Equity, Disproportionality & Design

Annual Report

Evaluating a design thinking approach to the complex problem of disproportionality in Special Education

[September 2020]

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EVALUATING A DESIGN THINKING APPROACH TO THE COMPLEX PROBLEM OF DISPROPORTIONALITY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

REDUCING DISPROPORTIONALITY FOR ALL CALIFORNIA DISTRICTS BY IMPROVING CAPACITY TO USE FORCASTING DATA STRATEGICALLY.

Annual Report of Activities
School years: 2018-2019 & 2019-2020
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ACRONYMS

TFI	Tiered Fidelity Inventory
SPP	State Performance Plan
MTSS	Multi-Tiered System of Support
SELPA	Special Education Local Plan Area
ED&D	Equity, Disproportionality, and Design
PBIS	Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports
CASEMIS	California Special Education Management Information System
CDE	California Department of Education
CEDR/CodeStack	Center for Educational Development and Research
CalTAC	California Technical Assistance Center
SBLT	School Based Leadership Team
ISC	Improvement Science Collaborative
CPC	California PBIS Coalition

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The ED&D program is currently in an early stage of development. The program addresses the complex problem of disproportionality, where solutions are unknown and where actions need to be fluid and flexible. Therefore, the primary purpose of this evaluation is *to provide ED&D developers with timely feedback that can be used to adapt and improve their program*. This approach, driven by evaluative questions and applying evaluation logic, provides feedback to the program developers as the program unfolds, thereby increasing responsiveness to the needs of the program, its developers, stakeholders, and primary beneficiaries (Patton, 2012).

Questions

1. What is the ED&D program, and how is it being developed?
2. What seems to be working? Where is early progress? Why might it be working?
3. How are relationships developing in the provider community?
4. What practices and protocols are emerging that will be used to refine and improve the program?
5. What is emerging to be judged?

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Disproportionality is a longstanding problem in schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2017). The fact that students are identified for Special Education who are not truly disabled, or that some students are suspended at higher rates than their peers, is a powerful signal of a distressing problem that affects millions of children in California. Disproportionality can harm children in many ways from preventing them from achieving their academic potential to stigmatizing them socially as a result of racial stereotyping (Cooc, N., Kiru E.W., 2018). These events tend to compound by increasing achievement and opportunity gaps between these marginalized students and others.

In response to this disproportionality challenge, the California Department of Education designed a grant-based improvement program within the California Statewide System of Support, which appropriated nearly one million dollars to the San Diego South County Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA). This action empowered the San Diego South County SELPA to develop disproportionality resources and trainings, provide data analysis tools, offer coaching support for learning networks, and support for implementing a rigorous tiered intervention system. The San Diego South County SELPA's approach is designed to increase the awareness and capacity of educational leaders to address equity in their respective areas, implement quality intervention systems, and reduce the prevalence of disproportionality, thereby guaranteeing high levels of achievement for all students.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS, DESIGN, METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

ED&D team members, in consultation with the evaluator, selected a responsive evaluation methodology for this innovative project, one that generated rapid learning for program developers and supported the overall development of the program. A developmental evaluation (DE) approach uses a learning framework that plots challenges and opportunities by identifying (1) what the group needs to pay attention to as they move forward, and (2) what they need to learn. A learning framework keeps program developers centered on making good judgments about where to invest their time and energy. Data collection included a careful review of existing documentation, meetings with program developers, stakeholders, and beneficiaries, conducting interviews, and exploring research.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The following five findings emerged after an investigation of the evaluation questions:

1. ED&D' core tenets (Awareness, Action, and Scale) and the design tasks embedded in each tenet emerged from a community-based design model using input from a diverse set of stakeholders.
2. ED&D's human-centered approach engages stakeholders' emotions in the work and gives voice to the marginalized students it serves; ED&D tells the story of people, not compliance.
3. ED&D's work empowers the stakeholder community with the knowledge, skills, and resources it needs to understand and act on disproportionality.
4. ED&D's use of rapid assessments as a tool for reflective practice replicates the work ED&D expects in participants and creates an internal culture of continuous improvement.
5. ED&D employs a wide array of tools and procedures for judging the effectiveness of its products and services, including formative evidence, data for improvement, and short to long-term outcome data.

Based on these findings, it is the conclusion of the evaluator that the ED&D team's capacity-building efforts with SELPAs and related partners lays the foundation for the work to thrive across the state. Additionally, the team's dual focus on human-centered design while using best practices in the research literature presents the greatest opportunity for system and student-level change, especially regarding inequitable school practices. Third, the way ED&D cultivates and nurtures relationships between and among stakeholder groups (SELPAs, LEAs, and partners) ensures greater buy-in to reducing disproportionality on the front end and greater scalability on the bac- end of this project. Fourth, ED&D's unified approach of building technical competency, coupled with professional equity-focused networks, is a promising theoretical approach to dismantling inequitable system-level practices. Finally, the team's improvement approach, emphasizing feedback loops, moves the project away from compliance and toward efficacy.

"We need continue to look for other ways to support students of color, diverse students from communities that are marganailized and disenfranchised, in a way that partners with the community and brings light to this difficult work."

-Tasha Woods

EVALUATION PURPOSE & EVALUATION QUESTIONS

EVALUATION PURPOSE

Typical program evaluation efforts focus on the processes and/or outcomes of a program in order to determine whether the program has led to positive change for program beneficiaries. These types of evaluations are most appropriate for programs in more mature stages of development, where inputs, activities, and outputs have been established and agreed upon by stakeholders.

The ED&D program is in an early stage of development. Furthermore, it addresses a complex problem, where solutions are unknown, and where actions need to be fluid and flexible. Therefore, *the primary purpose of this evaluation is to provide ED&D developers with timely feedback that can be used to adapt and improve their program*. This approach enables ED&D developers to learn and act on their learnings as the program matures (Gamble, 2008).

This type of evaluation is necessary now in order to generate rapid learnings to support the direction of the development of the program. This evaluative approach, driven by asking probing evaluative questions and applying evaluation logic, provides feedback to the program developers as the program unfolds (Patton, 2012). In this approach, the evaluator embeds him or herself in the project as an internal member of the team. Through regular debriefing sessions, the evaluator captures program actions, outputs, and outcomes and also questions the differences between how these elements were planned and how they are being carried out, along with any changes that need to be made to them.

This approach is more responsive to the needs of the program, its developers, stakeholders, and beneficiaries. Reports of this evaluative effort, therefore, are primarily for the program developers to be used as they continue to adapt their program to the evolving contexts in which the work occurs. This report also serves the broader stakeholder community by providing a lens into how the ED&D model is being developed and adapted.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The following evaluation questions were co-developed with the ED&D team:

1. What is the ED&D program, and how is it being developed?
2. What seems to be working? Where is early progress? Why might it be working?
3. How are relationships developing in the provider community?
4. What practices and protocols are emerging that will be used to refine and improve the program?
5. What is emerging to be judged?

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Disproportionality is a common, yet avoidable issue. Disproportionality manifests in several ways in schools, but essentially occurs as a result of over-representation of a student group, such as the proportion of English learners in Special Education. Currently in California, a staggering 65% (743 of 1142) of school districts have disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education annually. Students in certain groups are simply being inaccurately identified for special education at greater rates than other groups. Additionally, 26% of school districts in California have disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates (California School Dashboard, 2019). Essentially, in these 301 districts, students with disabilities have suspension and expulsion rates that exceed the rates for other student groups in relation to their respective populations. As evidenced in Table 1, the prevalence of disproportionality statewide is an urgent problem that needs a focused approach (see Table 1 in APPENDIX I).

One factor contributing to disproportionality is the limited tools educational leaders have to address the problem. Many leaders are simply ill-equipped in their understanding of both the drivers of disproportionality and strategies to mitigate it. An examination of principal competencies regarding disproportionality indicated many leaders are simply unprepared to address the issue (Fergus, 2016). Given the fact than numerous educational studies have found that an effective school leader is the second most important factor in a student's education (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004), the need within the system exists to increase leaders' capacity to understand and address disproportionality.

A need is also present at the school systems level. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is an integrated framework that focuses on "instruction, differentiated learning, individualized student needs, and the alignment of systems necessary for all students' academic, behavior, and social success" (California Department of Education, 2020). MTSS identifies the necessary supports for students at different tiers of instruction (Tier I for all students, Tier II for some students, and Tier III for a few students). In addition to identification, MTSS ensures the systems providing these supports are effectively aligned to the students' needs. While MTSS identifies a way in which all students receive the supports they need for success, few students experience a fully implemented MTSS framework in their schools. The California PBIS Coalition's recent study on the implementation of MTSS found varied implementation across 818 school districts in the state. The remaining 324 school districts had no MTSS or Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) system in place (California Technical Assistance Center, 2015). For many students the promise of attending a school with an effective MTSS framework in place has not been fully realized. There is a need across the state to ensure students have a supportive environment in which they can thrive.

Finally, ongoing work in San Diego County has demonstrated that given the right statistical tools and understanding, districts may in fact be able to predict and avoid disproportionality altogether. While all school districts in the state receive findings regarding disproportionality (California Department of Education, 2020), these

findings are delivered after the fact. To proactively address the root cause of disproportionality versus a symptom of it, districts must be equipped with tools that help them predict and ultimate mitigate the drivers of disproportionality before they result in a finding. These statistical tools show promise, but currently only a limited number of school districts in the state has access to it.

The needs regarding disproportionality are clear. Schools districts have an over-representation of student groups in special education and suspension and expulsions of students with disabilities are generally higher than for other groups. Second, school systems have limited leadership capacity for addressing disproportionality-based problems. Educational leaders lack the knowledge and skills necessary to mitigate the effects of this complex issue. Third, school districts vary considerably in their implementation of a tiered system of support. Lack of fidelity to the elements of an effective system produces variation in school and district level outcomes regarding disproportionality. And finally, school districts have limited actionable data tools and resources to detect, predict, and overcome disproportionality challenges.

In response to these needs, the San Diego South County SELPA created the **Equity, Disproportionality, and Design** (ED&D) program. The overarching goal of the ED&D program is to reduce disproportionality statewide. To accomplish this goal, ED&D has focused on several short and long-term outcomes. ED&D's long-term outcomes include (1) reducing the percent of districts with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education from 20% to 12% by 2024, and (2) reducing the overall percent of students with disabilities suspended at least once from school from 6.2% to 5% by 2024.

The ED&D program is driven by a theory of action that hypothesizes if SELPAs grow their knowledge about equity and disproportionality, take a preventive approach to their equity goals, master an analytic process, build effective networks, and use a rigorous intervention approach, they will improve their equity outcomes and reduce disproportionality as measured by disproportionality metrics (see APPENDIX II).

EVALUATION METHODS & LIMITATIONS

The purpose of a developmental approach to evaluation is to generate rapid learnings to support the direction of the development of a program. This evaluative approach, driven by asking probing evaluative questions and applying evaluation logic, provides feedback to the program developers as the program unfolds. This approach is more responsive to the needs of the program by focusing a lens onto how the ED&D model is being developed and adapted.

A developmental evaluation is predicated on how well the evaluator understands the program and the broader context in which it is situated. Developing this deep level of understanding requires a significant investment of time in the early phases of the initiative. The evaluator must actively explore the key dynamics of the program and the larger system it is trying to influence. Data collection requires carefully reviewing existing documentation, meeting with program developers, stakeholders, and beneficiaries, conducting interviews, and exploring research. Data collection is often messy, requiring the evaluator to track decisions that are made in informal spaces, such as Zoom meetings, emails, and debriefs of events, all of which require strong relationships with individuals within the group and trust.

In an innovative project, the goal posts are always changing, so it is not feasible to develop concrete, unalterable outcomes, targets, and indicators. In addition to a traditional logic model, the evaluator focuses on a learning framework. A learning framework plots challenges and opportunities, identifying (1) what the group needs to pay attention to as they move forward and (2) what they need to learn. The fundamental function of a learning framework is to set direction for learning and project development.

A learning framework helps program developers become more strategic and intentional. The major strategy to facilitate the learning framework involves rapid cycle assessments, where the group debriefs experiences and addresses major threats and challenges. These rapid cycle assessments occur as one-on-one interviews and by asking participants to rate their expectations and the value of products and services they receive. From these assessments program developers identify threats and opportunities going forward. They brainstorm solutions to possible program challenges and integrate these ideas into future practice, while simultaneously capturing themes about opportunities and subsequently incorporating these themes into future processes and products. A learning framework keeps program developers centered on making good judgments about where to invest their time and energy.

"We are forming an equity committee to address issues of inequity and racism. We have data from this project I will show this committee. The more people I talk to about this project, the more I hear people talking about it. It grows. This project is an opportunity to educate everyone about what disproportionality is and what can be done about it."

-Megan Adams

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS

The Annual Report findings cover the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 calendar years. These program findings emerged from the five questions investigated and are arrayed below.

What is the ED&D program, and how is it being developed?

Finding: ED&D's core tenets (Awareness, Action, and Scale) and the design tasks embedded in each tenet emerged from a community-based design model using input from a diverse set of stakeholders.

The ED&D program developed through a collaborative, community-based approach to answer three fundamental questions:

1. How might we build a shared understanding of disproportionality across all stakeholders?
2. How might we engage our community with the tools to carefully and proactively address disproportionality?
3. How might we establish a statewide network of collaborators to scale new bold ideas to prevent disproportionality?

Each of these questions aligns to a cross-functional team comprised of SELPA leads, COEs, and industry partners such as Teachers Guild and IDEO (a design consulting firm). These teams are situated in a different phase of the program (1) awareness, (2) action, and (3) scale (see Figure 1 in APPENDIX I).

Each cross functional team then divided its question into multiple design challenges. The awareness team's primary responsibility involved building a shared understanding of disproportionality across stakeholder groups. Its work consisted of three design challenges: gathering baseline knowledge, building an online information repository, and creating an overview training. The overview training has been shared with multiple stakeholder groups over the past year. During this training, participants discussed the national conversation about equity and practical ways to measure disproportionality. They listened to and shared stories about inequality and the personal ways in which they have been affected by it. Additionally, participants in this training are offered a rich opportunity to make preventative disproportionality commitments and coach each other to improve those ideas. This ED&D team devised this awareness and action approach because empirical research has shown that professional learning about disproportionality embedded in a systems-focused framework has improved outcomes for students (Nishioka, Williams, & Jaffery 2019).

The action team's primary responsibility was to engage the community with tools that address disproportionality. This team focused on data literacy training, designing a data delivery system, and developing a PDSA database. This data literacy training has been extremely well received. The ED&D team has delivered four data literacy sessions to regions around the state, including the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and Antelope Valley SELPA area. Currently, there are three additional sessions scheduled in September (one was added due to the popularity of the workshop). These workshops are attended by Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, SELPA Directors, Special Education and Support Services Directors, coordinators, psychologists, Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSA) and others from over 88 school districts across the state. The data literacy training focuses on building an understanding of risk ratio scores, interpreting risk ratio reports, and communicating risk ratio results. Participants exit the training with skills and resources they apply in their respective contexts. Furthermore, the data delivery system has undergone multiple levels of testing. It is currently operational, and the team is putting it in the hands of more SELPA leads and LEAs to use as part of their routines for preventing disproportionately. This tool was co-developed with partners at the Center for Educational Development and Research (CEDR). The team continues to collect user evidence as SELPA and LEA leads engage with the tool and grapple with the complexities of understanding and interpreting risk. From this evidence, SELPA and LEA leads can use the tool and develop the verbiage for explaining disproportionality results to others. In addition, these users continue to raise important questions and insights that keep the ED&D team's mindset on ways to make it better. Many of the design challenges evolved through this cycle of design, feedback, and iteration. Additionally, the data literacy campaign has summarized numerous academic research studies that link increased data literacy and structures for examining data to improvements in student outcomes (Lai and Schildkamp 2013; Ariola and Dunn 2011; Faria, Heppen, et al. 2012).

The scale team focused on establishing a statewide network of collaborators to scale initiatives. This team oversees the data access procedures, the equity network, and the intervention framework. Considerable developmental work is occurring with this group. The MTSS/PBIS work, which comprises both the intervention framework and the equity network project, commenced in September with the support of two consultants. These consultants participate in monthly meetings with SELPA and ED&D leadership to guide the direction of the team. They will provide two virtual professional development sessions focused on MTSS including an overview session and an action planning session. These consultants also facilitate the statewide professional learning communities, which are slated to start in two cohorts (one occurring in the Fall and Spring of 2020-2021 and another concurrent cohort in the Spring of 2021). These cohorts will utilize a Tiered Fidelity Inventory to capture longitudinal data on changes in MTSS capacity over the life of the grant. ED&D embedded this intervention and networking approach because implementing a rigorous intervention framework has shown to positively affect student level outcomes across multiple contexts (Putnam, Horner, & Algozzine, 2006; King 2016). Plus, professional learning communities (PLCs) have a rich history in the research literature with many studies directly connecting the development of a PLC with changes in student learning outcomes (Goldenberg 2009).

In summary, the ED&D program has emerged as a community-based response to the problem of disproportionality. Design teams have converged to deliver products and services to address specific issues; they have refined and iterated on this work. Throughout this complex initiative, the ED&D program developers have facilitated the work of these cross functional teams and their design challenges. They have captured opportunities and challenges and investigated key learnings. Their workshops involve SELPAs working alongside LEAs to understand the urgency of addressing inequities in the system, reading and interpreting disproportionality data, and investigating the root causes of disproportionality by interviewing individuals close to the problem. For example, one key learning was expressed in this way:

> "A data tool is not a solution to a disproportionality problem, but rather it is a part of the process schools use to understand and address the root cause of the problem."

Insights like these serve as a critical milestone for the ED&D team's approach to sustaining a continuous improvement mindset throughout this initiative. The community design workshops have afforded the program developers the opportunity of working with a diverse set of partners and stakeholders including multiple SELPA regions, county offices of education (COEs), IDEO, Harvard's Strategic Data Project (SDP), Teachers Guild, and others. The ED&D team's highly collaborative model, which uses feedback for improvement, will continue to support program growth as the program matures.

What seems to be working? Where is early progress? Why might it be working?

Finding: ED&D's human centered approach engages stakeholders' emotions in the work and gives voice to the marginalized students it serves; ED&D tells the story of people not compliance.

The ED&D team is comprised of a tight knit group of individuals who share a mutual agenda about addressing disproportionality. Their collaborative efforts and application of design principles have demonstrated early progress regarding the development of the content for the ED&D workshops. ED&D developers apply design principles, taught by IDEO, which include the following phases: research, prototyping, and implementation. IDEOs first phase emphasizes understanding the user's needs, where developers put themselves in the context of the user. From this user perspective, developers begin ideating on as many design ideas as possible. They conceptualize the content, the activities, the way they communicate the information, and so on. They next enter a prototyping phase where the make something tangible and testable for their end user. The workshop content is built quickly and efficiently. This information is then put into the hands of their users for feedback and iteration. Once iterated, developers launch their solution by implementing it with their end users. They gather information on the extent to which participants were satisfied with the content along with ratings of how well developers accomplished the workshop objectives. As one team member expressed,

> "This process has led to a more polished and impactful product because it is based on human-design principles. In particular, the materials we create speak

> to people's emotions, connection to their students, and connection to each other. We use photographs, quotes, music, a sense of humor, and a visual style that tells the story of people more than it does compliance."

The human-centered design principles have laid the foundation for all the team's products and services. Based on preliminary data gathered on six workshops, most participants rate themselves "highly satisfied" with the content. Future evaluation reports will provide greater detail and evidence regarding participant satisfaction, learning, and application.

Another area of progress has been how ED&D has taken IDEOs design principles and built the community's capacity to use them. ED&D's vision emerged through community engagement events, where stakeholders convened and engaged in design principles to operationalize the ED&D vision. From these events, ED&Ds core tenets: Awareness, Action, and Scale evolved into nine design challenges (see Figure 1 APPENDIX I). This process created ownership of the ED&D project—a sense of identity around the mission to prevent disproportionality—within the community and built an urgency around the problem of disproportionality. One specific design challenge—the data tool—is an asset that supports SELPAs and LEAs to understand and act on disproportionate results. SELPA and LEA leads have thoroughly tested the data tool and ways to communicate the findings generated from it. Testing has led to several important design modifications and to user insights not previously acknowledged. As one user indicated,

> "This data makes me think about the root cause of these findings, and what parameters are in place or what could be put in place to address the findings."

Other users discussed how the data tool increased their sense of urgency around the data. The progress with this project, therefore, suggests that the quantitative evidence of disproportionality (displayed in the data tool tables) can be integrated into a school improvement process and ultimately translated into a meaningful narrative centered on student outcomes. This tool leads users to address the problem and stay focused on students versus getting lost in a risk ratio number.

A final area of progress involves the support the ED&D team provides its stakeholders. Providing support to all SELPA regions and LEAs across the state of California is a monumental challenge. The ED&D team has engaged in a few small support activities to try to figure out how to scale the support to many more SELPAs. For example, the ED&D team supported the Shasta County Office of Education with their strategy to conduct empathy interviews. The session complimented the workshop content because it allowed both groups to go deeper into the logistics and design of empathy interview questions. The Shasta COE left inspired by this follow-up session, and the ED&D team now has a process it can monitor to determine how best to support SELPAs, LEAs, and other partners.

In summary, early progress has hinged on how well the ED&D team support each other and its stakeholders. The team's human-centered approach resonates with end users and allows them to connect emotionally to this work. The relationship with stakeholders has created the conditions for honest feedback about this work and to its refinements.

How are relationships developing in the provider community?

Finding: ED&D's work empowers the stakeholder community with the knowledge, skills, and resources it needs to understand and act on disproportionality.

The ED&D project emerged from community engagement forums co-hosted by the project developers and IDEO, the design consulting firm. From these sessions, teams designed the core tenets of the ED&D project: awareness, action, and scale along with design challenges within each tenet. Groups formed around these challenges. For example, one group, the awareness group, was responsible for educating others about disproportionality. This group gathered research, collected data and information from websites. They shared their work with other teams working on similar design challenges. These design groups consisted of LEAs, SELPAs, community members, parents, and others. These meeting occurred in-person until the COVID-19 pandemic, then transitioned to virtual meetings. The culminating event occurred in May, which included every team sharing its work and accomplishments. One member of a design team stated,

> "One thing I assumed before I started this work was that only classroom people could get impact. I work in a district office and was never a teacher, but I've learned how to spread things throughout my district even from the district office. This work in these ED&D and IDEO workgroups has taught me how to connect people and translate ideas across people."

This community engagement model has allowed stakeholder from across different organizations to communicate and collaborate with each other. This collaboration builds a sense of shared ownership in the work and greater trust among project partners.

In addition to facilitating and nurturing relationships between team members, ED&D has provided LEAs and SELPAs access to a data tool that helps them better understand disproportionality. One team member commented,

> "This data tool will be useful because the data we have is important. Before, we struggled with the credibility of the data. Now we have a new system and process, so we consider the data to be valid. Plus, it's powerful to have the data tool because not everyone in a district has the capacity to pull data from a student information system. It's just not something everyone has the knowledge and skill to do. But most importantly, *this data tool has helped me tell the story of the data versus just sharing the numbers*, and that's important especially with disproportionality.

In summary, the ED&D project thrives on the relationships between and among its stakeholders, which have increased participants' perceptions of impact. The ED&D data tool presents disproportionality data reliably and accurately, so team members currently using it can do so with confidence and trust because they believe the data presents the most accurate picture of disproportionality in their LEA or SELPA. Across the state, school districts are forming equity committees and adopting policies to address inequitable school outcomes. The ED&D data tool gives these

committees and policies a data-driven approach. This tool provides the opportunity for school systems to engage in the difficult conversations around equity, and for those engaged in the ED&D work, know what can be done about it and monitor their progress toward better outcomes.

What practices and protocols are emerging that will be used to refine and improve the program?

Finding: ED&D's use of rapid assessments as a tool for reflective practice replicates the work ED&D expects in participants and creates an internal culture of continuous improvement.

ED&D uses a rapid assessment approach to refining and improving its products and services. This approach has two facets both of which are directed by two questions: What does the group need to pay attention to? What does the group need to learn? Both questions are central to the alignment of this work to a culture of continuous improvement.

The first facet of the rapid assessment process involves a facilitator debrief after any event, be that a product demonstration or a workshop. The process begins with an account of the context, who was involved in the event and why. Next, an organizer segments the event into its component parts. For example, a workshop might be divided into its agenda sections. Facilitators debrief each activity in that agenda and any changes they made to it in real time. For example, in some situations a video might be moved from one part of the agenda to another. In other examples, an entire module of content might be postponed. Once this part is complete, facilitators debrief any unexpected happenings that occurred along with their decisions in real time to address these unexpected events. Facilitators brainstorm and document changes and refinements to the event and finetune activities prior to the next event occurrence. This interactive cycle focuses ED&D developers' attention on what matters most and directs that attention to refining the development of the program.

These sessions are complimented with the second facet of this improvement process—a session outcome debrief where facilitators examine the outcomes of the event in relation to their predetermined expectations. For example, the data literacy training workshop included the following outcomes:

As a result of my participation in this workshop,

1. I understand how a risk ratio score is calculated.
2. I can explain a risk ratio score in general conversation to a wide audience.
3. I can interpret a risk ratio report.
4. I can discuss disproportionality data with others in my organization.

Workshop participants rated their level of understanding of these outcomes at the conclusion of the event. Facilitators established baseline performance expectations and compared participants' ratings to that baseline. For example, facilitators expected that 85% of participants rated their knowledge level as the highest option ("Strongly Agree") on the survey. When debriefing the data, facilitators brainstorm potential reasons why these ratings do not match expectations. They connect their

process debrief to this outcome debrief and develop feasible strategies to address areas that present major challenges. While this debrief process has led to fruitful conversations about the efficacy of the work, ED&D has a relatively small number of workshop responses at this point, so there is insufficient data to make large scale changes to actions or services. However, ED&D does have the tools in place to rapidly assess the performance and outcomes of events and address threats to these outcomes in real time. Furthermore, this process improvement approach models the kind of work ED&D expects in participants as they are acting on their disproportionality issues.

In summary, ED&D has developed the reflective tools to improve its program and keep it on track to accomplish its outcomes. The use of formative data gathered from session activity reflections and outcome debriefs models the continuous improvement process ED&D seeks with its stakeholders.

What is emerging to be judged?

Finding: ED&D's employs a wide array of tools and procedures for judging the effectiveness of its products and services including formative evidence, data for improvement, and short to long-term outcome data.

Ongoing measurement conversations have led to several considerations for what should be judged regarding this project. One type of data needed in this work is the formative data ED&D captures to understand its own efficiencies. These data are in the form of improvement cycles where actual performance is compared to expected performance and changes are made based on the results. Other types of formative data include conversations with stakeholders regarding the design of a product. These data allow ED&D to judge the quality of its products and services and make real-time adjustments to them. Other types of data include the proximal and distal outcomes that result from ED&D's planned work. Distal outcomes include the results that occur in schools, school systems, and with students. Other outcomes are more proximal in nature and are associated with the participants attending ED&D events.

As mentioned, ED&D has developed a method for determining whether its participants are satisfied with the program events and the extent to which they acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to address disproportionately. Currently, nearly 10% of LEAs and SELPAs across the state have participated in ED&D's efforts to collect evidence on these outcomes or are slated to do so by the end of September. ED&D's efforts to determine the extent to which participants acquire the knowledge and skills to address disproportionality have led to the identification of more than 15 knowledge, skills, and attitudes (or KSAs). ED&D is currently collecting evidence on each of these KSAs and will continue to develop more as the need arises.

In defining KSAs for this work, ED&D recognized a gap in evidence in the form of behavioral changes expected in participants. Behavioral changes often reflect the actions participants take to apply their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. While it is imperative to know whether participants acquire the knowledge and skills to address disproportionality, the team must also understand how this knowledge is applied in the workplace. To fill this gap, ED&D integrated a behavioral perspective into its

outcomes in the form of a “Call to Action.” In one “Call to Action,” participants complete a script for describing disproportionality to others in their LEA, then they follow through and deliver this message at a meeting taking place in their local context. After follow-up with these participants, ED&D will know (a) if the action took place, and (b) the challenges in carrying it out. This behavioral data will serve as a critical component for the team to understand the challenges and opportunities as participants apply the work in their respective contexts.

Furthermore, this behavioral data provides ED&D with an opportunity to understand the work from another’s perceptive. For example, meaningful adjacency is a notion that one’s work impacts others around them. That is to say, the learning that occurs with a participant in one workshop can be spread to others in the organization. ED&D plans to reach out to participants’ colleagues and gather evidence of what they understand about disproportionality based on their interactions with ED&D participants. Additionally, this evidence provides another opportunity to understand how well different organizations are interacting around disproportionality since many of the colleagues of, for example, a Director of Special Education in an LEA, are SELPA coordinators, directors and coordinators from other LEA, colleagues from Technical Assistance Centers, and others. ED&D will map the connections between its participants and others to find out how this work scales to others in the regions, which is a key element of the ED&D model. This potential measure allows ED&D to understand how the model builds the capacity of those indirectly connected to the project.

Additional areas of data focus on the distal outcomes in schools, school systems, and students. ED&D is curious about how this work influences a schools MTSS capacity. As such, it plans to engage in the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) multiples times a year to see the impact in a system and determine whether these MTSS practices dismantle and disrupt inequitable systems. ED&D is also curious about whether the work influences school culture; that is to say, whether students believe their schools are more equitable places. ED&D has access to several equity and school climate surveys and is working on mechanisms to use one of these surveys across its network. Finally, ED&D is ultimately curious about the influences of its work to address disproportionality and the extent to which this project reduces disproportionality outcomes in school systems, especially in Special Education and in suspension and expulsion rates. These distal outcomes often get the lion’s share of attention when examining program effectiveness, but the ED&D program has been designed to use data strategically, which includes a combination of formative data, data for improvement, and data on short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes.

In summary, ED&D has the tools to use data strategically and has intentionally focused on collecting both formative and summative data to make improvements to its products and services and to capture the effects of this work on stakeholders and beneficiaries.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions reflect program successes and challenges. One aspect of the ED&D program is its innovative community-based approach to addressing disproportionality. This approach has led to the following program’s strengths:

- The ED&D team's capacity-building efforts for SELPAs and related partners through awareness and action-oriented data trainings lays the foundation for this work to thrive across the state.
- ED&D's dual focus on human-centered design, while using best practices in the research literature, present the greatest opportunity for system and student-level change regarding inequitable school practices. The additional strength of adding behavioral outcomes for participants further improves the probability of reducing disproportionality across the state.
- The way ED&D cultivates and nurtures relationships between and among stakeholder groups, including critical design partners such as IDEO to its relationships with SELPAs and LEAs, ensures greater buy in to reducing disproportionality on the front end of this project and greater scalability on the back end.
- ED&D's unified approach of building technical competency (through data literacy tools and training, improvement science, and MTSS) coupled with professional networks guided by equity is a promising theoretical approach to disrupting inequitable school system practices.
- ED&D's innovative approach, emphasizing feedback loops in the program development and delivery process, moves this project from a compliance approach to one focused on efficacy.

Current areas of challenge include the following:

- Interrupted schooling, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, increases the burden on this project by creating additional issues related to learning loss, social-emotional learning, economic inequities, and others. COVID-19 presents an unprecedented set of challenges, including the potential amplification of disproportionality outcomes.

- Defining the best support structure for ED&D participants. There are numerous options to support participant learning in the workplace, including follow-up phone calls, booster sessions, direct coaching support, learning walks, and others. The ED&D team has committed to providing this support and has yet to fully determine how best to support its participants in their respective contexts. Direct coaching support is the preferred model, but with such a small team, a coaching model may strain resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are the specific actions the evaluation team proposes be taken by program developers. Each one is based on the evaluation's findings and conclusions.

- Continue to model a culture of continuous improvement in ED&D programs and services and connect this approach to the PDSA project as it commences.

- Determine a way to measure the strength of the relationship between ED&D

developers and its partners and stakeholders. Programs work on trust and ED&D must be knowledgeable about the development and evolution of its relationship with partners, including SELPAs, LEAs, and other partners. Use evidence about these relationships as the basis to define the ED&D support model, which may include a tiered approach to support defined by stakeholder competency and need.

- Gather evidence on how the intersection between the technical work (data literacy, improvement science, and MTSS training) and professional learning networks focused on equity influence and/or reduce inequitable schooling practices by examining the relationship between these actions and system outcomes.

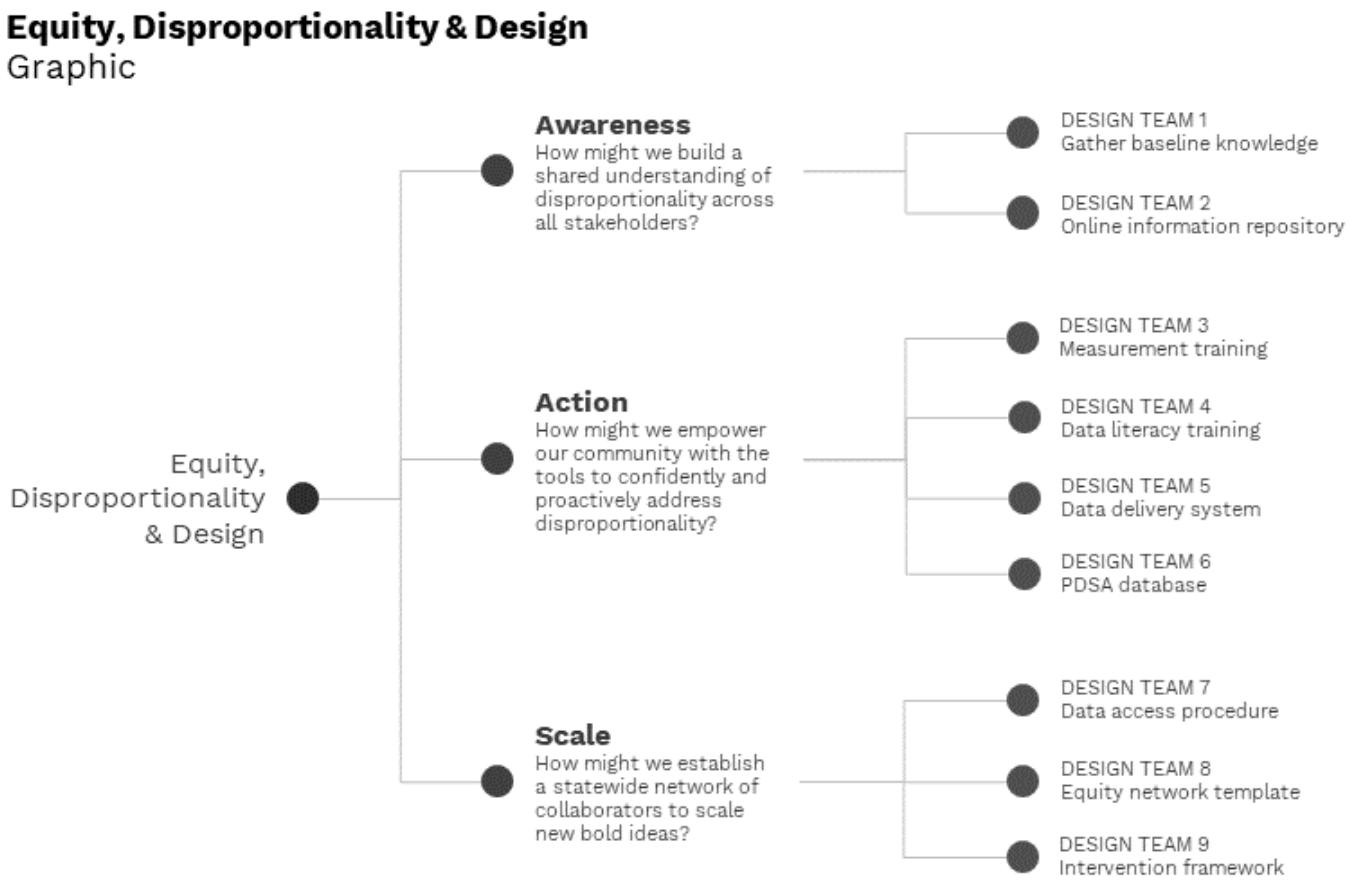
APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: TABLES

Table 1. The Prevalence of Disproportionality Statewide

Geographic Lead Agency	Counties Served	SELPAs	Dispro* Districts	Total Districts	Percent of Districts Dispro*
Alameda County Office of Education	Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano	15	21	103	20.38%
Kern County Superintendent of Schools	Fresno, Kern, Los Angeles, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura	29	36	213	16.90%
Placer and Sacramento County Offices of Education	Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Colusa, El Dorado, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Sierra, Sutter, Tuolumne, Yolo, Yuba	20	29	125	23.20%
Riverside and San Diego County Offices of Education	Imperial, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego	30	39	148	26.35%
Shasta County Office of Education	Butte, Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta, Siskiyou, Tehama, Trinity	9	21	152	13.81%
Sonoma County Office of Education	Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Napa, Sonoma	5	14	87	16.09%
Tulare County Office of Education	Inyo, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Mono, Monterey, San Benito, Santa Cruz, Stanislaus, Tulare	11	27	174	15.52%

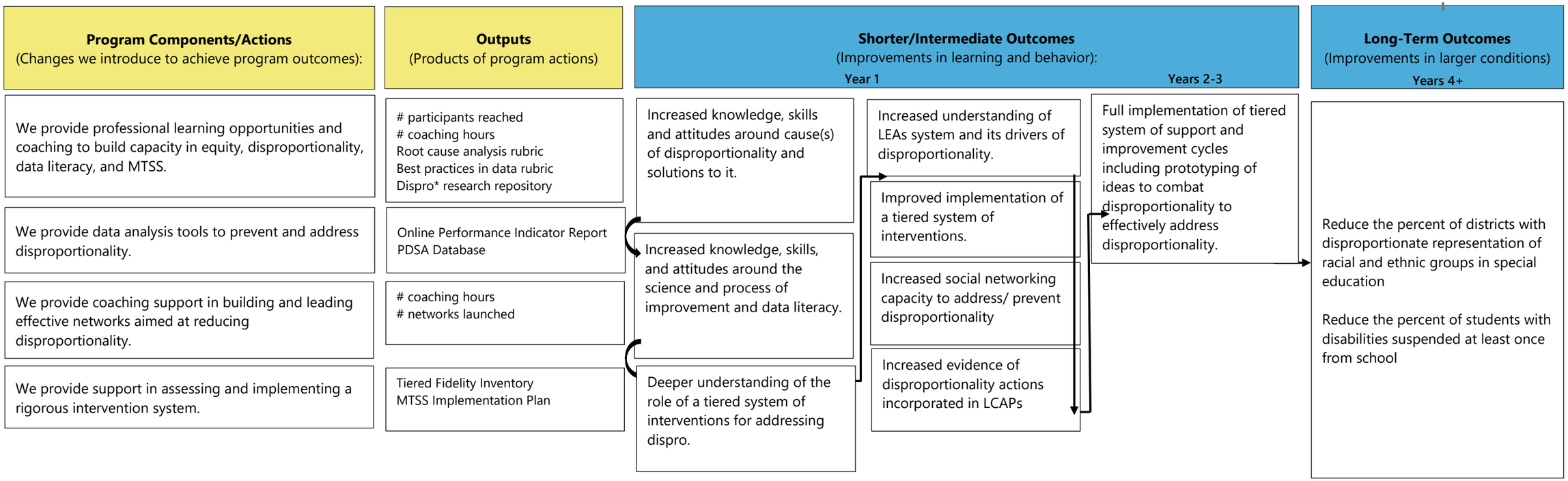
Figure 1. The ED&D Design Schematic



APPENDIX II: EVALUATION LOGIC MODEL

Problem Statement: Schools districts have (a) over-representation of student groups in special education in of suspension and expulsions of students with disabilities (b) limited leadership capacity for addressing dispro-based problems, (c) considerable variation in the implementation of a tiered system of support (d) and limited actionable data tools and resources to detect, predict, and overcome disproportionality challenges.

Project Goal: The ED&D project will reduce disproportionality in special education for targeted students in targeted regions, ultimately narrowing the achievement and opportunity gaps for these students.



APPENDIX III: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Instrument	Description
ED&D Attendance Log	A list of participants from each workshop session.
ED&D Facilitator's Log	Tracks which activities were completed and any changes to the program. Completed by the Facilitator after workshop session.
ED&D Session Activity Form	Tracks the activities in each session, participants' engagement; completed by evaluator.
ED&D End of Workshop Survey	Survey completed by participants at end of workshop sessions.
Facilitator Interview Protocol	Questions about facilitator's experiences and suggestions for program improvements.
Participant Interview Protocol	Questions about participants' experiences and suggestions for program improvements.
ED&D End of Program Survey	Retrospective pretest survey completed by participants at end of the program.
Tiered Fidelity Instrument (TFI)	A 15-item inventory that measures the extent to which school personnel are applying the core features of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports.
ED School Climate (EDSLS)	The EDSCLS web-based administration platform is a suite of school climate surveys for middle and high school students, instructional staff, non-instructional staff, and parents/guardians.
COMPASS Equity Survey	The COMPASS Equity Student Survey is a questionnaire for students in the upper elementary grades through high school that covers a range of issues related to educational equity in schools. The full bank of survey items consists of 13 subscales: valuing diversity, diversity instruction, belonging, representation, expectations, access and fairness, support, respect, safety, harassment, religion, parent involvement, and gender equity.
Student Outcomes	ED&D's long-term outcomes include (1) reducing the percent of districts with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education from 20% to 12% by 2024. And (2) reducing the overall percent of students with disabilities suspended at least once from school from 6.2% to 5% by 2024.

APPENDIX IV: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

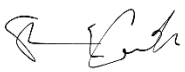
Program Actions	Research Sources
We provide professional learning opportunities and coaching to build capacity in equity, disproportionality, data literacy, and MTSS.	Evidence has shown that when schools approach disproportionality systemically by engaging in collaborative leadership, focus on preventative discipline practices, provide teachers with tools and support for addressing discipline concerns, have positive teacher-student relationships, high expectations for students, structured learning environments, and family and community engagement suspension and expulsion rates decline (Nishioka, Williams, and Jaffery 2019). Achievement gaps close when equity becomes part of an organization's culture and all individual students' needs are honored (Reed 2018). Evidence has shown that supporting educators with data focused on risk provides better analysis than outcome data illustrating differences in performance (Fergus 2017)
We provide a preventative, data-driven approach to analyzing and addressing disproportionality.	Lai and Schildkamp (2013) highlight that when teachers are given time, context, and skills to use data, student achievement improves. Ariola and Dunn (2011) illustrate the success of Oregon's investment in educator data literacy and how schools implementing data use strategies have closed achievements gaps, especially in math. Faria, Heppen, et al. (2012) found that school-level supports for data use, such as data infrastructure, time to review and discuss data, professional development, and staff capacity, were related to higher student achievement on state tests.
We provide coaching support in building and leading effective networks aimed at reducing disproportionality.	Goldenberg (2009) found significant gains in student achievement and improved teacher instruction after nine schools converted routine meetings into professional learning teams guided by an explicit protocol that encouraged initiative.
We provide support in assessing and implementing a rigorous intervention system.	King (2016) investigated the impact of the School-Wide Benchmarks of Quality, a PBIS fidelity measure, on student disciplinary outcomes. Results showed that the PBIS fidelity measure had a modest effect on the overall student disciplinary outcomes but did not address the disproportionate representation of African Americans. Putnam, Horner, & Algozzine (2016) compared schools that had implemented school-wide PBS to those that had not. The PBS schools had higher standardized test scores than the others. This finding was all the more impressive since the PBS schools began with lower scores.

Source of Evaluation Information	Date Accessed
Disproportionality Grant Documents (Application, Metrics, Theory of Action	11/19/2019
Disproportionality Literature Review	03/20/2020
Disproportionality Evaluation Contract	02/04/2020
Disproportionality Awareness Training Materials	12/02/2019
Disproportionality Awareness Training	12/02/2019
Data Literacy Training Materials	05/29/2020
Data Literacy Training	01/31/2020 05/29/2020 06/29/2020 08/12/2020
Empathy Training Materials	07/29/2020
Empathy Training	08/04/2020 08/20/2020
ED&D Call to Action Materials	07/23/2020
ED&D Review Cycle Facilitator's Log (various)	06/29/2020 08/04/2020 08/12/2020 08/20/2020
ED&D Review Cycle Session Outcome Form (various)	08/04/2020 08/12/2020 08/20/2020
ED&D Evaluation Bi-weekly Meetings & Debrief Running Record	12/11/2020 (start) - Present
ED&D Team Meeting Notes (various)	07/16/2020 07/23/2020 09/15/2020
ED&D Email Exchange with Participants (various)	03/25/2020 05/14/2020 06/29/2020 08/07/2020 08/17/2020 08/11/2020 08/19/2020
ED&D Blog	12/20/2019 03/23/2020
ED&D Team Interviews	09/18/2020
Disproportionality Participant/Partner Interviews	09/18/2020

APPENDIX V: DISCLOSURE OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Name	Shannon Coulter
Title	Director Research and Evaluation
Organization	San Diego County Office of Education
Evaluation Position?	Team Leader
ED&D Project(s) Evaluated *(Include project name(s), implementer name(s) and award number(s), if applicable)*	Evaluating a design thinking approach to the complex problem of disproportionality in Special Education
I have real or potential conflicts of interest to disclose.	Yes
If yes answered above, I disclose the following facts: *Real or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to:* 1. *Close family member who is an employee of the ED&D operating unit managing the project(s) being evaluated or the implementing organization(s) whose project(s) are being evaluated.* 2. *Financial interest that is direct, or is significant though indirect, in the implementing organization(s) whose projects are being evaluated or in the outcome of the evaluation.* 3. *Current or previous direct or significant though indirect experience with the project(s) being evaluated, including involvement in the project design or previous iterations of the project.* 4. *Current or previous work experience or seeking employment with the ED&D operating unit managing the evaluation or the implementing organization(s) whose project(s) are being evaluated.* 5. *Current or previous work experience with an organization that may be seen as an industry competitor with the implementing organization(s) whose project(s) are being evaluated.* 6. *Preconceived ideas toward individuals, groups, organizations, or objectives of the particular projects and organizations being evaluated that could bias the evaluation.*	I am employed by the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) and the ED&D project is led by the South County SELPA, which is also a branch of SDCOE.

I certify (1) that I have completed this disclosure form fully and to the best of my ability and (2) that I will update this disclosure form promptly if relevant circumstances change. If I gain access to proprietary information of other companies, then I agree to protect their information from unauthorized use or disclosure for as long as it remains proprietary and refrain from using the information for any purpose other than that for which it was furnished.

Signature	
Date	09/30/2020

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