



The Network Solution: How Rural District Networks Can Drive Continuous Improvement

January 2019

Agenda

- 2:00 pm – 2:45 pm: Overview of the Rural Professional Learning Network and Research Findings
- 2:45 pm – 3:30 pm: Panel Discussion

Seminar Goals

- To learn more about the design of the Rural Professional Learning Network (RPLN) and the partnership between the nonprofit Pivot Learning and El Dorado County Office of Education
- To review the research findings on the implementation of the RPLN and its implications for network design, rural district collaboration, and continuous improvement
- To engage with network members during a panel discussion and assess implications for state education policy and local continuous improvement

Pivot Learning

- Pivot Learning is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to partner with educators to design and implement solutions to their greatest challenges in achieving educational justice
- We believe that in order to achieve real improvement in student outcomes, we must collaborate with educators to design agile solutions, measure their effectiveness and potential for sustainability and scalability, and deploy them in our nation's neediest schools

PACE

- Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) is an independent, non-partisan research center led by faculty directors at Stanford University, the University of Southern California, the University of California Davis, the University of California Los Angeles, and the University of California Berkeley
- We bridge the gap between research, policy, and practice

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Overview of the Rural Professional Learning Network



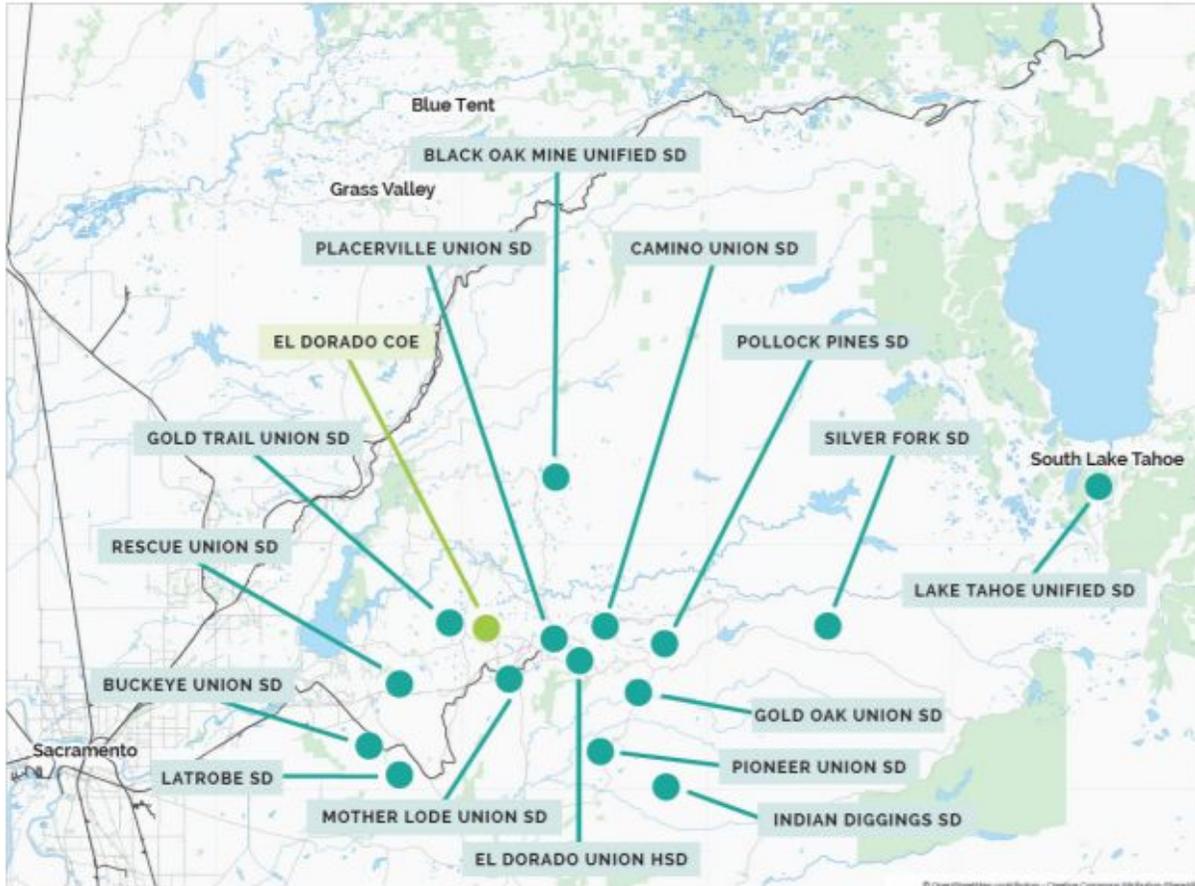
Project Background

- Goal: Build a network of rural school districts to solve shared problems of practice in California State Standards math implementation through in-person and virtual support
 - Common Core math challenges include accessing high quality math materials, developing students' growth mindset, and K-12 vertical and horizontal alignment (among others)
- Pivot redesigned and relaunched the network in 2016–2017 in collaboration with El Dorado County Office of Education

El Dorado County Context

- Northern California, east of Sacramento
- 15 school districts
- 27,000 students
- Vast geographic region: covers 1,700 square miles
- Twelve (12) TK–8 districts
- Two (2) unified TK-12 districts
- One (1) high school district

El Dorado County Districts



Rural Professional Learning Network Design Elements

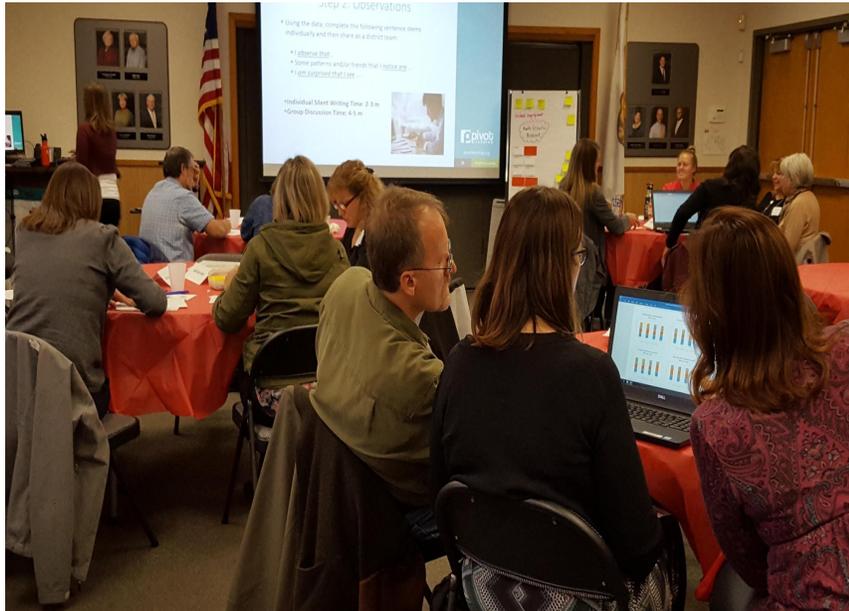
- The key design elements of starting this approach are:
 - Facilitator or network hub
 - Pre-work phase, which includes:
 - Identifying sponsors for each member district
 - Establishing project drivers for each member district
 - Convening diverse district design teams
 - On-boarding all participants
 - Reviewing common data to identify shared instructional problems of practice
 - Developing long-term impact and implementation goals

Support Provided by Pivot

- Bi-monthly network meetings
- Meetings with individual districts and/or schools
- Site visits
- Collaboration in Common – a state-approved online collaboration, learning, and resource platform
- External content experts in Math and instructional practices
- Free, user-friendly technology such as webinars

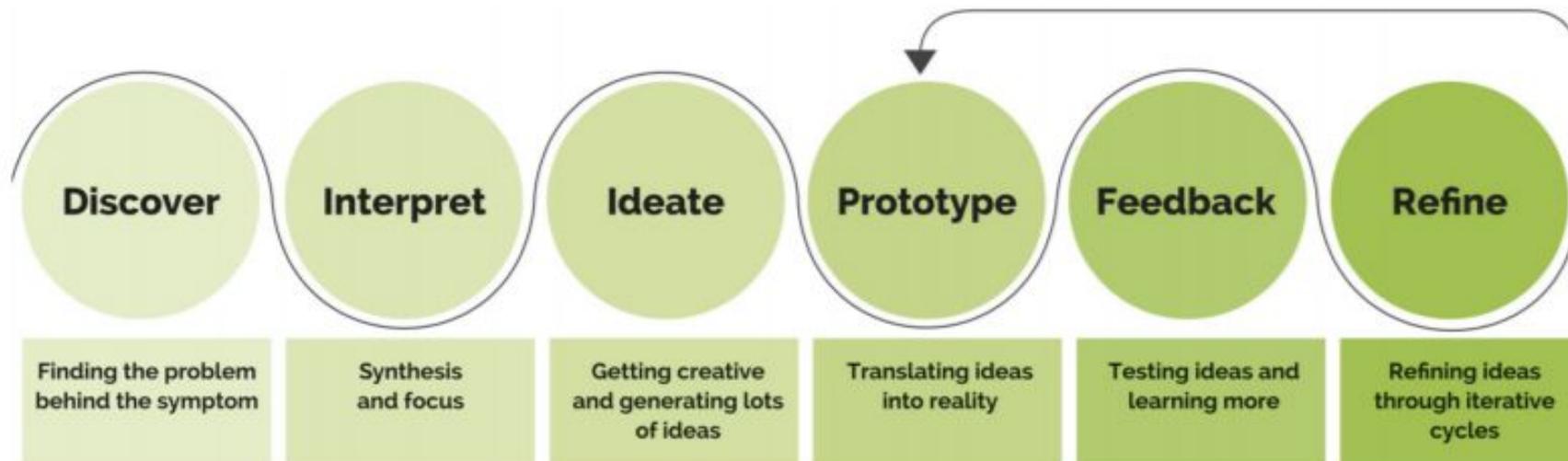
Support Provided by Pivot, continued

- Intentional community-building that fosters mutual accountability and collegiality, building on a collectively-developed and shared set of core values



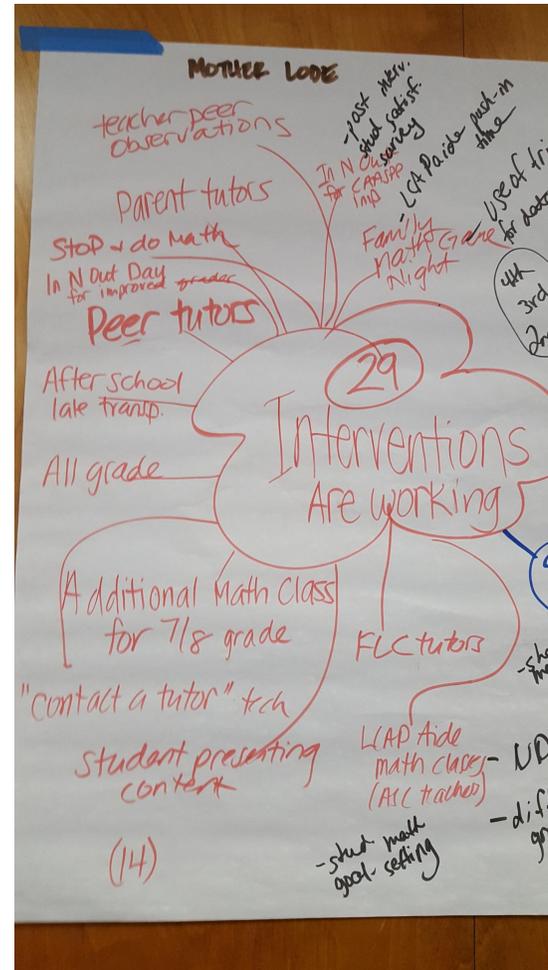
RPLN Implementation

- During the 2017-18 school year, each district engaged in the discover, interpret, ideate, and prototype phases of the design process



Design Process Examples

- **Discover:** Reviewing a resource library, reviewing literature, and receiving expert advice
- **Interpret:** Synthesizing student and teacher feedback
- **Ideate:** Brainstorming potential solutions



Prototypes

- Districts used selection criteria to identify the right solution (prototype) to test
- During testing, they looked for proof of effectiveness

District Team	Problem of Practice	Prototype	Indicator and Measure	Indicator and Measure
Gold Oak Union	Intervention	Intervention Push-In	Student Response on Surveys	Achievement on Benchmark Assessments
Mother Lode	Mindset	Professional Development	Grades	Student Response on Surveys

Overview of Research Findings

Driving Research Questions

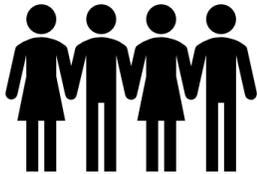
- Are collaborative networks, such as RPLN, effective means of overcoming the limitations of economies of scale, access to expertise, isolation, and funding that characterize rural districts?
- As a result, does this allow them to overcome the limitations of scarcity that characterize small districts and to build strong, effective instructional systems that schools working independently would not be able to do?

Research Project Context and Goals

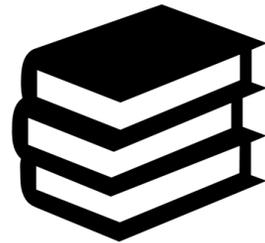
- The goal of our collective work was to ***develop and test a network approach for rural districts and schools*** that struggle with limited resources and capacity in order to ***decrease isolation and promote independence.***

Rural Network Context

- Rural districts may struggle with the following constraints or barriers:



Lack of funding, access to human capital, or technical assistance



Lack of time to identify high-quality instructional materials and assessments



Limited capacity of state and county agencies to provide support

The Rural Network Solution

- A collaborative learning network can address these challenges by providing access to:
 - Professional development
 - Technical assistance
 - External expertise
 - Collaborative time with peers
 - Economies of scale

Methods

- Methods included:
 - Focus groups
 - Individual interviews
 - Survey data from RPLN meetings
 - Student- and teacher-level surveys
 - Literature review on network development and implementation

Progress Assessment

- Members report significant benefits from the network
- Benefits included:
 - Strong learning community
 - Recurring meeting time to discuss issues
 - Community thinking and innovation
 - Focus on long-term questions (not just short-term)

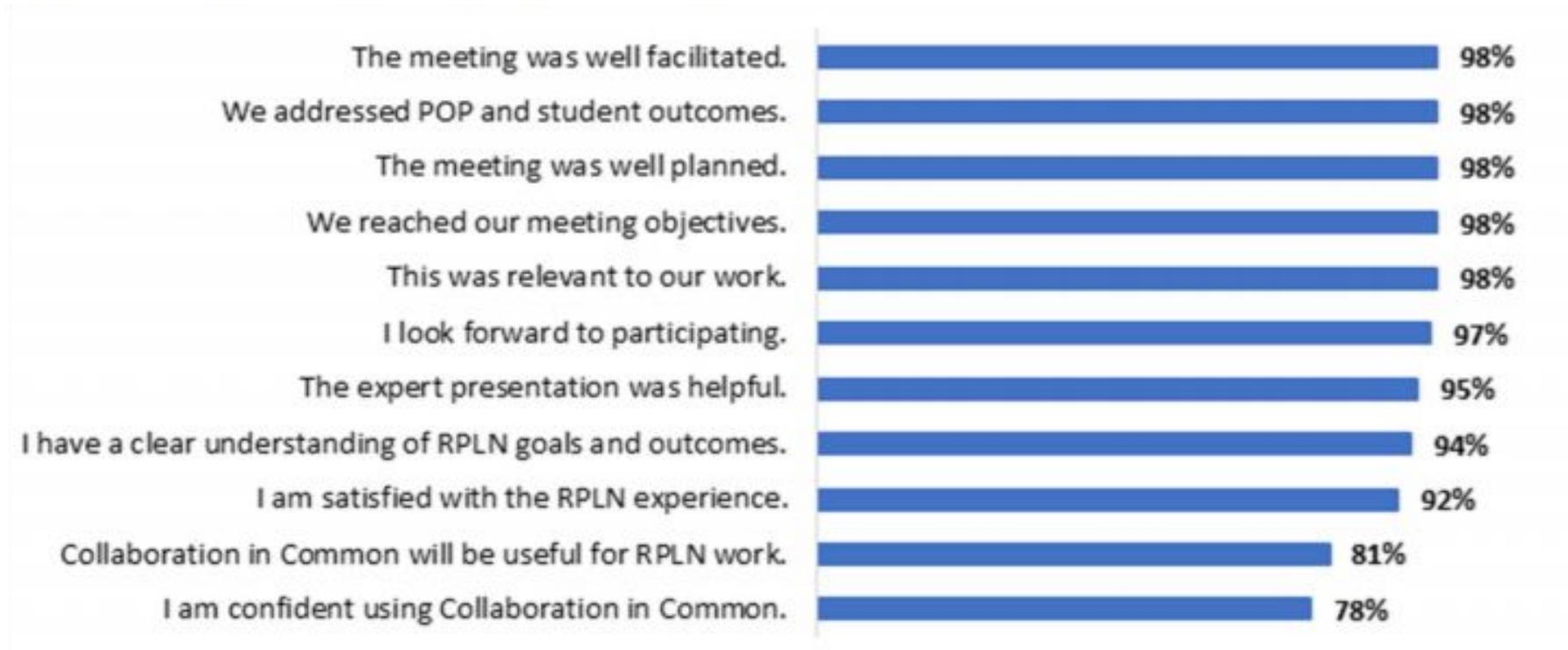
Progress Assessment, continued

“Initially, the change in standards led to an intensive discussion between the high school and feeder districts. Components of that discussion were not resolved. However, now that we have the network, we have the openness to discuss what used to be uncomfortable and contentious issues. In general, we are looking at what we can improve together.”

-Kevin Monsma, Deputy Superintendent of El Dorado County Office of Education

Progress Assessment, continued

- RPLN participants gave network meetings high marks



**Average Meeting Feedback*

Lessons Learned

- Shared network focus + site-specific work
- Multiple, strategic opportunities to learn best practices
- Intentional community and culture building
- Strong facilitator or hub
- Shared, data-driven improvement process

Conclusion

- Opportunity to recreate systems of support
- Leads to greater systemic coherence and improved outcomes
- Network model can drive continuous improvement

DISCUSSION

Panelists

- Dr. Ed Manansala, County Superintendent, El Dorado County Office of Education
- Kevin Monsma, Deputy Superintendent, El Dorado County Office of Education
- Gigi Marchini, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, El Dorado County Office of Education
- Dr. Marcy Guthrie, Superintendent, Mother Lode Union School District
- Kim Little, Principal, Pollock Pines School District

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