RIVERSIDE COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Comprehensive Support and Improvement

Perspectives and Feedback From District, Charter, and Site Leaders in Riverside County

Prepared by the Riverside County Office of Education

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Table of Contents

Appendices

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Introduction

Riverside County is located in Southern California and covers over 7,300 square miles, bordering Orange County to the west and the state of Arizona to the east. The county population is nearly 2.5 million with a student population of over 430,000. There are 23 school districts in Riverside County as well as 33 charter schools. The Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) provides direct student services including early childhood, special education, and alternative education programs as well as educational, legislative, and leadership services to all TK-12 local education agencies (LEA). The Riverside County Office of Education is comprised of an elected County Superintendent of Schools and employees who support the LEAs in a wide array of statutory duties and responsibilities. RCOE's pledge states, ***"Every student in Riverside County will graduate from high school academically and socially prepared for college, the workforce, and civic responsibility."*** This pledge helps to inform the work that is performed as well as define the measure of success in achievable terms.

The **California System of Support** is designed as a tiered model, which affords services to CA districts and schools based upon identified needs in order to support continuous improvement efforts. Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) is federal accountability that is required under the Every Student Succeeds Act[1] (ESSA) and is part of California's Accountability and Continuous Improvement System[2]. Eligibility of schools is based on two criteria[3]:

- Low graduation rate,
- Not less than the lowest-performing five percent of Title 1 schools in California.

Schools eligible for CSI are evaluated annually to determine if they continue to be eligible or if they meet criteria to exit. The "low graduation rate" eligibility is based on a school-level combined four and five-year graduation rate averaged over three years. Schools with a graduation rate less than 68 percent are eligible for CSI regardless of Title 1 status. Dashboard Alternative Status Schools (DASS) have historically based CSI status on a one-year graduation rate, however in 2022 the US Department of Education denied California's request for modified methods for DASS. As a result, DASS eligibility will be based on a combined 4- and 5-year graduation rate in 2022. Combined 4- and 5-year graduation rates are published on the CA School Dashboard[4].

The "low-performing schools" category is based on the lowest performing five percent of Title 1 schools and is based on color combinations (status and change) on the California School Dashboard. Eligibility criteria are as follows:

- Schools with all red indicators;
- Schools with all red but one indicator of any other color;
- Schools with all red and orange indicators; and
- Schools with five or more indicators where the majority are red.

Due to the changes made to the dashboard by AB 130, the 2022 Dashboard will not contain performance level colors which result from a combination of "status" (current year performance) and "change" (difference between current year and prior year.) The 2022 Dashboard will provide only a status level for each indicator ranging from 'very low' to 'very high' which will be used to determine CSI eligibility in lieu of the dashboard performance level colors. The 'lowest status' will be used as a proxy for a red performance level. The 'lowest status' for the Academic Indicator, Graduation Rate, and English Learner Progress Indicator (ELPI) is 'very low.' The 'lowest status' for Chronic Absenteeism and Suspension Rate indicators is 'very high.'

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[1] CA Department of Education (CDE): Every Student Succeeds Act https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/es/
[2] CA Department of Education (CDE): Accountability & Continuous Improvement System www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/dashboardkeypoints.asp
[3] CDE: Comprehensive Support and Improvement https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/csi.asp
[4] CA School Dashboard: www.caschooldashboard.org/

Every Student Succeeds Act and CA ESSA Requirements

ESSA Section 1111(d) requires each State to notify each LEA that serves schools eligible for CSI. Once LEAs are notified, and in partnership with educational partners and for each school that meets the criteria, the LEA shall locally develop and implement a plan for the school to improve student outcomes and approve each plan. The plan must[5]:

- Be informed by all State indicators, including performance against State-determined long-term goals;
- Be based on a school level-needs assessment and root cause analysis;
- Include evidence-based interventions;
- Identify resource inequities, which may include a review of LEA- and school-level budgets and address the inequities through implementation of the plan; and
- Use data and outcomes to monitor and evaluate improvement efforts.

CA Assembly Bill (AB) 716 and California Education Code sections 64001–65001, streamlines and aligns state and federal planning processes[6]. Effective January 1, 2019, this law renames the Single Plan for Student Achievement to the School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). Additionally, the law contains the following key provisions:

- Allows the SPSA to meet ESSA requirements for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement planning.
- Allows single school districts and charter schools to utilize the LCAP to serve as the SPSA, provided that the LCAP meets the ESSA school planning requirements and the stakeholder requirements established in subdivision (a) of Section 52062[7].

LEAs receive a formula-based allocation for each school that is eligible for CSI. CDE requires LEAs that receive ESSA, Section 1003 school improvement funds, to prioritize and focus these funds towards the area(s) identified for improvement for each school that was identified for CSI, based on the school-level needs assessment(s) and root cause analysis. LEAs must only expend ESSA school improvement funds at or on behalf of its CSI-eligible schools on evidence-based interventions/strategies/activities directly related to the following CSI plan development and implementation efforts[8]:

- Building capacity.
- Partnering with stakeholders.
- Conducting needs assessments and root cause analysis.
- Selecting and implementing evidence-based interventions/strategies/activities.
- Reviewing/identifying and addressing, through implementation of the CSI plan, resource inequities, which may include a review of LEA- and school-level budgeting.

LEAs with schools that meet the criteria for CSI must also complete the CSI prompts located in the Plan Summary section of the LCAP. This must include:

- A list of the schools in the LEA that are eligible for CSI.
- A description of how the LEA has or will support its eligible schools in developing comprehensive support and improvement plans.
- A description of how the LEA will monitor and evaluate the plan to support student and school improvement.

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[5] CDE Comprehensive Support and Improvement www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/csi.asp
[6] CA Assembly Bill 716 leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB716
[7] CA Education Code 52062 leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&sectionNum=52062
[8] CDE ESSA CSI Local Educational Agency (LEA) Authorized Use of Funds www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/csileaauthusefunds.asp

The Role of County Offices of Education in CSI Support

The role of the County Office of Education is to provide technical assistance to LEAs with schools eligible for CSI. COEs with LEAs in their county with schools that are eligible for CSI will receive a funding allocation based on the total number of schools eligible for CSI for the purposes of providing technical assistance. COEs that have LEAs within their county that serve schools eligible for CSI are required to[9]:

- Support LEAs to meaningfully address the CSI prompts in the Plan Summary of the LCAP related to CSI activities.
- Review and approve the CSI prompts in the LEA LCAP Plan Summary.

In Riverside County, CSI technical assistance consists of several common processes that are differentiated for each district with eligible schools. Comprehensive Support and Improvement takes place throughout the school year. After the annual publication of the CA School Dashboard in December, representatives from RCOE communicate with each district that has schools eligible for CSI. This is followed by personalized invitations to each district with schools eligible for CSI to participate in a series of professional learning opportunities, which include:

- Comprehensive needs assessments and root cause analysis;
- Identification of resource inequities;
- Identification, selection, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of evidence-based interventions; and
- Meaningful School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) development and implementation.

Additionally, RCOE offers customized support in the following areas:

- Building improvement capacity.
- Content area support related to identified area(s) of need.

In 2021, Riverside County had six CSI schools eligible for CSI based on "low graduation rate" criteria and 22 schools eligible based on "low performing" criteria. Of these 28 schools, 12 were DASS schools. At the time of the publication of this report, the CA Department of Education had not yet released the CSI eligibility file based on the 2022 CA School Dashboard.

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[9] CDE CSI Technical Assistance www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/csi.asp#what-support-will-the-coe-be-required-to-provide-to-leas-with-schools-eligible-for-csi

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this self-study was to determine the successes and challenges of CSI assistance as perceived and reported by LEA and site leaders in Riverside County with a focus on how CSI support impacted student outcomes. As such, the results of this study will inform future CSI services that capitalize on shared successes and identify actions to address challenges.

This study used multiple methods to obtain input from district and school leaders. LEA and school leaders from LEAs with schools eligible for CSI were invited to participate in a digital survey. All survey participants were invited to participate in empathy interviews using a semi-structured interview process. All participants who agreed to participate in the empathy interview were included in the sample.

Quantitative data was also reviewed from the 2018 and 2019 Dashboard and the California Department of Education's ESSA Eligibility files along with DataQuest and local data in 2020 and 2021. Data were examined to determine areas of student need. Student growth questions were asked to ascertain district and site leaders' perceptions of attribution for improved student outcomes.

Survey responses were collected and reviewed. Interview responses were qualitatively coded for trends and themes related to successes and challenges of CSI support. Trends and themes were compiled and summarized in this report.
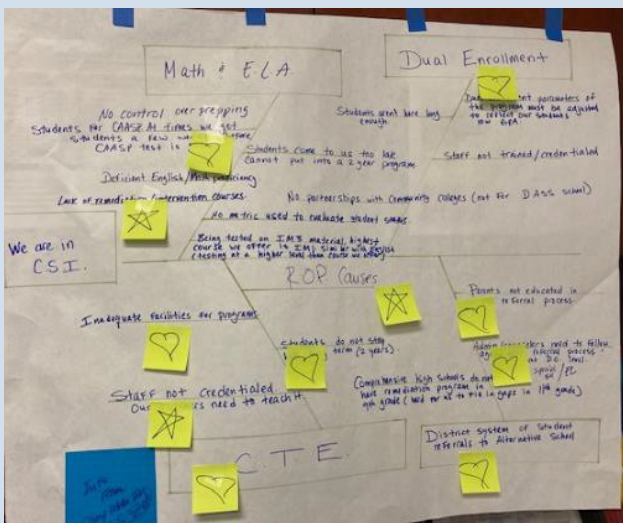
Number of Schools in Riverside County Eligible for CSI in 2017-18	43
Number of Schools in Riverside County Eligible for CSI in 2018-19	33
Number of Schools in Riverside County Eligible for CSI in 2019-20	33
Number of Schools in Riverside County Eligible for CSI in 2021-22*	28
Number of Respondents in Riverside County Participating in CSI Survey	22
Number of District and School Leaders** in Riverside County Participating in an Empathy Interview	20

*Schools were not identified in 2020-2021 as a result of CA AB130 and the COVID-19 pandemic.

**See Appendix B for list of participating districts and schools

Key Findings

In reviewing various data sources including survey results, meeting notes, and interview transcripts, there were several common findings evident in district and school representatives' responses about CSI.

- Several participants noted internal **success** as evidenced by local assessments (e.g. iReady, Measures of Academic Progress - MAP, district assessments) in focus areas due to **prioritizing needs**, selecting a **focus area** for improvement work, and **frequent monitoring** of the actions associated with the focus area. Interviews revealed that participants attributed success to a **targeted focus** on specific **student groups** or **indicators** as the improvement efforts ensured, "the team had a clear understanding of the problems in the system, the root causes of those problems, and a data collection and analysis plan to monitor the changes being introduced to the system in order to determine the level of success of those changes."

- CSI is a **collaborative process** requiring participation from a **variety of team members** at the site along with school district support. Although several participants shared their initial perception of CSI identification as a negative and/or like "the old days of Program Improvement," by participating in the continuous improvement process using Improvement Science, participants reported the increased value and meaning when district and site leaders approached the work "as a team" by including **diverse perspectives** from those with knowledge, experience, and/or interest in the identified focus area(s). Additionally, site leaders indicated that a collaborative process decreased their sense of being "overwhelmed" and increased their **confidence** in leading change to "address CSI eligibility." One school principal noted, "I was so glad I had a team at the school level, district level, and county level. I could not have done this alone."

- Districts and schools prefer that the County Office of Education provide a **customized approach to CSI support**. As evidenced by surveys, interviews, and work sessions, participants repeatedly indicate that each school's improvement journey is **unique** and contingent upon the **context** of their school. Site leaders noted that improvement planning, implementation, and monitoring "varied based on indicator, student group, and/or existing improvement efforts within the district, and even our geographic area as student needs vary greatly contingent on where we are located and the local services available to our school community."

- Efforts are still needed in **alignment** between **SPSA** and **LCAP**. Student needs inform what is funded in the SPSA and LCAP; therefore, actions should be aligned and coherent, not disjointed or create competing priorities. Participants indicated that through root cause analysis, causes for problems within their system often connected back to a lack of alignment within the school and within the district. One principal shared during a workshop session, "If I have to use the LCAP goals as my SPSA goals and my CSI needs are showing something different, I am stuck with a misaligned SPSA that does not address my CSI eligibility."

- Districts and sites would like more **flexibility** in how they can use **CSI funds** allocated by the CA Department of Education under the Every Student Succeeds Act. Hiring **additional permanent staff** is prohibited and often the needs require additional team members to implement identified evidence-based practices. As teams engage in identification and selection of evidence-based practices, especially to address low performance of academic indicators (ELA, Math, ELPI) through analyzing Tier I - III evidence-based interventions, they find specialized programs or personnel have demonstrated strong evidence of success; however, expending CSI grant funds does not allow for the hiring of permanent personnel.

Detailed Findings: Survey and Interview Responses from District and School Leaders

Summary of School Growth and Progress

LEA and school leaders who participated in the CSI study were asked if CSI identified schools have shown any **growth** as evidenced by student outcome data. Improvements could be based on local, Dashboard, or observational data. Two participants reported that scores at the schools had not improved or had gotten worse but attributed declines to **changes in site and district leadership**. Some schools mentioned that they were still waiting on official dashboard scores to confirm progress. The majority of schools that participated in the study did report there was growth at their CSI schools. The growth was reported in **improved local results** as well as in **graduation rates**. A few school leaders were optimistic that, due to improvements made at the site, the schools would be **eligible to exit CSI** once the official Dashboard data is released.

The growth at schools eligible for CSI was attributed to many different factors. Some LEA and school leaders believed that the growth was a result of a **specific focus** that the school prioritized based on CSI eligibility. When the school was able to **target specific areas**, they noted growth in those areas. Specific areas of focus for the schools include A-G completion; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI); Dual Enrollment; and CTE offerings. Most of these courses were being offered at Dashboard Alternative Status Schools (DASS) for the first time. Other programs that were offered that were deemed successful were after-school tutoring, targeted Literacy intervention for English Learners (EL) and cognitive coaching in mathematics, done in conjunction with RCOE.

Study participants were also able to discuss other factors that they believe helped them have success in their schools. Some of these factors were **implementing** specific strategies as well as **planning**. Schools believed that **writing effective plans** was a way to remain focused and use funds to implement effective strategies. These strategies included **professional development** and **classroom observations**. **Data analysis** was also a common theme with many schools using **professional learning community (PLC) meetings** to analyze data and focus on areas of improvement for students. Other schools believed that bringing in **new staff** such as counselors, coordinators, or instructional assistants helped to improve outcomes for students.

LEA and school leaders commented on the **improved systems** they have seen in place at the CSI schools. These systems have helped **improve monitoring** of students as well as **academic supports** according to those interviewed. Schools had also seen improvements in **culture** as a result of CSI identification. Schools reported an "increased feeling and belonging" and the "culture and climate improved at all of the schools eligible for CSI." One district leader described the culture at the school best as "they see [the school] as a second home, as a safe home, so the culture has been enhanced due to CSI."

A common theme when discussing the success of the schools was **leadership** and **teams**. Many LEAs and school leaders attributed the success of the school to working with **leadership teams** and **teams of teachers** to **analyze data** and **plan for improvement**. Teams felt it was important for everyone to be on board with the plan and work with the plan including the root cause analysis or comprehensive needs assessment. Most schools were appreciative of the support provided by RCOE. They noted that RCOE was able to help put data analysis into place as well as targeted support to help improve outcomes at their schools. One district even said, "We attribute the success to RCOE, the approach and collaboration they had helped to open our minds."

Spotlight on Success

A Systemic and Targeted Approach at a Riverside County Middle School

Ongoing success under the umbrella of CSI is evident in Riverside County. Thomas Jefferson Middle School in the Desert Sands Unified School District, originally identified for CSI in 2018, is one of the schools making great strides. When beginning the work for CSI at this middle school, the principal knew it was important to build a team of leaders who could help guide the work. After the team conducted a root-cause analysis based on data from the California School Dashboard, iReady local assessment results, and academic grades, they created a plan focused on literacy equity. The plan took into consideration the resource inequities that exist at the site and allowed the team to revisit and modify interventions as necessary. The school set up a cycle of monitoring that allows them to revisit the plan and the interventions to ensure they have the desired impact. When an outcome is not as expected or anticipated, the team can quickly adjust to improve outcomes. The school began the literacy work with a focus on Schoolwide Instructional Practices, which has grown to include Targeted Literacy Intervention, English Language Development, and Instructional Rounds, the most recent addition being Instructional Coaching. The success of the school has centered on its use of the Continuous Improvement model to analyze data and make decisions based on the needs of the students.
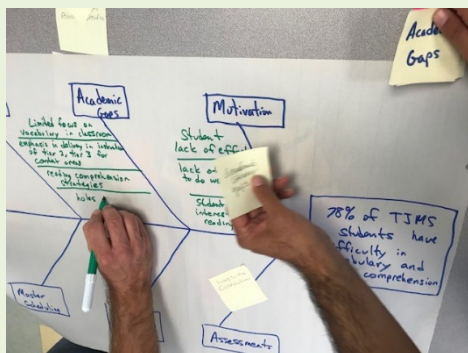
Creating New Opportunities for Students at a Riverside County Continuation High School

Continuation schools in Riverside County have provided an alternative setting to achieve graduation for students who may not have been successful in the comprehensive setting. Alvord Continuation High School has not only succeeded in supporting students in graduation, but the school has created opportunities that have not been available previously. Alvord Continuation High School is eligible for CSI due to Low Performance. As the majority of their student population are high school seniors, the improvement team's inquiry began with leveraging the College and Career Indicator (CCI) to address the root causes of low performance. Through persistence, a strong partnership with Riverside Community College (RCC) and ongoing capacity development, students at Alvord Continuation High School now have access to at least two college courses per year. During year one of implementation, 14/15 students not only accessed these college courses, but successful completed and passed both courses. This was due to the improvement team's comprehensive planning and ongoing Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles. The team realized that dual enrollment would ensure access; however, students at ACHS needed and wanted more than just access. The school developed a support plan in which students received direct and indirect support from an on-site teacher who not only communicated with the RCC professor, but who provided guidance, time and ongoing accountability to students who enrolled in RCC courses. Students who complete and pass two college courses are considered Prepared as measured by the CCI. As ACHS' improvement journey continues, the school has developed stand-alone CTE courses and is in the process of developing Nonregistered Pre-Apprenticeships. When Non-Registered Pre-Apprenticeships are integrated into a stand-alone CTE course, students have an additional path to graduate Prepared as measured by the CCI.

Additional stories of success will be featured during the **CSI Showcase: Journeys of Improvement in Riverside County** series scheduled in early 2023. Register here: https://rcoe.k12oms.org/2182-225087.

Perceptions About CSI

District and school leaders were first asked their perceptions when they hear the term "Comprehensive Support and Improvement" (CSI). While the initial responses were varied, some leaders said that they "looked at it as a negative" and a few compared it to Program Improvement. Some districts saw the eligibility for CSI as "not good news" and knew they were "failing to meet requirements" or "low-performing". Leaders shared we "feel like they want to get out" and one saw the label as "a lot of work" with one school principal asking, "What did we get ourselves into?"

Accountability was a common theme regarding CSI. Districts mentioned the Dashboard and the need to "look at data and figure out what to do to increase mastery." **In-depth data analysis** was mentioned as well as focusing on "red indicators" on the dashboard. These thoughts regarding the dashboard also brought to mind considerations such as, "What does this [identification] mean for accountability?"

While the initial perceptions might have been negative, most districts also had positive comments regarding CSI technical assistance. Most leaders saw CSI as a "**support structure** that comes with **funding**." They commented that CSI provided **extra targeted support** or different types of support to each school. One leader commented that their perspective changed, "I have shifted; I now believe it is a **collaborative opportunity** to bring stakeholders on board to support and go on a journey of success."

Some leaders commented on the resources that CSI provided. These leaders believed that the CSI identification was a way to **use resources to address needs in a targeted fashion**. Leaders believed that CSI gave them a way to look at outcomes and use resources to help facilitate a conversation around **evidence-based practices**, which need to be in place to address low performance, according to one leader.

Overall, CSI was seen as "more collaborative than punitive" and "extra help" for the schools. The term itself was seen as a "catalyst to get schools to improve" and the goal was seen as **helping schools to turn around**. As one school leader said, "CSI isn't negative; it is trying to make you better."

Perceptions About In-Person CSI Meetings Facilitated by RCOE

District and school leaders were asked for their perspectives on the support meetings facilitated by the Riverside County Office of Education staff. Most leaders saw the support in these types of meetings as positive with only a few commenting that they believed the work was disjointed. Some respondents indicated that they were unable to provide their perception because they did not participate due to COVID. Almost all of the leaders who participated or received this level of support were appreciative. They believed that the meetings were "really great" and they were given "good **tools**." The leaders believed that the meetings "helped with getting **services**, **training**, and **data collection**," and they always felt like they were "**supportive** the whole time."

Leaders who were interviewed were also very complimentary of the **responsiveness** and support provided by the RCOE team. Leaders appreciated having a **point of contact** at the county who was responsive when they had a question. Participants felt they were able to get their questions answered quickly and that, "RCOE is always available to troubleshoot". They felt that **direct communication** with RCOE was positive and appreciated the **follow-up** when they were not able to make it to a meeting or a site.

Overall, **personalized support** provided by RCOE was appreciated with LEAs mentioning that RCOE had an "excellent approach" and that they "love what RCOE does." The respondents reported RCOE has been "very helpful to keep us on track with support and brainstorming" and that "RCOE is there when the district needs them." Districts and school leaders mentioned that they appreciated their **relationship** with RCOE staff commenting that, "We are fortunate to have a good working relationship with the RCOE team."

Perceptions About CSI In-Person Workshops and Trainings Facilitated by RCOE

LEA and school leaders were asked to provide their perspectives regarding CSI workshops that were inclusive of root cause analysis sessions. Almost all of the participating schools and districts found these workshops useful with only one choosing not to participate. Online survey responses ranked workshops as 44% excellent, 44% Good and 5% Fair with one district choosing "did not participate." This one district believed that the web-conference format was difficult and that there was too much information covered in the time which made the workshop overwhelming[10]. One survey participant commented that the presentation format was not very accessible and that there needed to be adjustments made prior to presenting the information to school level leadership. All of the other LEAs found the workshops "useful" or "very accessible."

Leaders who participated in the study commented on the tools that were provided by the workshop. The tools were hard to understand at the beginning for some, but the workshops and explanations "paid off and the tools made sense." Leaders were able to use the tools in their schools such as **empathy interviews**, **driver diagrams**, and **aim statements** to help **develop plans**[11]. According to survey participant comments, the **presentations** themselves were also useful when presenting the information to districts. The workshops themselves became a tool allowing some districts and schools to "network with other schools and districts to see what they are doing."

Workshops were seen in a positive light by many with most leaders able to use the content to **create customized support for their schools**. They viewed the workshop as a help for them to be able to "**see their why**" or time to find **common themes** between their CSI schools and the district. Leaders saw the workshop time as being "crucial to being able to accomplish what we did." As one district leader said, "These workshops were outstanding."

Perceptions About CSI Follow-Up Support Provided by RCOE

CSI follow-up support was provided to LEAs and schools who asked for additional support beyond initial meetings and workshops. Leaders who took part in this type of follow-up support were asked their perspectives regarding the support. Follow-up support included a variety of options; **meeting** once or twice via web conference, meeting weekly to check-in and **discuss data**, **root cause analysis support** for the site administrator or leadership team, **coaching** sessions with RCOE and the school team, RCOE support for **EL team** and **EL instruction**, **improvement science** training, and support in improving **data collection systems** among other services.

Participants in follow-up support saw the experience as positive. Leaders commented that the "support was helpful and targeted to my school." Respondents felt like the support was "where I have seen the most growth with our school site" with the same district commenting, "It is like hitting the jackpot to be able to **identify the root cause** and exact needs of the students and implement a targeted intervention."

Participants in the study were complimentary of the support from the Riverside County Office of Education staff. Leaders commented that, "RCOE provided clarity and samples" and that "RCOE assisted at every step, including the data collection system." The leaders felt that RCOE was "**proactive**" and appreciated the support provided by the county.

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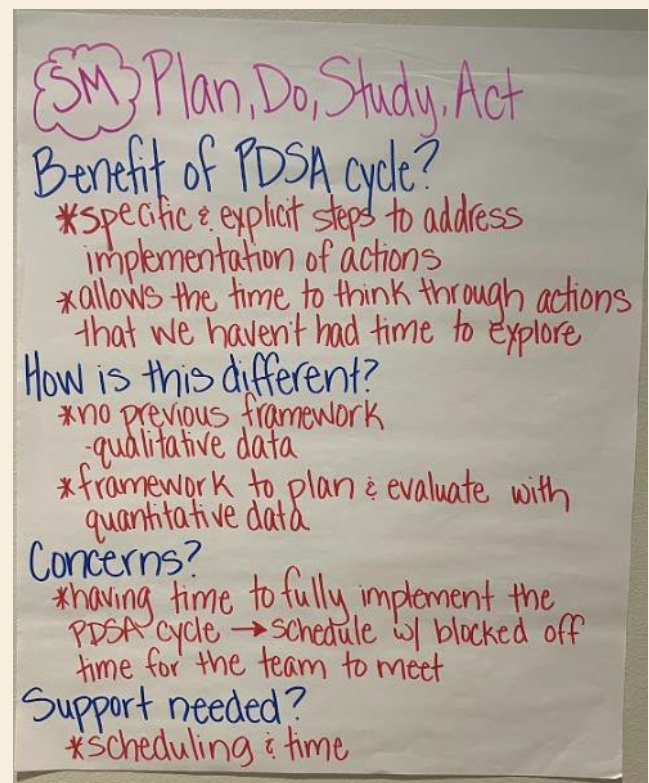
[10] Web conference sessions were required due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and inability to convene in-person workshops.

[11] CDE Improvement frameworks and continuous improvement tools www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/continuousimprovement.asp#frameworks

Perceptions About School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) Trainings and Support Provided by RCOE

Participants in the study were asked their perceptions regarding support for developing the School Plan for Student Achievement if they participated. SPSA workshops and support include a comprehensive overview of SPSA plan and implementation requirements with a variety of resources to develop a meaningful School Plan, which articulates the needs of the school, goals and actions aligned to those needs with clear metrics to monitor and evaluate each action. Additionally, all SPSA workshops and customized support opportunities include activities that demonstrate how SPSAs directly connect to and support the district LCAP.

District and school leaders who participated in SPSA workshops commented that the experience was positive. Leaders believed that the workshops were informational and had positive outcomes. Participants reported that workshops gave them a **process to follow** and helped the district **align the SPSA with the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)**. One district commented that the workshop was an "Ah-ha" with a realization that "we were doing some things not quite in line with the intention of the SPSA," and they were able to modify their practice to improve their school sites SPSAs. Other districts thought that the workshops were able to break down the parts of the SPSA, take what was confusing, and make it easier to understand by providing **examples**, which helped lead to clearer SPSAs.

Some districts and schools requested follow-up support regarding SPSA development after the SPSA workshops. The leaders who participated in SPSA follow-up support commented on it positively. Leaders believe that this support "went well" and that the goals were better than they would have been by just attending the general workshop. One district was able to reformat their basic SPSA template based on support and another school site was able to develop a **SPSA evaluation tool** based on support. Overall SPSA follow-up support was seen as "excellent" and one district said the "outside support was so helpful."

District and School Leader Feedback to Improve COE CSI Support

District and school leaders who participated in the study were asked to provide information on how RCOE could improve their practice in providing CSI technical assistance. Most comments regarding improving support were related to customizable services. Leaders wanted to be able to **choose the type of support** they could request such as varying levels of workshops (beginning, intermediate, or advanced), regional offerings in various locations, virtual events vs. in-person, and one-on-one support.

Interview participants' suggested additional improvements as well. Some districts requested **check-ins** with RCOE staff on a **more regular basis** while other schools requested check-ins with other schools, such as alternative schools, where they can **share ideas** and information. A few districts also mentioned c**ounty liaisons or coaches for principals** who could be consistent supporters through the process. Regardless of what type of support is offered, districts also mentioned that **communication** regarding offerings should be sent to multiple people in the district including district Cabinet members as well as reminders to ensure that no one misses an important meeting or workshop.

District and school leaders perceived that **mindset** in regards to CSI might also be an issue. Some districts recognized that it is difficult to have the county office provide mandated support and that there needs to be a certain level of comfort built between the school and the people providing support. Leaders wanted more guidance on **spending funds on evidence-based interventions** and would love to hear examples of effective practices that have been successfully implemented by other schools.

Overall, feedback for RCOE technical assistance was positive. Leaders said that the support "was what we needed at the time," and that "RCOE has always excelled at providing services." Participants have felt like the SPSA support has been a "positive experience with RCOE," and that "now we have the **self-esteem** that we can get things done".

## Input for State and Federal Policymakers Regarding CSI

LEA and school leaders were asked to provide input and advice to policymakers regarding CSI including the CSI reporting system (Grant Management and Reporting Tool - GMART[12]), CSI support provided by CDE, or allowability under the CSI grant. Most leaders who had worked with GMART made comments regarding the usability of the system. GMART was referred to as "**confusing**" and a **frustration** because it "takes forever to get things done." A few district leaders suggested not including the detailed budget reporting, as it is a lot of work and wondered if there were other ways of extracting data. Some suggestions regarding GMART were to not "change it every year" and to have "more employees available at CDE to support GMART." A few district leaders did approve of the system saying "GMART is not an issue for us and we are happy to see them simplify when they can."

A recurring theme in interviews also appeared to be the **flexibility in using funding** allowed under the rules of CSI. Many leaders felt it "can be difficult to spend money based on the restrictions." The schools wanted more guidance in regard to ways that funding could be used and felt that **removing restrictions placed on hiring people** would help. Leaders felt that they were able to "purchase resources but we can't hire the people to implement them," or that they needed "**permanent people** and couldn't use the funding for that." They suggested being allowed to use a percentage of the funding on "something other than capacity building." As one school leader said, "Extra bundles of funds can be a blessing and a curse."

District and school leaders had a variety of suggestions for statewide support in regards to CSI. Leaders suggested improvements to **websites** such as the sites used for **evidence-based interventions** as the different sites could sometimes send mixed messages.

Leaders also suggested that the **CDE website** should contain the most **up-to-date information** for schools to access. Most of the suggestions for improvement surrounded **alternative education schools** and the identification of those schools. The leaders of alternative schools asked that the state would take the DASS qualification into consideration when compiling an eligibility list. The measures of alternative schools were also commented on. District and school leaders believe that alternative schools might possibly be held to a different accountability standard due to the nature of their student population. One district suggested that schools should be "**held responsible for the student they have for a specific amount of time, not the students that come in and out**." Some leaders also suggested that policymakers consider an "alternate way for qualifications which considers geographic location, history, growth, and other issues such as the number of students in foster care."

While there were many comments and suggestions from the district and school leaders to policymakers in regards to CSI support and implementation, there were also some districts leaders who had positive comments. One district leader was "glad to see the state using the data from this year as a baseline coming out of the pandemic." Other leaders felt that the "system does not feel as punitive as PI (program improvement). It feels more **productive**, it feels better."

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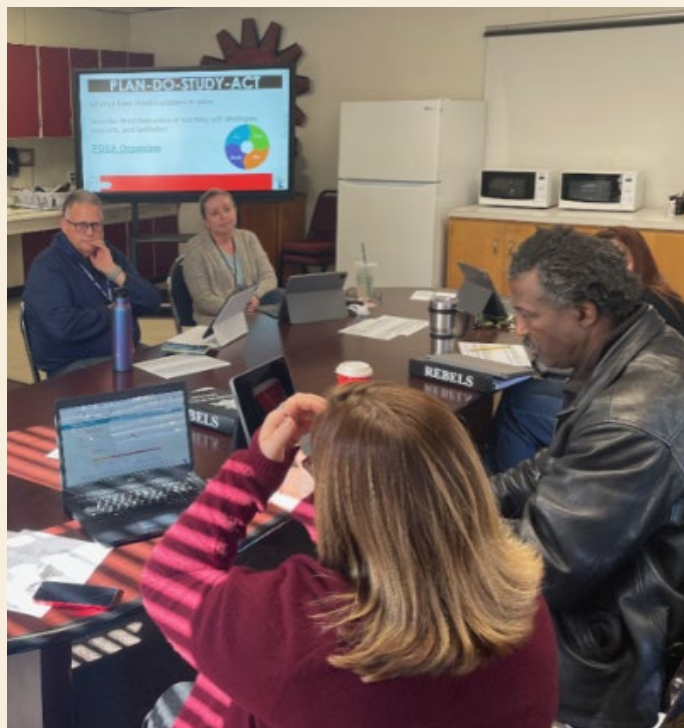
[12] CDE GMART www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/gmartinstructions.asp

Recommendations

Recommendations for Schools

- Develop a **CSI Improvement team** consisting of members representing a **variety of perspectives** related to CSI eligibility including district leadership. As one participant noted, "This is a collaborative process and opportunity to bring stakeholders on board and get ongoing support to go on a journey toward success."

- Develop team capacity in **Continuous Improvement** and **Improvement Science**. Although CSI funds cannot be used to hire additional permanent staff, they can and should be used to **build capacity**. As sites embark on the improvement journey, participants indicated one of the most valuable expenditures is on building the capacity of their improvement team in Improvement Science practices. One site leader said, "We decided to build the capacity of our own team so that we all worked toward **becoming improvers** so that we can work together to identify and treat our existing problems and in the future be **preventative** about potential problems."

- Refine **data collection, analysis, and reporting** to **improve monitoring and evaluation** of existing and planned actions to address CSI eligibility. Many site teams noted a feeling of "being overwhelmed by the amount of monitoring" associated with each action developed to address their CSI eligibility. Establishing a **monitoring system** with clear practices of collection, analysis, and reporting, ensures actions can be adapted or abandoned when they are not achieving the desired results therefore limiting the amount of potentially wasted resources (e.g., time, money, materials, etc.).

- **Protect time for improvement work**. One participant noted, "It takes a lot of time to do the work, just understanding how our system was creating the outcomes took several meetings." One school leader shared the importance of engaging in **weekly improvement meetings**, especially in the beginning phases of their improvement journey, as a way "to keep us focused on the work, discussing progress and making changes to our plan as the needs of students and the school changed." Another school leader shared, "it [improvement work] takes a lot of time and if you don't protect the time, use it wisely and really build the capacity of your improvement team, you just get stuck in doing the same things over and over and nothing changes. We just keep getting the same outcomes we always got and stay in CSI."

Recommendations for School Districts

- Not only to meet ESSA requirements, but also to ensure the school team is supported in developing their improvement plan, it is **essential that district leader(s) partner with the school** to provide technical assistance in plan development, monitoring, and evaluation. One district leader explained the importance of this by stating, "I had to know what the school needed, what they already had in place, and what level of support I had to provide. Without being on the school's improvement team, I would not have known how to help and support their work."

- Identify a **dedicated district team member** to serve as the **point of contact** for services related to Comprehensive Support and Improvement requirements and activities. Some LEAs have several schools eligible for CSI and ensure schools have access to a point person that can provide leadership, resources, time, and training to enhance the school's plan and plan implementation. Site leadership indicated, "I can always reach out to our state and federal lead to find out if our actions are approvable and in line with the CSI requirements." Additionally, a district leader shared, "I oversee the schools eligible for CSI and I am able to be the **liaison** between the school, district, and county offices to make sure the schools receive relevant and important information to keep their CSI plans moving."

- Make **connections** between **school** and **district improvement plans** (SPSA and LCAP). As schools engage in root cause analysis, in order to ensure **prioritization** of focus area(s) and selection of **evidence-based interventions,** it is critical that schools are aware of district-wide actions in the LCAP and district leadership is aware of needed actions in the SPSA. This **reduces redundancy** and maximizes school and district resources. A district leader shared, "I was able to communicate to the school that through the LCAP several district actions were being implemented to support chronic absenteeism. This allowed the school to narrow their CSI plan to focus on other indicators of low performance." Furthermore, a district leader who was the point of contact for CSI identified schools shared, "knowing what the schools needed allowed me to **advocate for district support through the LCAP development process**."

- Provide **evidenced-based intervention training** and **support** to identified schools. One of the requirements associated with federal funding is the selection, implementation, and monitoring of evidence-based interventions. Through SPSA and CSI workshops, participants and district and school levels reported challenges with how to find, select, and monitor evidence-based interventions that are directly aligned to the specific needs and context of the school. Although resources are published, district leadership reported, "It is hard to find a clear rating system for the Tiers of Evidence. We need ongoing support in learning more and how to support our schools with really understanding the difference between evidence-based practice, research-based strategy and just good practice when it comes to federal dollars." One participant noted, "We did not have a strong understanding of the ESSA Tiers of Evidence and how they connected to our School Plans."

Recommendations for County Offices of Education

- To ensure consistent **communication** and facilitate ongoing support to districts and schools, it is recommended that county offices **identify a dedicated team member** to serve as the point of contact for services related to Comprehensive Support and Improvement requirements and activities. During interviews, district leaders repeatedly noted the ease of communication because the county office had a designated CSI point person. District leaders shared, the county office point person was able to provide answers to questions, schedule meetings, support sessions and resources based on the needs within the district, which "made it easier to get what we needed so that we could support the sites."

- As each school has a different context, county offices should be ready to provide customized support to the greatest degree possible. Several participants reported that because **CSI work is highly contextual** based on specific student needs, it is critical that a **differentiated** approach is available. Although overview sessions and workshops provide districts and schools with information on ESSA requirements and resources, "the actual plan development and implementation is so much more meaningful when the COE team member is an actual **partner** in the work. It makes it so much more meaningful and builds our leadership capacity in continuous improvement."

Recommendations for CA Department of Education and State and Federal Policymakers
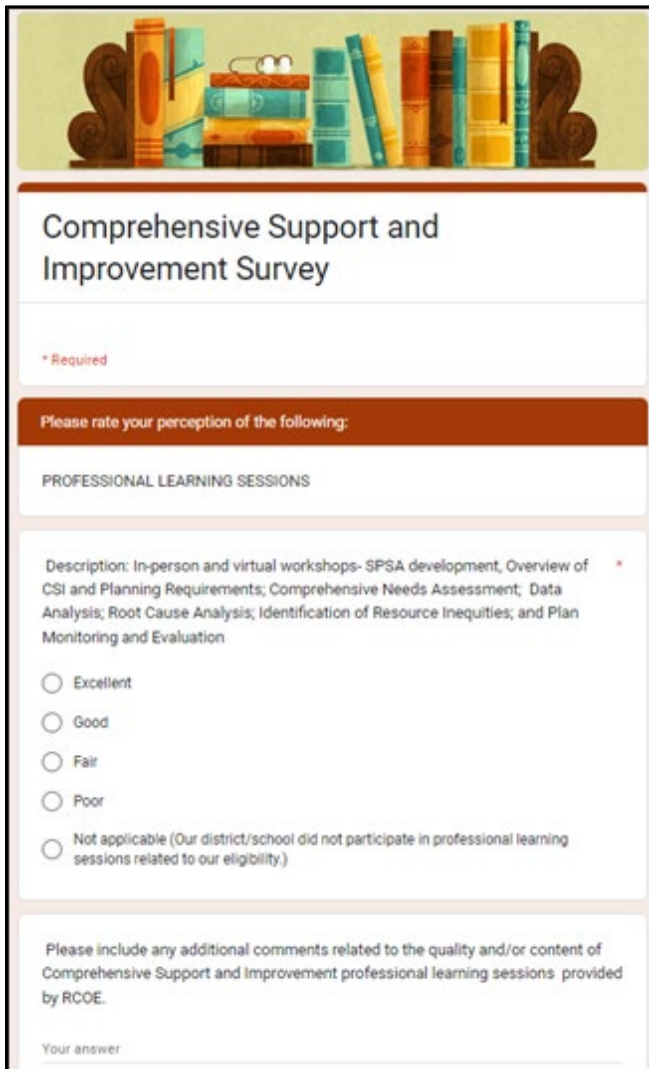
- Participants from both school and district settings reported how "overwhelming the many tools and documents" are on CDE and ESSA websites. It is recommended that alternative resources that provide greater s**tep-by-step guidance** with **examples** for use be developed for schools eligible for CSI (e.g., sources and examples of evidence-based practices; tools to support identification of resource inequities).

- Provide more **flexibility** in the use of **CSI funds** including **removing the prohibition of hiring additional staff**. Even though CSI funds are not ongoing, districts are experienced with expending one-time funds. Many have created internal processes for hiring temporary, short-term, or grant-funded staff, or they have processes to address staff attrition and can absorb permanent staff into other roles once grant funding expires. Several participants in the study commented on the need for **specialized** and **permanent personnel** to implement **specialized interventions** to address the root causes of low performance.

Appendix A

Data Collection Tools

1. Sample CSI Feedback Survey Questions (Summer 2022)

2. Sample Semi-structured Interview Protocol

CSI Feedback Survey in Google Forms

Appendix B

List of Participating Districts and Schools

Districts Receiving Link to Participate in CSI Survey	Districts Participating in CSI Empathy Interviews	Schools Receiving Link to Participate in CSI Survey	Schools Participating in CSI Empathy Interviews (2022)
Alvord Unified	Banning Unified	Alessandro High School	Alvord Continuation High School
Banning Unified	Coachella Valley Unified	Alvord Continuation High School	Chemawa Middle School
Coachella Valley Unified	Corona-Norco Unified	Andrew Jackson Elementary	Gateway Charter School
Corona-Norco Unified	Desert Sands Unified	Banning Independent Study School	Hemmerling Elementary School
Desert Sands Unified	Hemet Unified	Chemawa Middle School	Mountain View High School
Gateway Charter	Gateway Charter	Desert Hot Springs High	Thomas Jefferson Middle School
Hemet Unified	Jurupa Unified	Fruitvale Elementary	
Jurupa Unified	Moreno Valley Unified	Gateway Charter School	
Moreno Valley Unified	Palm Springs Unified	Glen Avon Elementary	
Palm Springs Unified	Palo Verde Unified	Hemmerling Elementary	
Palo Verde Unified	Perris Elementary	Hoffer Elementary	
Perris Elementary	Riverside Unified	La Familia Continuation High School	
Perris Union High	San Jacinto Unified	March Mountain High School	
Riverside Unified	Temecula Valley Unified	March Valley High School	
San Jacinto Unified	Val Verde Unified	Mountain View High School	
Temecula Valley Unified		Nicolet Middle School	
Val Verde Unified		Nueva Vista Continuation High School	
		Opportunity Program	
		Orange Grove High School	
		Painted Hills Middle School	
		Raincross High School	