

CALIFORNIA LEARNING ACCELERATION SYSTEM GRANT | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Interim Evaluation Memo One

The COVID-19 pandemic led to lost instructional time and academic outcomes for California students, particularly those in early grades and the most vulnerable student groups. In response, on July 9, 2021, the governor approved Assembly Bill 130 (AB 130), which in part allocated funding to provide professional learning for educators to support evidence-based learning acceleration strategies for all students. Through this funding, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) operates California's Learning Acceleration System Grant (LASG) program. The LASG program aims to establish statewide infrastructure to build local educational agencies' capacity to accelerate academic progress. This acceleration will be achieved through professional learning opportunities focused on evidence-based approaches and classroom practices, particularly in core academic subjects, by carrying out four grant goals:



Develop a robust statewide infrastructure for professional learning.



Implement evidence-based professional learning opportunities or guidance for educators, paraprofessionals, and administrators to address students' learning acceleration.



Increase learning among educators, paraprofessionals, and administrators.



Accelerate learning for all students impacted by COVID-19 learning disruptions, including students with unique considerations.

CCEE created a proposal process and administration plan for the grants, and later awarded a total of \$45 million to the Lake County (Rural Math Collaborative), Santa Clara County (The California Collaborative for Learning Acceleration), and San Diego County (California Literacy Elevation by Accelerating Reading) Offices of Education to provide educators with these professional learning opportunities. Each grantee is providing varied support for accelerating math, literacy, or language development.

Education Northwest and our subcontractor Social Policy Research Associates are leading a system-wide evaluation of the LASG program from 2022–2026. We use an equity lens in every aspect of our work, including planning, development, implementation, and analysis. This initial memo is part of the larger evaluation that includes three phases (planning, formative, and summative), though data collection will span the phases where appropriate. Our approach focuses on the collection of rich and varied data types, both qualitative and quantitative, and engages a team with expertise in coordinating findings from these different types of data in all phases of the project. Evaluation data sources include grantee and professional learning participant focus groups, a professional learning participant survey, observations, document review, attendance data, administrative data, and California Healthy Kids survey data. This first memo shares initial findings focused on data collected during the formative phase of the evaluation and is organized around the grant goals and evaluation questions.



How are grantees developing a statewide infrastructure for professional learning?

To provide insight into Learning Acceleration System Grant (LASG) grantees' progress towards the first grant goal of developing a statewide infrastructure for professional learning, we explored several factors. These include the characteristics of staff members served during the grant period as of June 2023, the systems and processes that supported grantees in developing evidence-based professional learning, the alignment of these systems and processes across grantees, and how grantees are leveraging technology in their efforts. Initial findings are presented below:

LASG grantees formed partnerships with and provided services to half (n = 29) of the counties in California.

The LASG infrastructure provided support for various professional learning activities throughout 2022-2023.

LASG professional learning activities reached approximately **374 educators**, encompassing a diverse range of roles.¹

Grantees used **What Works Clearinghouse**² to identify proven, evidence-based strategies for learning acceleration.

CCEE provided grantees with ongoing support throughout their learning process for the development of professional learning opportunities, especially as challenges emerged.

Although each grantee was required to use the set of guidelines and evidenced-based literature outlined in the original Request for Proposals,³ **in practice the work varies substantially** depending on content focus and selected strategies.

Each LASG grantee **engaged with technology to increase access to professional learning**, through a combination of virtual meetings, asynchronous online courses, and storing and sharing resources.

¹ This number represents an unduplicated count of participants, and some individuals attended multiple opportunities.

² The What Works Clearinghouse is a project of the Institute of Education Sciences, which is the primary research and evaluation arm of the U.S. Department of Education. Its main purpose is to conduct rigorous evaluations of educational programs, practices, and policies to determine their effectiveness.

³ The CCEE's Learning Acceleration Playbook, the Revised MTSS Framework, and the Quality Professional Learning Standards (QPLS), among others.



How are grantees implementing evidence-based professional learning opportunities?

The second grant goal focused on implementation of evidence-based professional learning opportunities. To explore grantee progress, we examined how the professional learning content is meeting participant needs and whether these needs vary by locale; the delivery methods that best meet the participant needs and whether these vary by locale; how well professional learning aligns to CCEE's theory of action and essential design principles; participant perception of professional learning quality, relevance, and usability; and strategies, structures, and supports participants perceived as most effective. Initial findings are presented below:

Grantees implemented professional learning opportunities **covering a range of content**. The content needs were similar across locales, with most participant survey respondents agreeing that the content suited their needs.

Professional learning participants participated in a range of opportunities. Grantees provided this variety to make the services more accessible. The needs for certain professional learning structures (such as the mix of in-person and virtual opportunities) varied slightly across rural and urban areas.

Grantees are successfully designing professional learning opportunities **aligned with CCEE goals**, although **how** these goals are incorporated varies.

Participants overwhelmingly reported in the survey that the professional learning opportunities they participated in were **high quality, relevant, and useful** for enhancing instructional practice. Interviewees also described the material as “very high quality,” “very valuable,” and “very good,” but had varying thoughts on the audio and video quality of asynchronous offerings (e.g., audio, centralized resources).

Since this was mostly a grantee planning year, many participants said they had not yet fully implemented the strategies highlighted in professional learning. However, **those who reported that they had implemented strategies found most of those they engaged with effective.**

Participants cited **collaboration with other educators in the state** through structures like communities of practice, professional learning networks, and other statewide activities as the highlight of their professional learning experience so far.



How is the Learning Acceleration System Grant increasing learning among educators, paraprofessionals, and administrators?

The third grant goal focused on increasing learning among educators, paraprofessionals, and administrators. To examine progress toward this goal, the evaluation team explored whether participants accessed the professional learning materials and completed the learning objectives related to evidence-based accelerated learning strategies. Evaluators also gathered initial insight into whether professional learning leads to changes in instructional practice. Initial findings are presented below:

During observations, **participants were observed accessing virtual, shared files (e.g., Google Docs)** and most interviewees did not report experiencing any challenges with accessing the learning materials.

Survey results suggested that **participants successfully completed learning objectives.**

Close to half (44%) of survey respondents said they had already made changes to their instructional practice based on what they have learned through their grantee's professional learning opportunities. Those who didn't report changes were in the early stages of implementation.

Educators perceived positive impacts of instructional changes on student learning, engagement, and mindset, as well as on educators' professional growth and coaching capacity.



How is the Learning Acceleration System Grant accelerating learning for all students?

The fourth grant goal focused on accelerating learning for all students. To explore progress toward this goal, we examined whether professional learning opportunities address the needs of diverse learners, including early learners, English learner students, students with disabilities, students with dyslexia, students experiencing homelessness, low-income students, and foster youth. Initial findings are presented below:

Professional learning materials frequently mentioned equity and diverse learners across professional learning opportunities, but materials addressing the specific needs of diverse learners (beyond multilingual learners) or actionable suggestions **were inconsistent across grantees and opportunities.**



Challenges, bright spots, and lessons learned

Recruitment of professional learning participants emerged as the biggest challenge for all LASG grantees. Other challenges included the **timing of contract or memorandum of understanding execution** and **aligning visions for professional learning, both internally (e.g., within project teams) and with participants.** To combat these challenges, grantees focused on the importance of generating enthusiasm and buy-in from potential participants and being clear about the time commitment required of participants for a fully immersive experience.

Despite these challenges, **grantees were satisfied with the number of participants they were able to recruit and the number of materials they developed in this first year,** particularly given the tight timeframe. **They were also happy with the level of grantee collaboration and their ability to simultaneously learn about and adapt content based on participant needs.** These bright spots highlight the need to continue strengthening the LASG statewide network supported by the CCEE to help with recruitment, align visions across grantee teams, and create uniformity in materials, framing, and language.



Recommendations and next steps

Recommendations to drive continuous improvement efforts and next steps towards accomplishing LASG grant goals are summarized below:

Continue to share lessons learned and best practices across LASG grantees. Learning should continue to be shared system-wide, through avenues such as the LASG professional learning network meetings, to bridge gaps and help build a community where grantees can learn from each other and leverage each other's partnership and expertise.

Clearly communicate expectations and time commitment. Since all projects have different levels of intensity it is particularly important to clarify the time required for each professional learning offering. These expectations should be built into professional learning design and delivery as a road map for participants. For example, clearly outlining the different ways in which a participant can engage with the professional learning, the time commitment, what participants can expect to learn (e.g., value statement), and/or whether they can count the time toward their professional development goals.

Refine recruitment efforts by leveraging lessons learned. Grantees should build upon recruitment strategies and efforts established this year by developing flyer and pamphlet templates that can be leveraged across grantees and translated across settings to continue to broaden reach. Further, grantees noted sensitivity around certain terms (e.g., equity and learning acceleration),

which may indicate a need for differentiated recruitment strategies that directly address potential participants' concerns or questions.

Support participants in advocating for professional learning opportunities. Provide support and partnership to help participants advocate for the professional learning at their respective institutions and organizations, including presenting to school boards or other high-level administrators.

Continue building partnerships across the state, including with county offices of education, to create a statewide professional learning infrastructure. This includes support in engaging with locales that have not yet been able to participate in learning activities, identifying their barriers to doing so, and providing thought partnership to address those barriers.

Continue to offer professional learning in a variety of formats. Maintain a balance of virtual and in-person professional learning opportunities to increase accessibility, ease scheduling, and respond to challenges due to COVID-19. Ensure that professional learning incorporates hands-on, practical application of the content.

Schedule professional learning events to maximize attendance, including at the start of the academic school year and during non-teaching periods (e.g., late afternoons). Work with participants to identify times that maximize engagement and learn about participant constraints such as childcare to encourage participation.

Continue to hone and adjust professional learning opportunities to maximize quality. As grantees move into year 2, take time to review, assess, and pivot if necessary while maximizing successful aspects. This includes thoughtful, intentional data collection and use to inform future efforts and plan strategically.

Collect feedback from professional learning participants. Connect with all participants, including asynchronous participants, for feedback on usability and organization in service of learning (for example, usability of online platforms).

Incorporate more concrete examples into professional learning. Include problems of practice focused on specific examples that educators can translate into their work (e.g., working with diverse learners).

Continue to provide focused support on strategies for working with diverse learners. Provide educators with concrete strategies, relevant problems of practice, and guidance on how to apply accelerated learning strategies with different groups.

Strategize how to maximize data collection efforts. It is important to work together as a system across evaluation teams and grantees to ensure better response rates and representation in the data collected to explain the impact of the grant activities on students.