union Elementary described this coordinated approach as a major strength in SCOE’s DA support. She noted that the DA team was led by the same SCOE staff who were providing LCAP and special education support, and that this helped the team align the work taking place for DA, LCAP development, and special education monitoring. Nijjar described that having the same team complete all three activities through the same improvement conversations helped the district use their “time and resources wisely,” and it ensured that the necessary perspectives and expertise were present to inform all three.

For example, leadership from Galt Joint Union Elementary and Center Joint Unified School District described how, through DA, the SELPA Director and SCOE staff with special education expertise provided valuable insight that informed the root cause analysis process, the district’s selection of strategies, and ongoing data collection. As one of their key focus areas, both districts sought to improve support for students with IEPs within general education classrooms.

Galt Joint Union Elementary leadership described how SCOE helped the DA team draft a survey to gauge general education teachers’ and special education teachers’ perceptions of the extent to which students with IEPs were receiving appropriate accommodations within general education classrooms on a daily basis. There was a stark contrast between the results, with far fewer special education teachers reporting that students with IEPs received the necessary support. Center Joint Unified’s DA team identified a similar gap within their classrooms.

To address this gap, both Galt Joint Union Elementary and Center Joint Unified have invested in strengthening collaboration between general education and special education, including by facilitating structured collaboration time. Galt Joint Union Elementary leadership reported that the district has also been implementing principal-led observations and feedback. For these observations, principals consult with Resource Specialist Program (RSP) teachers about the supports that individual students with IEPs should be receiving in general education classrooms; principals then observe the classrooms and provide general education teachers with both positive and constructive feedback regarding support for students with IEPs.

Across special education, literacy, support for English learners, and numerous other areas, SCOE staff described examples of how cross-departmental coordination has helped ensure that each initiative is informed by multidisciplinary expertise. Furthermore, by aligning strands of improvement work with similar goals—including DA with other accountability processes—SCOE helps district teams use their time efficiently, allowing them to spend more time engaging deeply with on-the-ground school improvement work.
Concluding Note

As seen across these vignettes, COEs have found a wide variety of ways to ensure that DA is truly differentiated, responsive to districts’ needs, and an authentic value-add to districts’ improvement journeys. Although the six common themes featured in this report may not encapsulate all promising practices that COEs employ, they can offer a helpful lens for COEs’ own continuous improvement efforts. For example, COE teams might choose to reflect upon the extent to which their DA approaches incorporate each theme—or select a single theme to focus on deepening.

Furthermore, although these vignettes illustrate examples of promising practices from nine COEs, a wealth of other examples exist within the DA support offered by other COEs across the state. Some of these practices are described in the following section of this report. The Geo Leads and research team intend for this report to serve as a foundational resource that supports ongoing collaboration, peer learning, and sharing of resources across COEs to continue to improve the quality of DA statewide.
Promising Practices
Shared Via Statewide Survey

To offer preliminary insight into promising practices employed by COEs across California, WestEd administered a survey to all COEs in fall 2023. The survey offered COEs the opportunity to share DA practices that they believe are most effective at supporting LEAs to improve student outcomes.

Survey prompts were open-ended and spanned a range of elements of DA. These 14 elements were identified by the Geo Leads, in collaboration with WestEd, as central to DA. The survey also offered an “Other” option that invited COEs to share promising practices outside of the 14 key elements. (Appendix B includes information on the survey response rates and frequency of responses by DA element.)

The following pages summarize the promising practices shared through COEs’ survey responses. The practices are organized by DA element from the survey, and some illustrative quotes and examples are provided where relevant. These practices were shared with COEs in January 2024 as a resource for the new cycle of DA support.

Although these promising practices emerged from survey responses rather than from our mixed-methods research (which focused on DA practices with evidence of impact), many of these practices reflect the key themes that later surfaced from our mixed-methods research.
Recommendations for Reflecting on These Practices

The following pages explore the breadth of COEs’ promising practices for DA across the state and may offer new ideas for how to enhance your existing DA support. However, this section is not intended to serve as an instruction manual or a definitive list of best practices. All of the following promising practices have emerged from the experiences of California COE leaders, but not all these practices will be appropriate for every COE’s context.

As you and your team prepare for the next stage of DA support, we suggest reviewing the following practices and reflecting on how they connect to your current DA practices. Consider discussing the following with your team:

- Within each of these elements of DA, which practices do we believe are most important or valuable for ensuring high-quality DA for the LEAs that we support?

- To what extent do we currently include those practices as part of our typical DA process?
  - If we don’t currently include them, can we try introducing them this year?
  - If we already do include them, are there ways in which we can strengthen or enhance them?

The following pages also offer some examples of COE tools and resources connected to these practices.

If you would like additional support or guidance in implementing practices discussed in this document, please reach out to your local Geo Lead.
Element 1: DA Onboarding, Ongoing Communication, and Relationship-Building

COE leaders shared the following promising practices for introducing DA to LEAs, helping LEAs view DA as a positive form of support, building positive relationships, and fostering authentic LEA investment in the work.

Prior to launching the official DA process:

- **Embed information about DA (and potentially provide DA-like support) through Tier 1 support and existing collaboration structures for all LEAs.** This helps all LEAs understand what DA involves and promotes the message that DA is a positive form of support.

  “Examples of regularly scheduled collaboration structures include [our county’s] System of Support, Curriculum Breakfast, Superintendent’s Council, and Small District PLCs. Tier 1 DA information and support, as well as continuous improvement project facilitation, are embedded in these structures. Therefore, the formal DA process and the support provided by [our county] are well known by districts prior to and throughout the DA journey.”

- **Start by listening.** Prior to launching the DA process, hold introductory meetings that focus on listening. These meetings involve informal empathy interviews, listening sessions, or other similar activities that focus on (1) building relationships with LEA leaders and (2) hearing about the LEA’s postpandemic context, current focus areas, and improvement work thus far.

  “Starting the DA process, we make sure the district understands that we are interested in supporting them where they’re at. ‘Based upon your area(s) of eligibility, what do you already know about the problem and what actions have you already tried?’ We don’t want to make anyone go backwards.”

When creating DA teams:

- **Provide each DA-eligible LEA with a single, consistent point of contact at the COE.** When selecting this point of contact, consider:
  - **Preexisting relationships.** Intentionally choose a point of contact with a preexisting, positive relationship with the LEA.
  - **LCAP readers and other technical assistance leads.** Often, COEs’ point of contact is the same individual who reads the LEA’s LCAP. It may also be the same individual who coordinates and/or provides other system-focused technical assistance for the LEA, such as CSI, TSI, ATSI, and Compliance Improvement Monitoring (CIM).

- **Assign COE staff with specific skill sets and roles to the DA team.**
**Element 1: DA Onboarding, Ongoing Communication, and Relationship-Building**

Promising Practices for Differentiated Assistance

- **Help the LEA select the right people for the LEA DA team.** For example, LEA DA team members should represent relevant departments (Curriculum & Instruction, Continuous Improvement, Leadership Development, Special Education, etc.).

- **Help the LEA understand the importance of having consistent DA team members.**

**When onboarding DA teams:**

- **Develop onboarding meetings** that clearly describe why the LEA is eligible, what DA is and is not, what the process involves, roles/expectations, and available support. Offer support that is personalized and flexible.

- **Offer onboarding materials with data summaries** (including "data packets") that help the LEA understand why it is eligible.

One COE described offering a half-day DA onboarding session for all eligible LEAs. "In this meeting, we present jointly with our Prevention and SELPA staff in order to present united and aligned supports for LEAs. We also explain an aligned system of support for DA and CIM."

The COE offers three levels of DA support: Basic, Moderate, and Substantial. "This way, we are able to meet their needs, wherever they are in capacity."

**To establish ongoing routines for effective DA:**

- **Hold regular, in-person meetings.** Strengthen relationships by continuing to hold in-person meetings, in addition to offering virtual meetings to accommodate the LEA's needs.

- **Suggest brief check-ins** with DA teams or DA team leaders in between full DA meetings.

- **Co-develop DA meeting agendas** with the LEA.

- **Create norms for effective meetings and follow-up.** This includes taking detailed notes at each meeting, determining agreed-upon action items and next steps, and sharing agendas prior to meetings.

- **Begin meetings with opportunities to connect.** Start each DA meeting with a short relationship-building activity.

- **Reiterate throughout the DA process that DA is intended to be a positive form of support (not a punitive measure or a compliance activity).** This includes messaging that DA is an opportunity for DA team members to continuously learn more about the LEA's system together.

"Make it clear that we are here to offer individualized support with whatever the district might need (data support, thinking through any challenge areas, etc.)."
Connect DA to existing countywide initiatives. For example, if there is a countywide initiative on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and the DA process finds that PBIS may be a helpful strategy, then connect the LEA’s DA work to the COE’s resources for PBIS capacity-building. Such connections have helped LEAs view DA as a positive form of support.

Related Tools and Resources

From Placer County Office of Education (PCOE):

- **Orientation Slide Deck**: A slide deck that PCOE uses for the half-day orientation that it provides to all DA-eligible LEAs.
- **DA Team District Roles & Responsibilities**: A one-pager to familiarize DA leadership and team members with DA roles and responsibilities.
- **LEA LCAP Profiles**: Staff on PCOE’s LCAP Review team (most of whom also provide DA support) create an LCAP Profile for each LEA in the county, drawing information from the LEA’s LCAP. PCOE staff share the LEA Profile with each eligible LEA’s DA team to create a shared understanding of the LEA’s context, initiatives, and existing actions and services. The LCAP Profiles also help PCOE staff understand which PCOE departments engage with the LEA, which helps PCOE ensure that its support is not siloed.
- **Lead Facilitator Actions and Continuous Improvement Activities List**: An organizer for COE DA Leads. The first tab offers a to-do list for setting up ongoing DA support meetings. The second tab offers a list of continuous improvement activities (with linked tools). The third tab offers a sheet for taking attendance and reflecting on LEA engagement during each meeting.

From Kern County Superintendent of Schools (KCSOS):

- **Materials for Introductory Meeting With Superintendent**: A set of materials for the initial meeting in which a superintendent is introduced to DA eligibility and the support process. These materials refer to the continuous improvement process (CIP), which is KCSOS’s model of support offered to DA-eligible districts, but the materials can be adapted as needed. These materials include meeting agendas, templates for communicating with district staff and educational partners about DA eligibility and support, lists of next steps, and other materials for launching the process.
Element 2: Deciding Which Student Groups/Indicators to Focus on for DA

COE leaders shared the following promising practices for supporting and guiding the LEA’s decision-making around which student groups and indicators to focus on for DA, including ensuring that DA is focused on those student groups who are most in need of additional support. (For example, LEAs may also consider including high-priority student groups/indicators whose performance did not prompt DA eligibility.)

- Collaboratively examine state data (including California School Dashboard data) and local data. Often, this process begins with examining state data and then focuses on local data for DA-eligible student groups and indicators.

- Provide data analysis tools and data visualizations for the DA team. Consider producing data visualizations that also include student groups whose outcomes have multiple orange Dashboard indicators.

  “We begin with concrete data specific to the student groups that are qualifying them for DA and broaden it to other groups that are on the fringe (those groups that would be in ‘orange’). Districts never want these groups ignored or their work to be siloed. . . . The process we follow allows them to decide [which groups to focus on] on their own.”

- Consider the LEA’s current focus areas and initiatives. These include the focus areas for other improvement work within the LEA (CIM, CSI/TSI/ATSI, etc.).

- Include leaders with knowledge about DA-eligible student groups. DA teams should ideally include leaders from LEA and COE departments that focus on these student groups.

- Start small and focused (e.g., one student group or indicator at a time) so that the work is more specific and actionable.
**Element 3: Centering Equity Within DA**

COE leaders shared the following promising practices for ensuring that DA processes center equity throughout all components and phases of the work (e.g., addressing implicit bias within the root cause analysis, helpful protocols to use).

- **During DA meetings, lead grounding exercises** to focus on the student experience and human connection.

- **Use empathy interviews and related methods** to gather qualitative data on user experiences (e.g., staff and student experiences).

  “We often try to dig deeper into the problem via data collection and analysis. For example, for one of our LEAs, we followed specific English learners via a transcript analysis that allowed DA team members to realize biases that they did not see before.”

- **Employ continuous improvement tools such as feedback loops** to ensure educational partners’ voices are continually involved in the root cause analysis and DA process.

- **Leverage equity-focused tools such as equity pauses.** Equity pauses help DA team members reflect on the team’s aims, consider their individual biases, and so on.

  “The Improvement team is designed with the users as the most prominent voice, using a team design framework that we adapted to ensure all levels of the system are at the table.

  Empathy interviews are taught and experienced at the very first meeting (using an empathy challenge process we learned from [the Curricular and Improvement Support Committee] CISC) and then we embed equity pauses throughout the process to make sure the decisions that are made come from more than just the people in the room.”

- **Offer trainings that center on equity-focused improvement work** and/or sponsor LEA leaders to attend external trainings/institutes on this topic.

- **Disaggregate progress monitoring data.** When reviewing progress monitoring data, include analyses that disaggregate data by student group.
Element 4: Strategies for Working With LEAs With High Turnover

COE leaders shared the following promising practices for supporting an effective DA process and fruitful outcomes even amid high turnover of LEA leaders/staff.

To ensure a consistent internal knowledge base about DA activities:

- **Document standardized processes and procedures for DA activities.** Although DA should ultimately be differentiated to best meet each LEA’s needs, documenting a core set of adaptable processes (e.g., communications templates, typical timelines, and continuous improvement activities) can provide a helpful base structure for consistent, high-quality DA.

- **Identify COE team members who are knowledgeable about the DA process** who can step in temporarily if needed.

To maintain ongoing communication and documentation of the DA team’s work:

- **Develop clear communication protocols** so that DA progress and information are shared across the full DA team on an ongoing basis and knowledge does not rest with one person.
  - **Use shared platforms** (e.g., Google Drive) to ensure all DA team members have access to these materials.

- **Ensure detailed documentation and organized archiving of the DA work.** This includes all individual meeting notes, resources, data displays, driver diagrams, process maps, progress reports, lessons learned/reflections, and so on.
  - **Prepare a summary document/tool/artifact** that tells the story of the work thus far.

  “We use a Padlet as a storyboard of the entire improvement journey so that all of the work is captured in one place.”

To maintain DA’s momentum when turnover does occur:

- **Conduct short, frequent check-ins** with eligible LEAs to stay promptly informed about any turnover.

- **Conduct individual meetings with new leaders/team members** to get them up to speed.

  “Establishing a 15-minute check-in meeting every 2–3 weeks with the District Improvement Team (DIT) lead has helped us stay in contact and be apprised of turnover.”
Element 5: Data Analysis/Root Cause Analysis

COE leaders shared the following promising practices for the main data analysis/root cause analysis phase of the DA process.

For data selection and preparation:

- **Start with high-level (Dashboard) data and then identify local data** to collect and bring to future meetings.
  - Use “Satellite Data, Map Data, and Street Data.” One COE noted the value of using the framework of “Satellite Data” (Dashboard data), “Map Data” (current CALPADS data), and “Street Data” (qualitative data from interviews with staff, students, etc.) to help LEAs understand the types of data to investigate.

- **For Dashboard data indicators, examine current, locally collected data** for those same indicators (suspensions, chronic absenteeism, etc.), as the locally collected data will be more up-to-date.

- **Produce data analyses and data visualizations.** Produce data profiles, data analyses, and data visualizations for the DA team to review together.

- **Offer data management coaching** to help LEAs extract data needed from their local data management systems, create data analyses, and perform other essential data management tasks. For LEAs with limited data capacity, this may include assigning a dedicated COE “data coach” to support them.

- **Establish data-sharing agreements with LEAs.** Establishing data-sharing agreements with LEAs facilitates the COE’s ability to produce data analyses/visualizations and provide more hands-on, ongoing data support.

- **Host a countywide data system** to provide local data to LEAs.

For the data inquiry process:

- **Provide TA on improvement science tools and protocols.** COEs described coaching LEAs to use a variety of improvement science tools and protocols, including problems of practice, aim statements, iceberg models, the “5 Whys” protocol, ladders of inference, empathy interviews, process maps, system simulations, fishbone diagrams, the prioritization matrix for change ideas, and cycles of inquiry.
Leverage continuous improvement tools and protocols beyond improvement science. COEs shared using tools and protocols from books such as:

- *Data Analysis for Continuous School Improvement* (Bernhardt, 2017)

One COE described using Appreciative Inquiry, a strengths-based approach to systems change: “The LEA DA teams were able to work in a space of imagination and innovation when co-creating efforts to sustain their envisioned results. This was a multiday process that was deeply engaging and resulted in sustainable action plans supported by the team and superintendent.”

Leverage the six components of the LEA Self-Assessment as a guiding framework for assessing the LEA’s system.

Use a variety of physical formats to make data analysis activities more interactive (e.g., digital tools, sticky walls, and posters).

One COE shared that after the DA team develops the problem of practice (PoP), “individuals within the team each generate as many possible ‘causes’ for the PoP and categorize each cause into one of six components (adapted from the LEA Self Assessment). . . .

Then, each team member takes three dot stickers and places them on the three root causes they believe, if resolved, would have the biggest impact on eliminating the problem of practice. A consensus tool (e.g., “fist to five”) is used to identify two to three root causes, leading to the creation of a theory of action.”

Bring LEAs together for DA data analysis activities. This can help them feel more comfortable slowing down and grappling with their data.

“Gathering LEAs together to ‘wallow’ in system information and data longer than they typically do has made the ‘5 Whys’ protocol very effective. Seeing their colleagues struggle has put them at ease and [allowed them to] understand more deeply that continuous improvement work is a process and they are not the only ones engaged in this work.”
Related Tools and Resources

From Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE):

- **Dashboard Data Analysis Protocols**: These five data protocols help DA teams understand, explore, and analyze their LEAs’ Dashboard data.

- **Root Cause Analysis Day 1 and Day 2 Sessions**: These slides, which focus on the Chronic Absenteeism indicator, introduce key continuous improvement concepts and explain how to use the “Satellite Data, Map Data, Street Data” framework.

From KCSOS:

- **Continuous Improvement Process Session Slides**: Slides for three full-day sessions for DA teams. The sessions focus on (1) performing a district data dive, (2) introducing the root cause analysis and creating a problem of practice, and (3) revisiting the problem of practice after collecting staff and community feedback.

From the Capital Central Foothills Area Consortium (CCFAC), led by PCOE and the Sacramento County Office of Education:

- **DA Improvement Science and Implementation Science Crosswalk**: This document includes links to tools to support improvement science and implementation science activities, organized by phase of the DA process. The document also has brief, embedded worksheets to support DA teams as they use these tools and record next steps.

Needs Assessment Tools

From the CCFAC:

- **Data Use Self-Assessment Toolkit**: This self-assessment and companion resources can be used to assist schools or school districts to improve their data quality, create accessible and integrated data systems, develop new data practices, and set the stage for collaborative and productive data conversations.

From the California County Superintendents (formerly California County Superintendents Educational Services Association):

- **LEA Self-Assessment**: A tool for LEA leadership teams to examine the current status of systemic practices that have been consistently demonstrated through research to be the components of effective LEA systems.
Needs Assessment Tools continued

- **LEA Self-Assessment (Abridged)**: A tool to help LEA leadership teams narrow their focus and select one or two system components to be reviewed and discussed in greater detail via the LEA Self-Assessment.

From the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE):

- **Levers for Systems Change**: This online self-assessment helps LEAs assess the quality of their educational infrastructure through the lens of six fundamental system components. The assessment results aim to help LEAs determine where best to start system improvement efforts. (*Note: Using the tool requires a quick registration step.*)

From a partnership between the California Department of Education (CDE), CCEE, and WestEd:

- **BASICS Tool for Assessing Special Education Infrastructure**: This online self-assessment helps LEAs assess the quality of their special education infrastructure through the lens of six fundamental system components for special education systems. (*Note: Using the tool requires a quick registration step.*)

From the State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices Center (SISEP) and the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN):

- **District Capacity Assessment**: This district self-assessment toolkit and training are designed to help district leaders and staff better align resources with intended outcomes and develop action plans to support the use of effective innovations.

From SWIFT Education Center:

- **SWIFT Fidelity Integrity Assessment**: This self-assessment tool helps school leadership teams examine the current implementation status of key schoolwide practices.

From Attendance Works:

- **Attendance Systems Assessment Tools**: These self-assessment tools help district and school leaders identify strengths and opportunities to develop a systemic approach to reducing chronic absence.
Element 6: Identification of Strategies/Interventions

COE leaders shared the following promising practices regarding the identification of strategies/interventions to address the LEA's areas of need, ensuring that strategies/interventions focus on the students with the greatest needs and are evidence-based.

- Use driver diagrams to develop a theory of action to test strategies.
- Support the LEA in inventorying existing initiatives prior to identifying potential new initiatives (to ensure alignment and reduce redundancies).
- Leverage public sources of vetted, evidence-based strategies such as:
  - Hattie’s “Visible Learning” Meta-Analysis of Effective Influences
  - Attendance Works
  - What Works Clearinghouse
- Curate lists of evidenced-based practices.

  “[We are] creating Evidence-Based Practices playlists that are available digitally and online.”

- Bring in content expertise as needed from within and outside of the COE.
- Develop communities of practice to allow LEAs to share strategies that are working within their systems.
- Empower all DA team members to identify strategies.

One COE shared a structured process for empowering all DA team members to research, propose, and collectively decide upon strategies.

“After having ample time to research initiatives, team members bring forth their most promising initiative to present to the entire team, facilitator, and district leadership.

Initiatives presented are rated by the team in terms of: need, fit, capacity, usability, supports, and evidence. Each initiative is also visually rated on a matrix by each team member in terms of perceived effort vs. impact.

Finally, after hearing about and rating each initiative, the team votes for the one they feel will best address the areas of need.”
Related Tools and Resources

From RCOE:

- **Evidence-Based Strategies Guidance Sheet**: An overview of evidence-based practices, including specific examples and links to curated sources of evidenced-based practices.

- **Initiative Inventory One Pager and Sample Photos**: Instructions and sample photos of a hands-on activity for inventorying existing LEA initiatives and informally evaluating their levels of implementation and impact.
Element 7: Engagement of Educational Partners

COE leaders shared the following promising practices for engaging educational partners (e.g., school staff, families, students, and community members) as part of the DA process.

- **Ask LEAs to share data they’ve collected from existing engagement/feedback loops** (e.g., from the LCAP development process or Community Schools work).
  
  “Many districts already do listening circles and thought exchanges, but we’ve recognized that these data are often lacking in the DA conversation initially. We have to be intentional in asking what information they’re already gathering that could be connected to our DA conversations.”

- **Provide the LEA with tools, coaching, and other support** as needed for gathering input from educational partners (e.g., through empathy interviews, surveys, staff interviews, and focus groups) and analyzing the resulting qualitative data.

- **Encourage the LEA to make engagement opportunities accessible**. Strategies include providing childcare, food, and input sessions that don’t overload audiences with too much information.

- **Support the LEA in developing communication plans** to communicate about DA with educational partners.

- **Encourage LEAs to include educational partners on DA teams**.
  
  “We encourage districts to form a diverse DA/Continuous Improvement Process (CIP) team that includes representatives from various educational partners within their system. . . . We provide a roster form to build the team that helps visualize the diversity of the DA team.”

- **Prompt LEAs to consider whose voices have been included and whose haven’t**. This includes encouraging LEAs to elevate student voices.

- **Meet regularly with cross-agency partners (e.g., other county departments, the SELPA, wellness partners)** to hear what they’ve learned from students, families, and community members within the LEA.
  
  “We utilize a feedback loop that works across entities in support of specific student groups. For example, the Department of Social Services and the Dependency Court judge meet with our office monthly to discuss the work around foster youth. They have major [insight] into the decisions that can either support or hurt our foster youth, so we believe these feedback loops are imperative to the success of the work.”
Element 8: Collaborative Learning/Peer Learning Structures

COE leaders shared the following promising practices for incorporating opportunities for collaborative learning/peer learning as part of DA. (This includes DA-related collaboration across COEs, LEAs, school sites, etc.)

Coordinate and facilitate collaborative trainings and/or communities of practice that focus on key topics for DA-eligible LEAs. These training series and communities of practice may be preexisting (and open to any LEA) or newly formed based on needs that surface from DA. For example, COEs described hosting trainings and communities of practice that focus on:

- topics directly tied to DA eligibility (e.g., literacy, math, attendance)
- key strategies for addressing DA-related areas for improvement (e.g., multi-tiered systems of support [MTSS], PBIS, social emotional learning, Universal Design for Learning)
- systems improvement processes (e.g., continuous improvement, strategic planning)
- specific contexts or roles (e.g., charter schools, job-alike roles at the LEA level, site principals)

One COE described some of the activities from its continuous improvement–focused community of practice for DA-eligible LEAs:

“LEAs work with their teams to complete a task (such as data analysis, identification of a PoP and root causes, etc.) and come back together. . . . Different activities are designed to create a safe space for LEAs to share their thinking/progress and solicit input from other LEAs.

These collaborations have served as an excellent opportunity for local districts to network and support each other.”

Conduct regional DA meetings or, if appropriate, use a cohort model for DA. In these environments, LEAs participate in DA activities together and use collaborative protocols (e.g., a consultancy protocol or critical friends protocol) to learn from one another.
Related Tools and Resources

From RCOE:

- **English Learner-Focused Community of Practice Slide Deck**: A slide deck for Session 1 of a community of practice that RCOE hosts for LEAs whose Dashboard performance indicates a need for additional support for students who are English learners. Such communities of practice allow LEAs to learn from and alongside peers who are focusing on the same student groups.
Element 9: Implementation Support/Ongoing Improvement Routines

COE leaders shared the following promising practices for supporting the implementation of strategies selected as part of DA. (For example, this includes monitoring implementation, establishing continuous improvement routines, and measuring the impact of DA efforts/interventions on student outcomes.)

- **Help the LEA establish continuous improvement routines and action plans.**
  For example, support LEAs in developing and documenting plans for implementation and progress monitoring. These plans should include actionable details to drive the work forward (e.g., action steps, roles, due dates, data collection steps and timelines, and a schedule for reconvening).

  “Implementation support is structured around [action plans] clearly linked to each component/subcomponent identified in the LEA Self-Assessment.

  "Each action plan consists of goals, strategies, and action steps, as well as the person responsible [for each action step] and due date.”

- **Create tools to support planning for implementation.**

  “We created a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Reflection tool to guide districts through the process of creating the right-grain-size change idea,” as well as a graphic organizer to support action planning.

- **Offer frequent check-ins** to serve as an accountability partner, document progress and next steps, and provide ongoing support throughout implementation.

  “Assigning an accountability partner from the county office for each LEA and then engaging in regular check-in meetings every 2–3 weeks has been the single greatest help LEAs have reported.

  "Data, outcomes, and next steps are all recorded on a shared electronic form that helps county office leadership see the results of the DA work.”

- **Support DA work within an ongoing LEA community of practice.** Hosting an improvement-focused community of practice (which may be open to all LEAs) can provide an opportunity for DA-eligible LEAs to continue to receive support throughout implementation.
Help the LEA coordinate with and support site leadership. This can include coordinating with site-level improvement teams (e.g., SPSA development teams) about implementation and monitoring plans. It may also include coaching site principals on implementing selected strategies.

Leverage learnings from the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN). Some COEs noted the value of participating in and offering access to NIRN training (through their Geo Lead) and using or adapting the NIRN’s stages of implementation to guide the COE’s approach to implementation support.

One COE described identifying three stages of implementation for LEAs (partly adapted from NIRN’s stages of implementation), each with clear metrics for progress monitoring:

**Stage 1: Change in Knowledge**
- Staff are trained in the identified strategy/intervention.
- **Metrics include:** Percentage of staff who have completed the training.

**Stage 2: Change in Practice**
- Staff begin to apply the new strategy/intervention in the classroom.
- Staff receive nonevaluative coaching and access to additional training as needed.
- **Metrics include:** Quantified applications of the strategy in the classroom, as well as frequency of coaching and support.

**Stage 3: Change in Outcomes**
- Student learning reflects the impact of the strategy/intervention.
- Staff assess changes in student performance, including particular attention to equity across student groups.
- **Metrics include:** California School Dashboard data and other student data.

Related Tools and Resources

**From KCSOS:**

- **Materials to Facilitate Teams’ Transitions to Implementation:** KCSOS developed this collection of materials to facilitate teams’ transitions from the systems analysis (“Focusing Direction”) stage to the implementation stage. The collection includes materials for a transition-planning meeting with the LEA superintendent, slide decks for facilitating three sessions with the full team, and accompanying tools to support teams’ action planning.
Element 10: Measuring the Quality and Impact of COE DA Processes Internally

COE leaders shared the following promising practices for COEs to use internally to measure the quality and impact of their DA support.

- **Provide surveys to DA-eligible LEAs/DA team members.** For example:
  - **Session feedback surveys** provided to LEAs/DA team members following DA team meetings and DA-related professional learning sessions
  - **Pre- and post-surveys** to assess LEAs’ understanding of improvement work prior to DA and following DA

  “We provide anonymous surveys to all team members at the end of each DA activity to seek feedback on activities and the value of time spent to identify their PoP, root causes, and theory of action.

  We provide LEA [DA] teams with a pre- and post-survey seeking their level of understanding of improvement work.

  We also annually survey all LEAs in our county, including county-authorized charters. This survey [asks about] the level of support the county office is able to provide to the LEA around a number of topics including the LCAP, DA, schools requiring technical assistance, and implementation.”

- **Conduct interviews, focus groups, and annual surveys** to collect in-depth data on LEAs’ perspectives and experiences with the DA, CSI/TSI/ATSI, and LCAP support that they have received.

- **Use progress monitoring data to assess the impact of DA support.** Using data on both implementation progress and outcomes can provide a way for COEs to assess the extent to which DA support is translating into on-the-ground system changes.

- **Develop internal DA data dashboards.** COEs described developing internal dashboards where they review DA survey data, process data, and outcome data on an ongoing basis.

- **Convene cross-departmental meetings within the COE** (e.g., involving Educational Services, Curriculum & Instruction, Continuous Improvement, and other relevant COE team members) to discuss LEA progress and needs for additional support.
Related Tools and Resources

From PCOE:

- **DA Meeting Feedback Survey**: A sample survey for collecting feedback after each DA meeting.

From RCOE:

- **DA Self-Study**: In the spirit of continuous improvement, RCOE staff conducted a “self-study” to better understand district perspectives on DA support services and inform RCOE’s future DA support. The mixed-methods study included a survey, empathy interviews with district and site representatives, and quantitative data analysis. RCOE published this brief report of findings on its website and shared the report internally and with its LEA networks. (RCOE also conducted a **CSI Self-Study**.)

- **Presentation on DA and CSI Self-Studies From the California Educational Research Association (CERA) Conference**: This slide deck, presented by RCOE at the 2023 CERA Conference, provides an overview of the methods, tools, and findings of RCOE’s DA and CSI self-studies.
**Element 11: Integration With Other Improvement Work and Accountability Processes**

COE leaders shared the following promising practices for integrating DA with CSI, TSI, ATSI, CIM, SELPA support, and other improvement processes/TA in which the LEA is participating.

- **Align DA with CIM through collaboration with SELPA leadership.** For example:
  - Include SELPA leadership in DA meetings/activities.
  - Collaborate with SELPA leadership to co-lead a root cause analysis process that addresses both DA and CIM.
  - Co-lead trainings and communities of practice (focusing on improving support for students with IEPs) with SELPA leadership.
  - Meet regularly with SELPA leadership to discuss the COE’s and SELPA’s support for LEAs and the alignment of DA and CIM.
  - Create a single improvement plan that addresses as many accountability requirements as possible for both CIM and DA.

- **Align DA with CSI/TSI/ATSI by identifying eligible schools and bringing site-level improvement work into the DA process.** For example:
  - Early in the DA process, identify which schools are eligible for CSI/TSI/ATSI based on similar outcomes, and invite site leaders from those schools into the root cause analysis and improvement planning process.
  - Facilitate a series of training sessions for LEA and site leaders on the alignment of DA/LCAP development with CSI/TSI/ATSI/SPSA development.

  "As [our COE] supports district teams in identifying their area of focus and in the root cause analysis, we discuss site needs based on site Dashboard data. In many instances, this leads to the district team requesting that the root cause analysis process be facilitated with school site teams.
  [Our COE] team members then facilitate a series of sessions with site teams to support alignment of DA/LCAP development with CSI/ATSI/SPSA processes."

- **Develop an internal COE system of support team** to facilitate coordination between different types of TA.

  "We have developed an internal COE System of Support Team for strategic purposes that includes the SELPA, Foster Youth and Homeless liaisons, the CALPADS coordinator, administrators, directors, and Continuous Improvement Specialists.” The Continuous Improvement Specialists help “connect the dots” between the various types of TA."
Related Tools and Resources

From RCOE:

- **LEA Accountability Status and Grant/Project Participation Tracker:** RCOE developed this spreadsheet tool to track the details of each LEA’s technical assistance eligibility (e.g., for DA, CSI/TSI/ATSI, and CIM) and participation in various state grants and initiatives (e.g., the California Community Schools Partnership Program, the Literacy Coaches and Reading Specialists Grant, and the Community Engagement Initiative). Having all this information about each LEA’s improvement efforts in one place can help support alignment between these strands of work.

- **LEA DA Eligibility and COE/SELPA Collaborative Support Details:** Slides 17–24 offer examples of how RCOE and the Riverside County SELPA collaborate to support LEAs in serving students with IEPs. The slides include some artifacts produced through this collaboration.
Element 12: Integrating DA With the LCAP

COE leaders shared the following promising practices for supporting LEAs with aligning and integrating DA with their LCAP process and reflecting their DA improvement work within their LCAP document.

These practices can also support the steps that COEs and LEAs are now required to take to support alignment between DA and the LCAP, per 2023 legislation. Those steps are:

- DA should include a review of the LCAP goals, actions, and services.\(^5\)
- The LCAP must include actions and services that implement the work related to DA.\(^6\)
- The LCAP’s Plan Summary must include a summary of the LEA’s work underway as part of DA.

- **Assign the same COE staff member** as both the DA lead and LCAP reader.

- **Provide LEAs with a set of organized online folders (e.g., through Google Drive) that contain data analyses and other key materials from the DA process.** Suggest to the LEA’s LCAP writer that some of this content can be leveraged for LCAP development.

- **During LCAP development, provide the LEA with support to incorporate DA results.** LCAP workshops and meetings with individual LEAs should include guidance and individualized support for incorporating DA results (such as data analyses, goals, and planned actions and services) into the LCAP.

  “LCAP Plan Summary prompts are used in DA discussions with districts and connected to written LCAP responses. Actions identified [in the LCAP] are often resulting from focused improvement science work in our DA process.”

- **Develop tools that connect DA data to LCAP actions and services.**

  One COE developed a “Connecting the Dots” worksheet that “leads districts through identifying strengths and weaknesses for student groups based on data and then connecting those to LCAP actions and services.”

  This includes considering how LCAP goals, actions, and services may need to be added or revised based on the data and DA process.

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\(^5\) Per EC Section 52071(c)(1)(E)

\(^6\) Per EC Section 52070(d)(1)(F)
Element 13: Two-Year DA Timeline

Although the statewide shift to a minimum 2-year DA timeline is new for the 2023/24 school year, several COEs described having already tested and adopted an 18-month or 2-year DA process during the pandemic.

COEs that have already been implementing this longer DA timeline shared the following promising practices for implementing DA over a 2-year (or longer) timeline.

- **Develop a timeline that invests additional time at the beginning of the DA process to build a solid foundation for success.** This includes taking the time for an effective onboarding, building data literacy among DA team members, and conducting a thorough root cause analysis.

  “We have used an 18-month DA Process Map for a few years now and it has been very successful. . . . It takes the onboarding time seriously (approx. 4–6 months) to set up the work and then utilizes the PDSA cycle for a full year after that.”

- **Plan for a full year of PDSA cycles,** including supporting the LEA with implementation, progress monitoring, and making data-informed adjustments.

  “We have approached our DA and other support and technical assistance as an ongoing and cyclical process.”

  “This extended time frame allows for the development and implementation of the entire Continuous Improvement Process (CIP) Plan and implementation support. The result is a more sustainable approach to improvement that prioritizes long-term system change.

  Ongoing evaluation and assessment are essential elements of any continuous improvement process, allowing us to gauge the effectiveness of interventions, make data-informed adjustments, and ensure that improvements are not merely transient, but deeply embedded into the educational fabric [of the system].”
Element 14: Supporting Charter Schools

COE leaders shared the following promising practices learned from providing technical assistance to charter schools (e.g., through CSI/TSI/ATSI) that may also be applicable to DA support for charter schools.

- **Connect with charter schools through charter school networks/communities of practice.** Leading or co-leading charter school networks offers charter schools an opportunity to collaborate and learn from each other. Such networks have also helped COEs build relationships with charter school leaders, learn about charter schools’ contexts and needs, and help charter schools see the COE as a positive support provider.

- **Invest time in building relationships with the leaders of DA-eligible charter schools and providing a thorough, positive onboarding experience, including listening to leaders and learning about their schools.** These steps may be especially critical for charter schools, given their unique contexts and given that most have had little exposure to DA in previous school years. See the first section in this document (“Element 1: DA Onboarding, Ongoing Communication, and Relationship-Building”) for specific practices to support relationship-building and effective onboarding.

- **Connect DA to existing TA for charter schools.** For example:
  - Make connections to DA during charter school LCAP workshops and individual support for LCAP development.
  - Connect DA to the charter school’s existing CSI/TSI/ATSI improvement work, if applicable.

  “DA/CSI/ATSI topics are embedded within the [Charter Schools] LCAP workshop series. The workshop series is co-presented by [our COE’s] LCAP team, DA support team, and Charter Schools Unit to demonstrate the collaborative effort between departments to improve student outcomes.”

- **Collaborate with the California Charter Schools Association** to develop webinars and written resources for DA-eligible charter schools.

**Related Tools and Resources**

**From RCOE:**

- **Dashboard and DA Overview During a Charter Schools LCAP Workshop:** A slide deck from RCOE’s Charter Schools LCAP Workshop series. Slides 42–64 include an overview of the Dashboard and DA for charter schools.
COE leaders shared these additional promising practices for DA.

**Participate in regional collaborative opportunities to share DA promising practices with other COEs.** For example, the newly formed DA Onboarding Workgroup, Geo Leads huddles, and other learning collaboratives (which vary by region) have provided opportunities for COEs to share promising DA practices with each other.

**Tailor DA support to meet the unique needs of small, rural LEAs.** For example:
- Collaborate closely with LEA superintendent/principal (often a joint role) to learn about the LEA’s unique context and needs.
- Align any TA processes (e.g., DA, CSI/TSI/ATSI, and CIM) to the greatest extent possible.
- Offer additional support with fiscal and programmatic development as needed.
- Host meetings for small, rural LEAs to collaborate on LCAP development, strengthen relationships, and work through shared problems of practice.

> “Being rural, having several single-school districts that have the [combined] role of superintendent/principal/curriculum director . . . we have to align [all our TA] for sustainability and to maintain engagement, as they don’t have the capacity to do this any other way.”

**Create and communicate a clear throughline between the DA process and school- and classroom-level support.** For example, one COE described how using the concrete, familiar framework of MTSS has enabled the DA team to more clearly communicate about how DA’s LEA-level work translates to enhanced support for students at the school and classroom levels. The COE has invested in building MTSS structures within its LEAs, hosts MTSS trainings and communities of practice for LEAs and site leaders, and uses DA to focus its efforts on enhancing student-level supports through MTSS.

> “[Using MTSS as our foundational strategy for DA] has particularly appealed to our districts, as it builds the mindset, structures, and skills needed by district admin and teachers to address the needs of all students.”

**Develop a brief DA guidebook or framework that links DA to other parts of the COE’s and/or LEAs’ work.** This resource would then be shared with COE staff, LEA staff, and educational partners.

**If possible, dedicate COE staff positions to focus primarily on DA and other continuous improvement work.**

> “The acquisition of staff who have the ability to focus on DA work, with a minimal amount of distractions, and the capacity, knowledge, and skills to facilitate the process, has been invaluable.”
Appendix A: Summary of Methodology for Identifying COEs and Districts for Interviews

To identify COEs and districts to interview for the qualitative component of this research, the WestEd team analyzed quantitative data to identify counties in which DA-eligible districts experienced better-than-expected performance compared to DA-eligible districts statewide.

The analyses leveraged publicly available student outcome data from 2019, 2022, and 2023, and the research team focused primarily on districts’ changes in performance between 2019 and 2023. Data sources are listed in Table A-1.

Table A-1: Key Data Sources and Types of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Key types of data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) Data</td>
<td>2019, 2022, and 2023 student outcome data (by student group and indicator for each district)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDE DA Eligibility Data</td>
<td>Multi-year DA eligibility by student group and by “priority area” (which is typically a combination of indicators) for each district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDE Enrollment Data</td>
<td>Total count of students enrolled by student group for each district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDE Chronic Absenteeism Data</td>
<td>Total count of students chronically absent by student group for each district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Conducted for the DA Evaluation (2022)</td>
<td>District ratings of DA quality by COE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Priorities within these analyses included:

- Incorporating multiple measures of performance, including individual measures (i.e., math, ELA, and chronic absenteeism) as well as more comprehensive measures (i.e., DA eligibility or non-eligibility).
- Controlling for student demographic factors (through “beating the odds” regression analyses).

In summary, the analyses sought to identify counties in which DA-eligible districts, in comparison to their DA-eligible peers statewide, met as many of the following criteria:

1. A comparatively large proportion of districts that were eligible for DA in 2019 were no longer eligible in 2023.
2. From 2019 to 2023, districts experienced a decline or comparatively small increase in the average number of student groups prompting DA eligibility. (On average, DA-eligible districts statewide experienced an increase of 0.5 more eligible student groups.)
3. Districts demonstrated better-than-predicted performance (i.e., were “beating the odds”) based on a series of regression analyses. These statistical predictions took into account many student demographic factors as well as each district’s prior performance. Specifically, the research team looked for counties with higher proportions of DA-eligible districts that were “beating the odds” in any of the following areas:
   a. higher than predicted ELA proficiency in 2023
   b. higher than predicted math proficiency in 2023
   c. lower than predicted chronic absenteeism in 2023

In addition to the aforementioned analyses of student performance data, the research team also took into consideration whether COEs received “high” or “very high” ratings of DA quality from their districts, on average. These survey data were collected by WestEd for the Evaluation of California’s Differentiated Assistance. The research team executed a data-sharing agreement with the CDE to obtain permission to use the survey data for this analysis, and, accordingly, has kept individual COEs’ DA quality ratings confidential.

Upon completing the above analyses and identifying the COEs that met the greatest number of the above criteria, the research team obtained the list of nine COEs that were ultimately interviewed for this research. To determine which districts to interview, the research team contacted leaders from each COE and shared the list of districts that met the greatest number of positive performance criteria (listed above) within the county. Upon confirmation from the COE that these districts had engaged with DA support, the research team invited district leaders from between two and four districts per county to participate in interviews.
Appendix B: Survey Response Rates and Frequency of Responses by DA Elements

Table B-1. Number of Survey Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COE respondents</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responded and shared promising practices</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responded that they did not have promising practices to share</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33 (57% of 58 COEs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table B-2. Frequency of Responses by DA Element

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DA element</th>
<th>Number of responses (out of 29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DA onboarding and ongoing communication/relationship-building</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis/root causes</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making around which student group/indicators to focus on for DA</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration with other improvement work/accountability processes</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centering equity within DA</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative learning/peer learning structures</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation support/ongoing improvement routines</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for working with LEAs with high turnover</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement of educational partners</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating DA with the LCAP</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Measuring the quality and impact of COE DA processes internally</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of strategies/interventions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting charter schools</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-year DA timeline</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</table>