BUILDING SYSTEM KNOWLEDGE FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT:
EARLY LESSONS FROM THE CORE DISTRICTS
FACTS-AT-A-GLANCE

The CORE Districts are leveraging their comprehensive data system and strengthening their ongoing collaboration to solve a shared problem — middle school math outcomes and the performance gap for African American and Hispanic/Latino students. The eight districts are applying a specific continuous improvement framework known as Networked Improvement Communities to reach their goal.

PACE conducted surveys, analyzed field notes from 23 CORE convenings, and conducted interviews that captured the learnings of more than a hundred educators in the CORE network. The new PACE brief "Building System Knowledge for Continuous Improvement: Early Lessons from the CORE Districts" highlights lessons educators can use to refine their own continuous improvement practices.

WHAT WE KNOW

While continuous improvement is the cornerstone of school accountability, California's schools and districts lack a shared understanding of the routines, structures and supports necessary to dramatically improve student outcomes.

The Networked Improvement Communities (NICs) framework is gaining traction as a promising model for helping school districts become continuous improvement organizations.
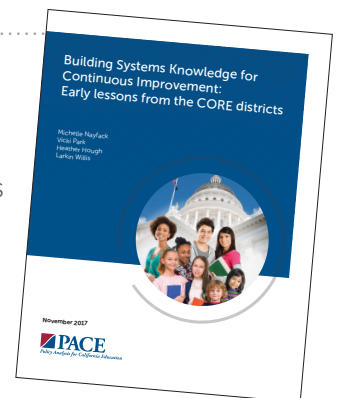
NICs are different from other learning networks because they are:

1. focused on a well-specified common aim;

2. guided by a deep understanding of the problem, the system that produces it and a shared working theory to improve it;

3. disciplined by methods of improvement research to develop, test and refine interventions; and

4. organized to accelerate the diffusion of these interventions into the field and to support their effective integration into varied educational contexts.
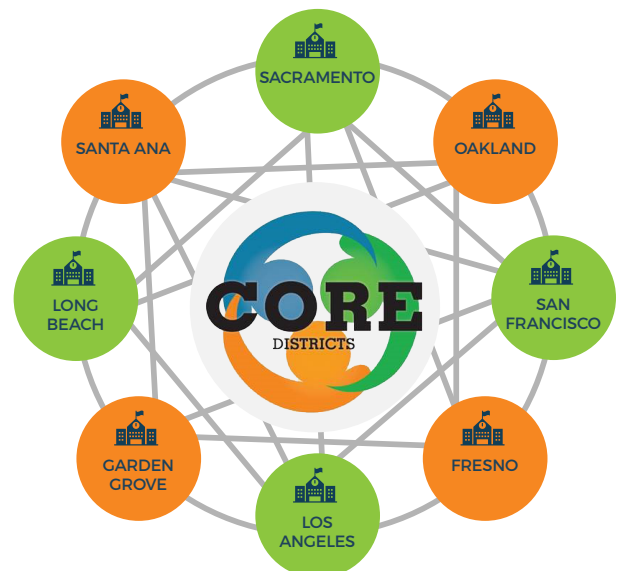
FIRST STEPS

For educational leaders interested in closing the knowing-doing gap, we offer the following first steps.

- Determine who needs to be part of the improvement team to ensure a full picture of your system.

- Decide how to coordinate your team's work, including roles, responsibilities and purpose.

- Identify routines and structures that support the collaboration of your cross-functional team, and provide different types of opportunities to share progress and troubleshoot challenges.

- Assess your capacity to collect, analyze and use both systems-level data and data that will help build understanding about the perspectives of parents, students, teachers and school leaders.

- Clarify areas where more resources or professional development is needed.

- Anticipate and plan for challenges by identifying existing system structures or processes that facilitate inquiry and which create barriers to success.

WHAT WE LEARNED

"When we can work well together and utilize each other's strengths and make those weaknesses disappear because of the meshing of the teams and the expertise, it becomes a really powerful thing."

Lesson 1: Effective systems analysis starts with creating an improvement team that is set up for success.

Lesson 2: The systems analysis process enables educators to revise, refine and expand their initial hypotheses about the reasons behind their problem of practice.

Lesson 3: Accessing and interpreting different types of data is critical to building a complete understanding of a problem of practice.

Lesson 4: Teams that are getting started in continuous improvement benefit from expert facilitation and learn-by-doing activities.

To view the full report please visit:
http://www.edpolicyinca.org/publications/building-systems-knowledge-for-continuous-improvement