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The Effectiveness of California's System of Support: Dashboard and Differentiated Assistance, As Perceived by County Office of Education, Court and Community School Administrators

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CALIFORNIA'S SYSTEM OF SUPPORT: DASHBOARD AND
DIFFERENTIATED ASSISTANCE, AS PERCEIVED BY COUNTY OFFICE OF
EDUCATION, COURT AND COMMUNITY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Educational Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Education

by

Jennifer Izant Gonzales

May 2021

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The Designated Dissertation Committee Approves the Dissertation Titled

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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CALIFORNIA'S SYSTEM OF SUPPORT: DASHBOARD AND DIFFERENTIATED ASSISTANCE, AS PERCEIVED BY COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION, COURT AND COMMUNITY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

by Jennifer Izant Gonzales

The purpose of this study was to: (1) describe the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators on the accuracy of the California Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status; (2) describe the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators about the efficacy of California's System of Support, specifically Differentiated Assistance, on impacting equity-focused change in California County Office of Education Court and Community Schools; and (2a) describe the most impactful actions taken by County Office of Education Court and Community Schools related to California's System of Support. This study was conducted using an integrated research design involving quantitative data from a survey and qualitative data from open ended survey responses and interviews. The conceptual framework for this study was built upon the intersection of critical theories and education, the history of alternative education, recent history and research of California alternative education accountability, and continuous improvement and capacity building. Results revealed that California's system of support is perceived as a step in the right direction with the need to continuously revise the accountability system to make it more meaningful and impactful for County Office of Education Court and Community Schools.

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I am incredibly fortunate to live and work in a community full of dedicated, creative, and supportive educational leaders. My colleagues and mentors at the Santa Cruz COE and throughout the county inspire me daily and I look forward to continuously cultivating safe and engaging learning opportunities for all. Thank you.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The Unresolved Issue in Education

School accountability systems such as the California System of Support, including the Dashboard are traditionally designed for comprehensive schools therefore needing modifications to meet the needs of alternative school programs (CDE, 2020).

Additionally, alternative education programs themselves are some of the most under-researched education entities despite the fact that they educate a significant number of California students in County Office of Education (COE) Court and Community Schools (Legislative Analyst Office, 2016; Legislative Analyst Office, 2017; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Traditionally, California's alternative education schools have served the state's most vulnerable students and students whose needs are not met by traditional schools (Legislative Analyst Office, 2007; National Center for Youth Law, 2021; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; CDE, 2017). It is imperative that alternative education schools are informed by an accountability system designed for these unique programs and a system that fosters continuous improvement.

Traditional and alternative school accountability in California has been undergoing a historic shift. During the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era, the accountability system for alternative education programs in California was similar to that of traditional schools and the system was narrowly focused on standardized testing in math and reading. California, under NCLB, utilized the national framework for accountability, the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and the state's system was called the Academic Performance Index (API).

After President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015, the breadth and depth of accountability measures increased. Standardized testing is still very much a part of the ESSA accountability system, but states are focusing on new measures, such as chronic absenteeism, college and career readiness, and English Learner (EL) progress. The passing of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in California ushered in the largest school finance reform in over 40 years and created a new set of priorities identified by the California Department of Education (CDE) for accountability (CDE, 2019).

The 10 state priorities identified in the LCFF signify a dramatic shift in school accountability from a system that selectively focused on testing toward a more holistic, comprehensive, and equity-driven system for California schools. The eight priorities, which apply to all Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and the two additional priorities for COEs include:

- LCFF Priority 1: Basic Services (Conditions of Learning)
- LCFF Priority 2: Implementation of State Standards (Conditions of Learning)
- LCFF Priority 3: Parent Involvement (Engagement)
- LCFF Priority 4: Student Achievement (Pupil Outcomes)
- LCFF Priority 5: Student Engagement (Engagement)
- LCFF Priority 6: School Climate (Engagement)
- LCFF Priority 7: Course Access (Conditions of Learning)
- LCFF Priority 8: Student Outcomes (Pupil Outcomes)
- LCFF Priority 9: Expelled Youth (Conditions of Learning) COEs only
- LCFF Priority 10: Foster Youth (Conditions of Learning) COEs only (CDE, 2019)

Using the California state priorities as a benchmark, the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) holds LEAs responsible for carrying out a fiscally sound and locally developed three-year action plan for services. Starting in 2013-2014 school year, all LEAs, including COEs operating Court and Community School programs, were required

to develop, go through local school board approval, and submit their plan to the CDE. With the new LCFF financial system in place and the development of the LCAP, California created an encompassing data system for accountability called the California School Dashboard (Dashboard). Unlike the narrow focus of the API, the Dashboard, which launched in 2017, focuses on multiple indicators that communicate district and school progress in a variety of areas.

Under the API system, a separate system of accountability, the Alternative School Accountability Model (ASAM) was created. This was an attempt to satisfy the 1999 Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) which required the CDE to create a separate accountability system for alternative education programs with specific performance standards. The separate system was not able to be fully implemented because the federal NCLB Act of 2001 required all alternative schools to meet the same AYP as traditional schools (Ruiz de Velasco & Gonzales, 2017). Every year under NCLB and even during the initial release of the Dashboard, alternative programs existed within an accountability system that failed to address their specific needs.

When the Dashboard was released in 2017, schools formerly categorized as ASAM, or alternative schools, did not have data published. Once again, the state was faced with trying to adhere to California Education Code (EC) Section 52052(d), which requires the State Superintendent and the California School Board to develop a separate accountability system for alternative schools (CDE, 2019). When NCLB was replaced with ESSA, the state had the flexibility to make adjustments to the metrics for alternative schools. The Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) was released in December

2018 and can be considered an alternative accountability data system housed within the Dashboard. Alternative education school data is available to be viewed through the Dashboard and some of the metrics for these schools are modified.

The Dashboard/DASS systems are far from their final form and the modifications to the metrics for DASS schools will continue to be adjusted by the state. Despite its continued evolution, the introduction of DASS is already beginning to impact alternative school programs, including COE Court and Community Schools. In its current form, alternative programs have indicators for the following: chronic absenteeism, graduation rate, English, math, suspension rate, English Learner Progress, and college and career readiness. Although the indicators match those of traditional schools, modifications are currently being made. The major modification in DASS involved recalculating the graduation rate for alternative programs.

Traditional schools in the Dashboard are evaluated on a four-year graduation cohort and DASS schools are evaluated on a one-year cohort (CAD, 2013). This significant change reveals how California is attempting to create a data tool for alternative programs that truly reflects their progress and ignites change. Unlike traditional schools, many students who attend alternative school programs do not begin in ninth grade, nor do they often stay in one school program for their high school career. The high mobility of alternative education students makes traditional four-year graduation cohort not a valid measure for alternative programs (CDE, 2020). Having a one-year cohort means that the graduation rate of alternative programs is calculated based on a numerator equal to the number of students who graduate and a denominator of the number of students classified

as a 12th grader. The one-year graduation cohort is also used to calculate the College and Career Indicator (CCI).

The CCI is measure for all schools in California and shows promise as an indicator to drive change in alternative education programs. Many of the metrics used to calculate the CCI exclude the majority of COE Court and Community School students, including the passing of Advanced Placement (AP) exams and A-G course completion. Current metrics that have the potential for alternative education schools and students include Career Technical Education (CTE) pathways and dual enrollment. Through dual enrollment agreements, high school students across the state are eligible to take community college courses nearly for free, including alternative education students. CTE pathways and dual enrollment offer exciting opportunities for alternative education programs to better prepare their students for life after high school. Although dual enrollment existed before California's new accountability system, the Dashboard identifies which students are dually enrolled. According to The Education Trust, students of color and socioeconomically disadvantaged students are not participating in high numbers, revealing systemic issues in educational entities (Education Trust, 2020).

With the development of DASS, the intention is that the alternative program accountability data will be valuable based upon modified metrics as well as the new array of indicators that more holistically evaluate programs and drive change. The use of Dashboard/DASS data is an integral part of California's tiered System of Support which aims to drive continuous improvement in schools (California System of Support Frequently Asked Questions, n.d.). Educational entities, including alternative programs,

qualify for a specific tier of support, based on data from the California Dashboard/DASS. The three tiers of support include General Assistance, Differentiated Assistance, and Intensive Intervention. Alternative school programs first became eligible for assistance with the release of DASS data in December 2018. Studying the impact and effectiveness and California's System of Support and new Dashboard/DASS for COE alternative education programs is necessary to continuously improve accountability for alternative education programs.

Significance of the Problem

The fact that alternative programs have, historically, neither been well-studied, nor held accountable in a meaningful way, needs to be addressed (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; Legislative Analyst Office, 2017; National Center for Youth Law, 2021). This research is designed to improve educator and general community member knowledge regarding COE Court and Community Schools as well as determining the effectiveness and impact of the Dashboard/DASS and California's System of Support on creating protocols and procedures designed to equitably impact students in alternative education programs. Access to a robust educational experience that is appropriately rigorous, engaging, and provides equitable opportunities for college and career exploration and preparedness is essential for all students, especially vulnerable youth. For too long, alternative education has been under-researched, misunderstood, unsupported, and has not been appropriately held accountable.

There is a long-standing need to study alternative education and research the impact and effectiveness of the newly released alternative education data system,

Dashboard/DASS and California's System of Support. As discussed earlier in this chapter, alternative education programs, specifically COE Court and Community Schools, serve some of the most vulnerable students in our education system, students who deserve and require research, continuous improvement, and accountability (Legislative Analyst Office, 2007; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; CDE, 2017; National Center for Youth Law, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Alternative education programs in California, in particular, COE Court and Community Schools, are under-researched. COE Court and Community Schools were developed to serve the most vulnerable students in our education system. While the scope of students who attend these programs has broadened, there is little to no systematic research on their effectiveness and impact that could be used to institutionalize better accountability practices and policies. The Dashboard/DASS and California's System of Support is a state-wide effort to hold schools, including alternative education programs, accountable and promote continuous improvement. Currently, there are no assessments or research that can be used to understand how the Dashboard/DASS and California's System of Support will impact the alternative education programs and students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to survey and interview COE Court and Community School administrators regarding the Dashboard/DASS and California's System of Support. Specifically, this study is designed to understand the perceptions of these administrators with regard to the accuracy of the Dashboard, the usefulness of the

Dashboard for equity, the impact of Differentiated Assistance, and the most impactful action taken as a result of participation.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators on the accuracy of the California Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status?

2. What are the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators about the efficacy of California’s System of Support, specifically Differentiated Assistance, on impacting equity-focused change in California County Office of Education Court and Community Schools?

2a. What are the most impactful actions taken by COE Court and Community Schools related to California’s System of Support?

Abbreviations

API. Academic Performance Index.

ASAM. Alternative School Accountability Model.

AYP. Adequate Yearly Progress.

CCEE. California Collaborative for Educational Excellence.

CCI. College and Career Indicator.

CCSESA. California County Superintendents Educational Services Association.

CDE. California Department of Education.

CISC. Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee.

COE. County Office of Education.

DASS. Dashboard Alternative School Status.

EL. English Learners.

JCCASAC. Juvenile Court, Community, and Alternative School Administrators of California.

LCAP. Local Control Accountability Plan.

LCFF. Local Control Financial Formula.

NCLB. No Child Left Behind.

SARB. Student Attendance Review Board.

SPSSC. Student Programs and Services Steering Committee.

Definition of Terms

Alternative education. Public schools that provide a different learning setting than traditional K-12 “comprehensive” public schools. Alternative education programs traditionally serve students who have faced significant life challenges, are expelled, are referred by local districts for lack of attendance, are on probation, and/or have needs that are not met by their district school. There are numerous types of programs that exist within alternative education (National Center for Youth Law, 2021).

At-risk. This is an antiquated term used in much literature about alternative education. The researcher takes issue with this term and uses it with quotation marks to emphasize this point. The term at-risk is used to describe underserved students and is deficit-focused.

County alternative education (COE Court and Community Schools). Alternative education programs administered by the local County Office of Education. Community

schools meet the needs of a broad range of students including those on probation, expelled, and credit deficient. Court schools focus on the needs of incarcerated students and alternative education students on probation (CDE, 2019).

Dashboard. According to the California School Dashboard website, the Dashboard “is an online tool that shows how local educational agencies and schools are performing on the state and local indicators included in California's school accountability system. The Dashboard is a key part of major shifts in California K-12 schools, changes that have raised the bar for student learning, transformed testing and placed the focus on equity for all students” (CAD, 2020).

DASS. The Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) is the data system for alternative schools in California. DASS, “holds alternative schools and alternative schools of choice accountable for modified methods of measurement for accountability indicators, when appropriate. The State Board of Education (SBE) will continue to take action on how to incorporate new modified methods in the Dashboard for future releases” (CAD, 2013).

Differentiated Assistance. Differentiated Assistance is the second tier of support outlined in California’s new accountability system. Districts are eligible to receive assistance from their local COE if any student group does not meet performance standards in two or more LCFF priority areas. When COE Court and Community Schools qualify for Differentiated Assistance they partner with the CDE or other COEs (CAD, 2013).

Site Selection and Sample

This study will take place in California and is focused on the perceptions of COE Court and Community School administrators. This mixed-methods study will survey COE Court and Community School administrators who have been involved in Differentiated Assistance for their programs. This study encompasses surveying COE Court and Community School administrators about the Dashboard/DASS and their experience with, and the impact of, Differentiated Assistance. Additionally, this study includes interviews with COE Court and Community School administrators. The participants in this study were selected because they are COE administrators of Court and Community School programs and have experience with Differentiated Assistance. Participants are members of the Juvenile Court, Community, and Alternative School Administrators of California (JCCASAC) which is a division of the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA).

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research will be limited in scope and focus on the perception of COE Court and Community School administrators from COEs throughout the state of California. This study will not focus on COE charter alternative education programs nor will it focus on COE special education programs. Administrators of COE alternative education programs have students with disabilities in their programs which is distinctly different from COE special education departments that run their own programs and are therefore not included in this study. This study will provide valuable insight into alternative education, the effectiveness of the California Dashboard/DASS as a data tool, and the impact of

California's System of Support, specifically Differentiated Assistance, on COE Court and Community Schools.

Assumptions, Background, and Role of the Researcher in the Study

My experience working in COE Court and Community Schools plays a fundamental role in this research. There has been a lack of attention paid to alternative education programs, specifically Court and Community Schools operated by COEs. County Court and Community schools have existed in an educational system, serving California's most vulnerable youth, without sufficient attention, research, and accountability that drives change. I believe that alternative education programs have a unique purpose in our educational system and should be studied and guided to serve students in the best possible way.

Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature

This chapter provides a review of literature on the following topics as they are foundational to the purpose of this study: (1) historical background and the complexities of defining alternative education (2) historical background and understanding of County Office of Education (COE) Court and Community Schools, and (3) understandings of the California System of Support and how it pertains to COE Court and Community Schools. The literature topics provide the foundational background for this dissertation in practice.

The first section provides an in-depth history of alternative education. This section discusses the concept of alternative education and the myriad of definitions and meanings that are attached to the term as well as poignant historical developments with regard to alternative education movements. It is necessary to trace the essence of alternative education back to the roots of the American education system to gain a foundational understanding of inequities of the system from the beginning and the development of alternative education to meet the needs of students not supported in traditional schools. The section ends with a definition of the COE alternative education programs that are the focus of this dissertation.

The next section explores the history of COEs and their evolving role in California's education system. COE Court and Community Schools are the focus of this dissertation. COEs are front and center of California's new accountability system as support agencies for districts and provide oversight for district LCAPs. With the new accountability system, COE alternative education departments can now partner with other COE Court and Community Schools to collaborate on continuous improvement efforts.

The third section focuses on educational accountability, including alternative education accountability and the shift towards continuous improvement and capacity building that occurred with LCFF. This section highlights the new opportunities for COEs to not only assist districts but to also partner with other COE Court and Community School programs to collaborate on studying specific problems of practice and investigating the causes.

The final section discusses the Dashboard indicators with a specific focus on the College and Career Indicator (CCI). The indicators included in the Dashboard focus on the 10 state priorities outlined in LCFF and use a mix of local and state indicators. The addition of the CCI has been seen as a promising step towards evaluating how well schools are preparing students for life after high school. Additionally, there is hope that this indicator might have an impact on promoting college and career exploration and transitional support for traditionally underserved populations. A detailed evaluation of the Dashboard and the indicators is essential to understand for this study.

Background: History of Alternative Education

In a broad sense, alternatives within public education can be traced back to the beginnings of America's public education. Educational options in colonial America consisted of a variety of learning opportunities like homeschooling and apprenticeship training (Cubberley, 1919; Hernandez, 2003; Morley, 1991; Young, 1990). Prior to the solidification of compulsory education, education was a parental responsibility and Massachusetts had a system in place that provided reading and writing instruction in towns with more than 50 families as well as educational pathways for college, work, and

religious service (Cubberley, 1919). Whether students were deemed fit for university or had access to education was inherently biased and these biases, based on race, gender, and social class became woven into America's educational system.

America's educational history is plagued with outright racism, classism, and sexism and, although this dissertation is narrowly focused on COE Court and Community Schools, it is necessary to highlight the inequitable structure of our educational system and the intersectional components of race, class, and gender. In 1779 Thomas Jefferson argued for a two-track education which separated the laborers and the scholars. Southern states had laws in place forbidding slaves from learning to read (Race Forward, 2006). Early roots of compulsory education in America began in the 1640s in Massachusetts when town officials would review the quality of home education of children and 200 years later Massachusetts was at the forefront of requiring students to attend school in the early 1850s (Cubberley, 1919; Williamson, 2008). The progression of compulsory education solidified inequitable systemic policies and practices that ultimately created an education system that necessitated alternative programs.

America's modern education system has been denounced for being designed for and narrowly focusing on the achievements of a few while sacrificing equity (Balfanz, 2009; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Young, 1990). Students who were not recipients of the benefits of America's school system did not thrive in these traditional school environments. The risk of being pushed out and not having access to a beneficial learning experience were and continue to be real threats to many students. Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, the only public education options for many students was continuation education.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, there was widespread concern that America's schools were not adequately supporting or preparing students for their future. Inadequate schools, along with the pressing reality that the education system was severely biased and provided substandard education for many student groups brought about a rise in alternative schools (Balfanz, 2009; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Neumann, 2003; Quinn et al., 2006, Morley, 1991; Sagor, 1999; Young, 1990).

Alternative schools that spawned from the social revolution era of the 1960s were created to address a variety of student and societal needs. The financial and social support of alternative schools created a surge in new public and private schools. Some programs, such as freedom schools, were developed during the civil rights era to mobilize, support, and promote the social mobility of minority students who were failed by the education system. Other educational programs, commonly known as free schools, were developed with the individual needs and personal achievement of the student in mind (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Neumann, 2003; Quinn et al., 2006). The progressive alternative school movement that developed in the 1960s can help shape the definition and understanding of alternative education today.

Modern alternative education typology. Alternative education is an ambiguous term with an extensive list of meanings that encompass educational programs that exist outside the scope of traditional public school programs. Raywid (1994) reveals there are two defining trends of alternative schools regardless of the problematic historical ambiguities:

Despite these ambiguities and the emergence of multiple alternatives, two enduring consistencies have characterized alternative schools from the start: they have been

designed to respond to a group that appears not to be optimally served by the regular program, and consequently they have represented varying degrees of departure from standard school organization, programs, and environments. (p. 26)

In conceptualizing an understanding of alternative education, Raywid (1994) creates the first typology of alternative education consisting of three general categories:

- Type I Innovative programs which are usually popular and can resemble magnet schools. The programs can be thematic and often represent a departure from traditional school strategies and curriculum.
- Type II Last-chance schools that are prescribed to students who are at risk of expulsion (arguably, students who have been expelled as well). The main focus of these schools is behavior modification and minimum pedagogical and curricular modification or innovation is considered.
- Type III Remedial focus schools for students who need an academic and/or social-emotional rehabilitation program. These schools generally promote a therapeutic school community and academic program to support students in transitioning back to their traditional schools.

Having a preliminary typology is useful when defining alternative education but many programs do not fit neatly into one of these three categories. In her seminal article Raywid argues that although most alternative schools fit in one of these three categories, many alternative schools use a combination of the different types to create a unique program (Raywid, 1994). Other alternative education historians have created different typologies or modified Raywid's original typology, including Raywid (Aron & Zweig, 2003; Aron, 2006; Raywid, 1999). In 1999 Raywid updated her typology to reflect changes she alluded to when discussing combining different types. Raywid combined Type II and III and reclassified her categories as schools that focus on changing the student, changing the school and changing the system (Aron & Zweig, 2003; Aron, 2006; Raywid, 1999).

A student-centered alternative education typology, developed by Melissa Roderick, introduced categories of students that alternative programs serve as opposed to the systemic, curricular, and pedagogical approach of Raywid's typology (Aron, 2006; Glenn Means, 2015). The student categories that Roderick creates includes:

- Students with discipline issues that are not on track with their peers and are in need of a short-term alternative program that will assist them in returning to their school;
- Students who have assumed significant responsibilities which can include raising children, or caring for family;
- Students who are returning to an alternative school program to complete their graduation requirements, who have a pause in their educational progress for a multitude of reasons; and
- Students who have fallen substantially behind their peers and are generally older with significant deficits in their educational progress because of special academic needs, e.g. reading at a fourth grade level.

In their research, Lange and Sletten discuss that although the research is limited, it suggests that present-day alternative education programs focus on students who are disenfranchised from their traditional school or at risk of school failure. The typology developed by Raywid and the alternative education student characteristics introduced by Roderick are helpful tools when conceptualizing alternative education programs and the students they serve. Current alternative education programs in California are provided privately or by local school districts as well as COEs. In reviewing the literature there is a clear gap in research that focused on COE alternative education programs.

Alternative education definition and scope. The complex history of alternative education along with the ambiguous nature of the term itself can create a challenge when researching alternative education. For the purpose of this dissertation, the focus is on

public alternative education programs that are administered by COEs. These schools encompass COE Court and Community Schools and are commonly called COE alternative education programs. Similar to alternative education, the role of COEs is often unknown (Halverson, 1973). To study COE Court and Community programs and the current accountability system in California it is necessary to understand the history and role of COEs.

Historical Background: County Offices of Education

The County Office of Education (COE) is the often-misunderstood entity, in the web of organizations involved in facilitating learning for the students of California. The United States Department of Education (DOE), California Department of Education (CDE), County Offices of Education (COEs), and local school districts work intertwined in efforts to provide a variety of services to meet the needs of students (Halverson, 1973). California's layered education system adapts to the ever-changing financial and political direction of the state and federal government.

Educational historians and researchers (Cubberley, 1919; Legislative Analyst Office, 2017; Farrar, 1980; Strayer, 1954; McPherran, 1954) agree there is a need for COEs and it is important to note that COEs are mandated by the state, and services vary across counties depending on the need. The original duties of COEs were vaguely described with the essential focus on being an intermediate agency by coordinating services between districts as well as the state and operated by superintendents. The initial roles were clerical in nature and did require much expertise, but this changed dramatically, as the roles for the COE became more defined and impacted students to a greater degree in

the 1900s (Cubberley, 1919). In fact, in 1952, the Office of the County Superintendent of Schools was written into the California State Constitution just three years after the state established the role of the State Superintendent (Farrar, 1980).

Over the decades, the role of the COE started to shift from a sole intermediate agency to more of a service agency after the establishment of the county school service fund. Largely the result of a study conducted by Strayer (1947), the fund not only established more money for COEs, but it ushered in a new era of significance and responsibility for COEs (Farrar, 1980). Many decades before the shift, Cubberley (1919) wrote about the importance of utilizing COEs:

Under a good form of county educational organization the possibilities for helpful and constructive service are very large, and the office of county superintendent of education will, in time, become an office of large importance, attracting to the position many of the best-trained men engaged in education work. (p. 42)

Cubberley foreshadowed an ideal change that is still in existence in California today. COEs are being utilized in more ways than ever before to support districts and students in a variety of ways. California's System of Support has ushered in a new era for COEs which promotes their ability to regionally support schools through the tiered system. This topic will be discussed further in this chapter.

COE alternative education in California. Non-traditional schools, including COE Court and Community Schools, are some of the most under-researched education entities (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). In a recent report by the National Center for Youth Law, the organization advocates for more visibility and accountability of alternative education programs and report that the experiences of alternative education students, who are the highest needs students in California, are currently invisible to the general public

(National Center for Youth Law, 2021). Students in Court and Community Schools are often the most vulnerable students who need significant support. Researching and placing an emphasis on COE Court and Community Schools not only benefits the students and local communities, it benefits society as a whole. Poverty, income disparity, trauma, politics, and the general inequities that are reinforced in society are factors that impact educational outcomes of youth (Beliner & Biddle, 1995). COE alternative education schools are in place to meet the needs of students who have educational and social-emotional needs that are not being met in their mainstream school as well as students who are incarcerated.

COEs receive direct funding for educating youth incarcerated at county juvenile hall facilities according to Article 2.5. Juvenile Court Schools 48645 – 48647 (California Legislative Information, n.d.). Of all the services provided by COEs, this is one of the explicit mandates that is required, many of other alternative community schools run by COEs would fall under optional services. Court schools are not only confined to juvenile halls, many are located in other educational facilities, juvenile ranches, camps, or other correctional facilities (California Legislative Information, n.d.). According to the Legislative Analyst Office (2017) of the 58 counties in California, 47 COEs operated at least one court school program in 2014-2015. These schools adhere to state standards and fall under the jurisdiction of the County Board of Education. Aside from court schools, COEs have alternative education programs that are considered county community school programs.

According to the California Department of Education (CDE), County Community Schools serve a diverse group including students who are: expelled, on probation, referred by the Student Attendance Review Board (SARB), or requested to attend by their parent or guardian (CDE, 2019). It is a common assumption that COE Court and Community schools only serve expelled students or students on probation but there is a population of students in COE alternative education who opt out of their district and choose to attend these programs.

Calculating enrollment of alternative education programs is challenging due to the high mobility of students in the programs. According to the National Center for Youth Law (2021), there are 69 COE Court Schools and 79 COE Community Schools. In the same report, which studied 813 alternative education programs including, COE Court and Community Schools, continuation high schools, community day schools, opportunity schools, and Division of Juvenile Justice schools, during the 2018-2019 school year there were 75,000 students enrolled on census day with a cumulative enrollment of over 146,000 students.

The recent report from the National Center for Youth Law (2021) highlights the disparities in the student population of California alternative education programs. According to the report there are disproportionately high numbers of students of color, students with disabilities, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, students in foster care, and students experiencing homelessness. Alternative education programs in California serve a disproportionate number of underserved students and continuously improving data, accountability practices, and services is critical.

Positive Alternative Education Attributes

Alternative education, including COE Court and Community Schools tend to share common characteristics that support their diverse learners. The literature (Aron, 2006; Hemmer, 2011; Quinn et al., 2006, Morley, 1991; Sagor, 1999) on positive current alternative education schools suggest that these programs generally emphasize:

- Positive school community and student-teacher relationships;
- Investment in staff who choose to be a part of the school;
- Strong leadership team with autonomy and flexibility who partner with all stakeholders;
- High interest curriculum;
- Engaging instruction that is applicable to life outside of high school, include college and career interests, and accessible to all learners;
- Professional development that supports the continuous learning of academic and social-emotional techniques and research-based practices; and
- Structured student supports

This synthesized list of positive and common characteristics of alternative education programs presents fundamental attributes that are hard to quantify and assess. Alternative education schools are held accountable and financed through the same system as traditional schools in California.

Local Control Funding Formula and Alternative Education

California's educational financial systems experienced a major shift when LCFF was signed into law in 2013 (CDE, 2019). In simple terms, LCFF was designed to fund schools equitably and locally (Howland, 2017). LCFF funding includes base funding along with supplemental and concentration grants (CDE, 2019; Ed100, n.d.). Although,

LCFF funding is technically unrestricted, the additional funding that is granted to districts and COEs based on students who are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged, English Learners, Foster Youth, or unduplicated students who meet the specifications of two or more of these categories, must be used in a way the law intended and focus on equity (Ed100, n.d.).

The funding for COE Court and Community Schools is aligned with traditional schools while adhering to specific details for COE alternative education programs.

According to the CDE (2019) the specifics of alternative education LCFF are as follows:

- Provides a uniform base grant per ADA for certain pupils served by county offices (on probation, probation referred, and expelled pursuant to EC Section 48915 (a) or (c)). In addition to the base grant, COEs receive a supplemental grant equal to 35 percent of the base grant multiplied by ADA and the unduplicated percentage of targeted disadvantaged pupils. Targeted pupils are those classified as English Learners (EL), meet income requirements to receive a free or reduced-price meal (FRPM), foster youth, or any combination of these factors (unduplicated count). COEs also receive a concentration grant equal to 35 percent of the base grant multiplied by ADA and the unduplicated percentage of targeted students exceeding 50 percent of enrollment.
- Provides a uniform base grant per ADA for juvenile court school pupils. Additionally, all juvenile court school pupils are deemed to be eligible for the supplemental and concentration grants provided for unduplicated pupils. The supplemental grant is equal to 35 percent of the base grant multiplied by ADA, and the concentration grant is equal to 35 percent of the base grant multiplied by ADA and 50 percent of the juvenile court school enrollment.
- Other pupils served by COEs are funded based on the LCFF funding of their home school district.

Under LCFF, COE Court and Community Schools create an LCAP similar to districts. The three-year LCAP plan addresses the eight state priorities, as well as the two additional priorities for COEs and the plan, is submitted to the county board of education and CDE for approval.

The California School Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status

The Dashboard was created as part of a comprehensive system of accountability, pursuant to California Education Code 52052 (CDE, 2019). This online tool provides stakeholders the opportunity to view current school and student performance as well as the extent of progress being made. Unlike previous summative systems of accountability, like the Academic Performance Indicator (API), the Dashboard is designed to better inform and more accurately identify schools in need of support (Hough, H & Kirst, M, 2017). Currently, there are Dashboard/DASS indicators for the following: Chronic Absenteeism, Graduation Rate, English, Math, Suspension Rate, English Learner Progress, and College and Career Readiness. In December 2018, alternative schools, including COE Court and Community Schools, had data published through the Dashboard for the first time. According to the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), the Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) applies modified metrics to qualifying alternative education programs that are meant to more accurately and effectively hold alternative schools accountable (CCEE, 2018). The Dashboard/DASS and California's System of Support represents a shift from punitive accountability to capacity building and continuous improvement. Table 1 displays the priorities and corresponding indicators as described by the CDE.

Table 1 *The State and Local Measures for LCFF Priority Areas*

Priority Areas	State Indicator	Local Indicator
Priority 1: Basic Services and Conditions at schools (Text books availability, adequate facilities, and correctly assigned teachers).	Not Applicable (N/A)	Annual report on progress and results
Priority 2: Implementation of State Academic Standards	N/A	Annual report on progress and results
Priority 3: Parent Engagement	N/A	Annually report progress toward: (1) seeking input from parents/guardians in decision making; and (2) promoting parental participation in programs
Priority 4: Student Achievement	CAASPP results for English Language Arts and Mathematics (grades 3-8 and 11th) English Learner Progress	N/A
Priority 5: Student Engagement	Graduation Rate Chronic Absenteeism	N/A
Priority 6: School Climate	Suspension rate	Administer climate survey every other year
Priority 7: Access to a Broad Course of Study	N/A	Annually report progress on the extent students have access to, and are enrolled in, a broad course of study
Priority 8: Outcomes in a Broad Course of Study	College/Career Indicator	N/A
Priority 9: (COEs Only) Coordination of Services for Expelled Students	N/A	Annual measure of progress in coordinating instruction for expelled students

Table 1 (continued.)

Priority 10: (COEs Only) Coordination of Services for Foster Youth	N/A	Annual measure of progress in coordinating instruction for foster youth
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Dashboard indicators: college and career indicator. The Dashboard, California's data accountability system which meets the requirements of the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the LCFF, has a variety of indicators which emphasize California's departure from a system that focused on test scores. According to Melnick, Cook-Harvey, & Darling-Hammond (2017) schools should be held accountable for outcomes they can reasonably effect and the indicator should clearly reveal successes and point to areas that need further investigation and support.

The CCI is a complex indicator that takes into consideration numerous pathways for students to gain success. Currently, there are seven paths a student may take to be considered College and Career ready as measured by the Dashboard. The data from the Dashboard reveals that the majority COE Court and Community School students do not perform well on the CAASPP and thus there is an excitement that other more authentic options are available for students. Although research has not been completed on the most suitable and beneficial option for alternative education students, there is a strong sense that alternative education students will benefit from focusing relevant aspects of College and Career Readiness. That being said, the report from the National Center for Youth Law (2021) describes the problematic part of holding alternative education schools accountable for students who on average attend for less than one school year. The report

indicates that the College and Career Readiness Rate is 15 times higher in traditional schools compared to alternative education programs.

California's System of Support

According to CDE (2019), the goal of the new accountability System of Support is, “to help local educational agencies (LEAs) and their schools meet the needs of each student they serve, with a focus on building local capacity to sustain improvement and to effectively address disparities in opportunities and outcomes (CDE, 2020). In their study of the Dashboard after one year of implementation, Polikoff, Korn & McFall (2018) argue the goals of the accountability system are: 1.) that student achievement is more than a test score and multiple measures are needed; 2.) that the Dashboard highlights inequities; 3.) that improvement is a local venture; and 4.) that continuous improvement, collaboration, and support will lead improvement not punishment. This is a significant departure from the accountability system that existed prior to LCFF which did not focus on collaboration or local capacity building and instead managed improvement efforts top-down, from a distance, with packaged intervention approaches (CDE, 2019). Being equity-focused and designed to effectively address disparities in opportunities and outcomes, and rooted locally, makes the new system of support a possible driver for change for all schools, including alternative education programs.

The three levels of support offered through California's new accountability system include supports available to all LEAs through General Assistance, targeted support through Differentiated Assistance, and the final level being Intensive Intervention. This system promotes best practices for all LEAs, including COEs, as well as providing

targeted support when Dashboard data reveals a need. The second layer, called Differentiated Assistance empowers COEs with the help of the CDE to support their local districts through a process that utilizes Dashboard data and improvement science principles. This new role of COEs and their capacity to serve districts has been studied by the Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE).

The PACE research includes surveys of California COE Superintendents and their impression of California's new System of Support. According to the PACE research by Plank, Humphrey & O'Day (2019) nearly every county superintendent agreed that the system is a step in the right direction. Additionally, County Superintendents who have made or plan to make big changes in their COEs to implement California's System of Support have increased significantly from 2017 to 2019. The research from PACE surveyed the Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee (CISC) and the majority of the CISC members surveyed believed COEs should develop their capacity to provide assistance in all areas relevant to the dashboard and continuous improvement.

While there were commonalities from the COE Superintendent responses and those from the CISC members there was a notable difference when asked if district results on the California School Dashboard provide an accurate measure of which districts need additional support. The majority, 73 percent, of superintendents believe in the Dashboard's ability to provide an accurate measure of which districts need support while only 41 percent of CISC members agree. Overwhelmingly, 93 percent of superintendents surveyed believe California's System of Support is a step in the right direction for

accountability. The research did not focus on COE alternative education programs but it does provide insight into the perception of the System of Support.

Continuous improvement and California's system of support. Michael Fullan, a leadership and education reform expert, argues that the creation of the CCEE as well as the national, state, and local accountability shifts can lead to authentic school reform (Fullan, 2015). According to the CCEE website:

The CCEE is a statewide agency that works to strengthen California's public school system so that districts can build their capacity to improve student outcomes. Our agency does this by working collaboratively with other statewide agencies, county offices of education, and stakeholders so we — as a collective group — can tackle challenges as a team. In some cases, the CCEE can also offer one-on-one support to districts through direct technical assistance (CCEE, 2019).

The CCEE's emphasis on collaboration and capacity building reveals California's commitment to assist schools with continuous improvement through an accountability system that focuses on collaboration and capacity building.

Fullan and Rincon-Gallardo (2017) argue there are right and wrong drivers of education reform in their series of feedback reports titled, California's Golden Opportunity. Wrong drivers, include: punitive accountability; building technology; individualistic solutions; and Ad hoc initiatives. Right drivers of education reform include: capacity building; pedagogy; collaboration; and systemness (Fullan & Rincon-Gallardo, 2017). With the utilization of the right drivers in California's new accountability system, schools have the opportunity to make changes that are targeted to support the specific needs of their students and promote continuous organizational improvement.

With continuous improvement at the heart of California's System of Support, COEs have been tasked with undergoing a transformational change from a compliance-driven intermediary organization to one that leads with a vision of continuous improvement. Research by Manansala and Cottingham (2019) from their PACE brief discuss the vision of COEs as continuous improvement leads. Manansala and Cottingham (2019) layout these key features of continuous improvement adapted from Grunow, A., and Hough, H. (2018):

- Systems produce outcomes
- Change efforts focus on key processes
- Progress requires continual learning and discovery
- Frontline workers are uniquely situated to learn how to get ideas to work
- As effective practices are discovered, they are spread throughout the organization

To be an effective leader of continuous improvement, COEs themselves must undergo a transformation. Manansala and Cottingham (2019) discuss these three essential shifts:

1. Every layer of the system must assume shared responsibility to improve student outcomes, requiring a mindset shift from the historical role of COEs.
2. To support continuous improvement in districts, COEs must themselves experience and lead through continuous improvement and operate as improvement organizations.
3. To coordinate resources in service of districts, COEs must break down departmental silos and use data that provide reliable, timely feedback.

Although this PACE brief does not focus on COE Court and Community Schools, the shifts discussed are essential for COE alternative education continuous improvement.

System of support and COE alternative education programs. California's alternative education programs first had the opportunity to participate in the System of Support, including Differentiated Assistance, with the 2018 release of the Dashboard/DASS data. COE Court and Community Schools belong to their COE LEA and when a COE itself becomes eligible for Differentiated Assistance, there are two options for support. The COE can work directly with the California Department of Education (CDE) or the COE can opt to work with a consortium of COEs with a dedicated lead COE agency and with support from the CDE. Similar to how districts work with their local COEs utilizing improvement science, consortiums of COEs collaborate regionally on creating a problem of practice, analyzing data, and creating an action plan.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in this study consists of these main areas: (1) the intersection of critical theories and education, (2) history of alternative education, (3) recent history and research of California alternative education accountability, (4) and continuous improvement and capacity building. The first approach focuses on the dynamic and ambiguous history of alternative education including typology and modern alternative education understandings. This research includes the tracing of systemic inequities in public education back to its conception thus necessitating alternative programs to educate youth who are disenfranchised from the traditional system. The

many positive attributes of alternative education programs and their students who are often labeled “at-risk”, can be challenging to measure, especially with accountability systems that focus on test scores.

It is impossible to be involved in COE Court and Community Schools without reflecting upon the deep inequities of our education system. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was first developed in the 1970s by legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado (Delgado, R., Stefancic, R., 2012). Race, socioeconomic status, gender, and sexual orientation are examples of the intersection of identities and oppression and inequities in the American education system. Social stratification in education is present when studying the curriculum, instruction and opinions of teachers across a district in New Jersey. The study revealed that socioeconomic status played a role in expectations set by the teachers and how “standard” curriculum was modified based on teacher assumptions of students of desires and abilities (Anyon, 1981). Despite being an antiquated article, the findings relate to the current inequities in the American education system and shines a light on deficit thinking.

A recent article in the YaleNews displays the intersection of race and gender expectations as perceived by teachers:

The intersectional analysis provides a more nuanced analysis of these disparities by exploring how teachers’ perceptions differ by gender within racial and ethnic groups, the researchers asserted. For example, the study showed that teachers penalize black girls and black boys differently in math. They are more likely to rate black girls as below average in math when their non-cognitive skills are below average relative to those of white students, but they are less likely to rate black boys as above average even when they exhibit exemplary learning behaviors, according to the study (Cummings, 2020).

As previously mentioned, COE Court and Community Schools serve students who have not experienced success in the traditional education system, and it is harmful to ignore systemic inequities that exist. Understanding how students are progressing within COE Court and Community School programs is challenging because a gap in research exists.

Alternative education accountability has been severely under-researched but the general consensus is that it has traditionally been ineffective and not designed to meet the unique needs of alternative education. The conclusion of a 2007 report by the California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) was that the former alternative education accountability system allowed comprehensive schools to shift responsibility for "at-risk" students by sending them to alternative programs and the system as a whole, "...violates in almost every respect the basic criteria for an effective accountability system" (LAO, 2007, p. 29). California's new System of Support and the Dashboard were built with traditional schools in mind with the embedded DASS system designed with targeted modifications to metrics to make the system impactful for alternative education programs.

Making changes in educational organizations takes time and utilizing the right drivers will lead to positive cultural changes and capacity building which are necessary for continuous improvement (Fullan, 2016). The new accountability system in California emphasizes collaboration, leading as learners, building capacity, root cause analysis, and improvement science to lay the foundations for continuous improvement. California alternative education schools that seek accreditation through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) are familiar with continuous improvement cycles and

collaborative self-studies. However, the work alternative education schools complete for WASC accreditation has never mirrored what was expected from state and federal accountability systems. With the LCAP and the Dashboard, there is more coherence and focus on an accountability system that intentionally builds capacity and promotes continuous improvement.

Conclusion

The review of the literature reveals themes that expose gaps in research regarding alternative education. First, there is much ambiguity around the concept and understanding of public alternative education programs that serve students who are not experiencing success in traditional schools or do not have access to them for a multitude of reasons. Second, there is a very visible gap in research regarding COE Court and Community School programs specifically. Finally, there is a gap of research that studies the impacts and impressions of California's new accountability Dashboard and System of Support, specifically with regard to the impact on COE Court and Community Schools and students.

Accountability for COE alternative schools is going through a significant transformation and the impact of the new system has yet to be uncovered. With a focus on leading change locally through collaboration, capacity building, completing a deep root cause analysis, and focusing efforts with a continuous improvement lens, the intention is that all students, specifically marginalized COE Court and Community School students will be positively impacted. This research project has been developed to not only provide a descriptive study of alternative education and to research the impact of

California's new accountability system on COE alternative education programs, this research is also designed to develop suggested best practices to promote equitable access, support and success for alternative education students. Chapter Three will go into detail regarding the methods of this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Design

This chapter presents the methodology used to explore the research questions of this study; the purpose of the study, research questions, research design, participant description, and researcher positionality will be explored. Descriptions of the numerical and narrative methods, data collection, and limitations of the study will also be discussed in this chapter. The integrated methods exploratory and descriptive study was designed to capture the perceptions of COE Court and Community School administrators regarding the accuracy of the Dashboard/DASS and the efficacy of California’s System of Support—specifically Differentiated Assistance—on impacting positive equity-minded change in California County Office of Education Court and Community school programs. During part one of the study, participants completed a survey online; during part two of the study, participants completed an interview.

Purpose

The first purpose of this study describes the complexities of alternative education, the role of the County Offices of Education, and the history of accountability for alternative education. The literature review provides a foundational descriptive study of these elements. The second purpose of the study is to describe the perceptions of COE Court and Community School Administrators regarding the accuracy of the Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status. The third purpose of this study is to describe the perceptions of COE Court and Community School administrators regarding the efficacy of California’s System of Support, specifically Differentiated Assistance, on impacting positive equity focused change in California County Office of Education Court

and Community school programs as well as explore the most impactful actions taken as a result of this system. The focus of this study, COE Court and Community Schools, and the emphasis on promoting social change and positively impacting the life of oppressed and exploited communities share similarities with Action Research (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007; Maguire, 1987).

Research Questions

The research questions examined in this study are:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators regarding the accuracy of California Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators about the efficacy of California's System of Support, specifically Differentiated Assistance, on impacting positive equity focused change in California County Office of Education Court and Community Schools?

RQ2a: What are examples of the most impactful actions taken by COE Court and Community School Administrators related to California's System of Support?

Research Design

A pragmatic integrated methodology approach has been utilized in this study. There is a problematic history of compartmentalizing research into qualitative, quantitative, and even mixed methods and the formal definitions and assumptions of quantitative and qualitative research can be constraining (Plowright, 2019). The data utilized in this study comes from survey responses and interviews. The survey data provides useful numerical

and narrative data and the interviews allow the participants the opportunity to express their experiences, understandings, knowledge, and recommendations. The numerical and narrative data work together to not only answer the research questions but also provide the depth of knowledge that can only come from respondents with their unique experience and dedication to alternative education.

Study Procedures

The two phases of the study involved gathering both numerical and narrative data through a questionnaire and interviews. The survey included various types of questions including Likert scale questions and free response. The researcher utilized Google Forms for the questionnaire and completed the quantitative analysis in Google Sheets. The researcher sent the survey link in an email which contained a description of the research project including the purpose, intent, as well as contact information for the researcher and the dissertation committee chair. Consent for the survey was presented at the onset in addition to a question that verified if the participant qualified for this research project. The survey was piloted with a COE Court and Community School administrator who was not a participant in this research. At the end of the survey, participants had the opportunity to indicate whether or not they want to participate in the interview phase of the study.

A semi-structured interview protocol, leaning toward a more structured process, was followed. Each interview participant was presented with the same open-ended questions in the same order during the interview. The questions allowed participants to discuss their unique experiences and provide specific and poignant examples related to the questions.

Prior to the start of the interview, consent was obtained. Interviews were conducted using the Zoom platform and the audio recordings were transcribed. During the interviews, the researcher took notes and once the transcriptions were complete, the documents were reviewed and analyzed. The interviews lasted about an hour each. The researcher printed the qualitative data from the survey and the transcribed interviews and analyzed them by hand linking them to the research questions and categorizing the data into themes.

Description of Participants

The population selection for the research study took careful consideration as it is a fundamental aspect to research (Saldana, 2011). Purposeful sampling was used to seek participants employed as California COE Court and Community School Administrators. Participants for this study are COE Court and Community School Administrators with at least one year of experience with Differentiated Assistance. Participants were at the time of the study members of the Juvenile Court, Community, and Alternative School Administrators of California (JCCASAC) organization and had various years of experience and backgrounds in alternative education.

Twelve COE Court and Community School administrators participated in the survey and eight of them further participated in the interview phase. For the survey, six participants identified as female and six identified as male. Eight survey respondents identified as White, four as having a mixed racial/ethnic identity, and one as Hispanic/Latinx. The survey participants represented eleven different COEs, two of the participants were from the same COE. The survey participant experience with COE Court and Community Schools included six people with 18 or more years experience, two with

14-17 years experience, one with 10-13 years experience, and two with 4-9 years experience. For the interviews, five participants identified as female, and three as male. Five of the interviewees self-identified as White, two as having a mixed racial/ethnic identity, and one as Hispanic/Latinx. For the interviews, two of the eight participants were from the same COE and the other six were from different COEs. The COEs represented small, medium, and large counties across California. The experience with COE Court and Community Schools for the interviews included five people with 18 or more years experience, one person with 14-17 years experience, two people with 4-9 years experience.

COEs offer a variety of programs to meet the needs of their learners and for this study, the participants provided perspectives that are currently severely under-researched. Numerous contextual factors were considered throughout this research. Contextual elements include race, gender, feelings about accountability, and the general lack of understanding of alternative education.

Positionality

The researcher's experience working for COE Court and Community School programs played a role with regard to positionality. As the researcher is simultaneously a Court Community administrator, it is acknowledged that there is no separation between the research field and researcher (Coleman, 2019). The researcher intentionally did not source participants from their County so that there would not be positionality conflicts that would impact the research.

As an educational leader and researcher, all aspects of positionality are important to investigate. Race undoubtedly plays a role in research, specifically with qualitative educational research. Researchers must be actively engaged regarding tensions that become apparent during research where race and culture are involved. Tatum (2001) as cited in Milner (2007) wrote:

In a race-conscious society, the development of a positive sense of racial/ethnic identity not based on assumed superiority or inferiority is an important task for both White people and people of color. The development of this positive identity is a lifelong process that often requires unlearning the misinformation and stereotypes we have internalized not only about others, but also about ourselves. (p. 53)

Racial and cultural consciousness were essential for the completion of this project. Milner argues that dangers will arise "...when researchers are not mindful of the enormous role of their own and others' racialized positionality and cultural ways of knowing, the results can be dangerous to communities and individuals of color" (p. 388). Critical Race Theory (CRT) encompasses numerous principles such as ingrained racism in society and education research, the importance of narrative and counternarrative as well as owning one's own reality in education (Milner, 2007). It was necessary for the researcher to investigate herself and her relation to others with regard to race, culture, language, and job positionality while this research was conducted.

Data Analysis

Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data was aligned with the research questions. The first section addressed the following research question (1) What are the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators regarding the accuracy of California Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status?

The next section addressed the following research questions: (2) What are the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators about the efficacy of California’s System of Support, specifically Differentiated Assistance, on impacting positive equity focused change in California County Office of Education Court and Community Schools? (2a) What are examples of the most impactful actions taken by COE Court and Community School Administrators related to California’s System of Support?

In Chapter Four, the numerical (quantitative) data for each research question from the survey are presented first. They are followed by the narrative (qualitative) data from the open-ended questions on the survey and the responses from the interviews.

Numerical (Quantitative) Analysis

The mean score, standard deviation were analyzed for the quantitative data. In the next chapter, the quantitative data are summarized and displayed in frequency tables. The mean score is the primary score used to analyze these data. According to Gay, “ The mean is the arithmetic average of the scores and is the most frequently used measure of central tendency.” (p. 435)

Narrative (Qualitative) Analysis

Qualitative analysis was used to group and analyze the data from the interviews as well as from the open-ended questions from the survey. The steps in the analysis of this data were:

1. The interview transcripts and open-ended questions on the surveys were analyzed for similarity in meaning.

2. Similar responses from the interviews and open-ended questions on the surveys were then combined. Similar thoughts, words and phrases were grouped together so that they aligned with the research questions.
3. The researcher reviewed the responses three times. The researcher then developed themes for the common thoughts, words and patterns.

Limitations of Study

This study's findings will be useful for a myriad of educational organizations such as the System of Support division of the California Department of Education, COE Court and Community School teams, divisions of the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) such as the Juvenile Court, Community, and Alternative School Administrators of California (JCCASAC), the Student Programs and Services Steering Committee (SPSSC), and the Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee (CISC). Other educational leadership organizations who either research or support continuous improvement and accountability efforts in public education in California such as the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), and the Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) amongst others.

This research study is limited in scope and focused on the perceptions and experiences of COE Court and Community School Administrators throughout the state. Due to the small sample size of this study it is not appropriate for the findings to be overly generalized. This study provided valuable insight into alternative education, California's new accountability system for alternative schools, along with the intended continuous improvement process, and the impact of this system on COE Court and

Community Schools. Despite the fact that this study cannot be generalized, the data gathered through the methods described in this research produce information that inform the greater education community. Alternative education students, families, and programs deserve to have research performed to improve practices for all students, specifically student groups who are traditionally marginalized.

One important limitation is the small sample size used in this study. COE Court and Community Schools make up a small sector of the overall public education system in California. Prior to the pandemic, the researcher had planned a larger, more robust study. Despite being a small study, the findings are relevant, timely, and shine a light on an under-researched area of public education in California.

Another limitation of the study was that the research intentionally focused on exploring the perceptions of COE Court and Community Administrators regarding the accuracy of the Dashboard and the efficacy of the System of Support and did not include other participants such as teachers, support staff and students. The vast majority, 11 of the 12 participants, identified as a director and one as a site principal. Despite the limitation, they provided poignant and specific findings related to the perceptions of these administrators as was the focus of the study and there exists an opportunity to solicit feedback from a more diverse group of participants.

Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this study was to describe and bring attention to alternative education programs, specifically, COE Court and Community Schools and to explore the perceptions and experiences of COE Court and Community School Administrators about the accuracy and efficacy of California's System of Support. Accountability for COE Court and Community Schools has gone through a significant transformation and the impact of the new system is just beginning to be uncovered. This chapter will describe how this research project provided a study of the impact of California's new accountability system on COE Court and Community Schools, and describe best practices and actions taken related to California's System of Support and COE Court and Community Schools.

This study addresses the following research questions: RQ1: What are the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators regarding the accuracy of California Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status? RQ2: What are the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators about the efficacy of California's System of Support, specifically Differentiated Assistance, on impacting equity-focused change in COE Court and Community Schools? RQ2a: What are examples of the most impactful actions taken by COE Court and Community School Administrators related to California's System of Support? This chapter provides a presentation of the findings of each research question.

Research Question One

What are the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators regarding the accuracy of California Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status? This first research question investigates various aspects of accuracy of the Dashboard. Accuracy with regard to the data, as well as how accurately the Dashboard displays areas of strength and areas for improvement have been addressed through both numerical and narrative responses. Figure 1 presents the numerical results from the question regarding the overall accuracy of the Dashboard/DASS data.

Six of the 12 respondents reported that they “slightly agree” the Dashboard data is accurate. The remaining six participants responded equally amongst “disagree”, “slightly disagree”, and “agree”. The mean ($M=2.67$) reveals the average is between “slightly disagree” and “slightly agree” and the standard deviation is ($SD=.98$) which shows the responses are spread out.

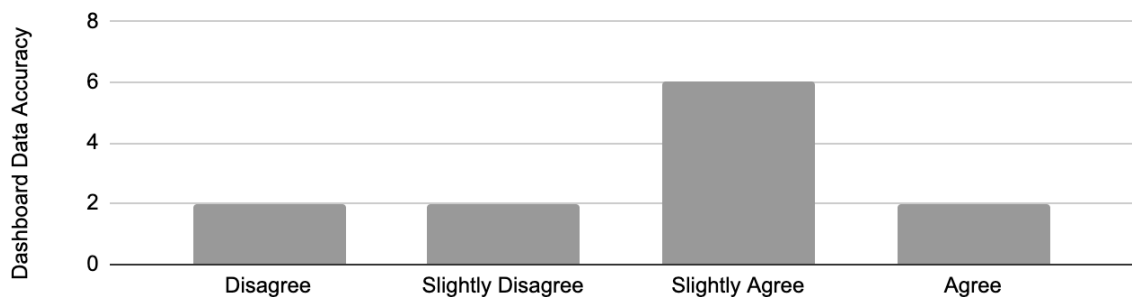


Figure 1. Response to the question of whether the California School Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) data is accurate.

The narrative data describes the variance in the responses. However, when grouping the responses, it becomes clear that the majority of the respondents answered in the “Slightly Agree” or “Agree” categories as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 *The California School Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) Data is Accurate - Frequency of Response*

Items	Accuracy of the Dashboard	
	#	%
Disagree/Slightly Disagree	4	33%
Agree/Slightly Agree	8	67%

Note: N=12

Participants had the opportunity to elaborate on their experience with regard to the accuracy of the Dashboard following the Likert scale question on the survey. Participants took this opportunity to discuss the unique aspects of COE Court and Community Schools that were not reflected in the Dashboard. Respondent Seven shared, "The Dashboard does not take into account the shifts in population we have everyday."

Respondent Three said:

The numbers may be accurate, they just don't reflect our programs. We cannot be compared to comprehensive school programs as we are uniquely different; most importantly our student population is highly transitory with enrollments/exits everyday so our student population may completely turn over in one year so comparing year to year trends is not always applicable.

Respondent Nine went into more details overall about the Dashboard, saying:

The Dashboard is an improvement for the ASAM system. The recent focus and allowance on developing graduation rate as a one-year cohort is a significant improvement. The local measurements are improved. The traditional metric really doesn't address our students and our educational programming. For example, the standardized tests don't reflect the current student learning performance or potential. Localized and incentivized assessments to value added learning is more accurate as students are more likely to buy in. Further, often our students are experiencing a traumatic experience (incarceration) and are unable to test accurately. This should be taken into consideration when developing an assessment and accountability system.

The data suggests that, overall, the respondents technically perceived the Dashboard as displaying the data received as accurate but the system has flaws with the data for COE Court and Community Schools.

The data collected from interviews were aligned with the survey findings. They provided even more details about the beliefs of COE Court and Community School Administrators with regard to the accuracy of the Dashboard. One recurring theme discussed by COE Court and Community School Administrators was the fact that the Dashboard/DASS forced the administrators to look more closely at their data collection and reporting processes. Respondent Three commented:

I have the confidence that it's accurate, but what we've discovered was there's some systems within our programs we needed to change. It's not that the Dashboard reported inaccurate numbers, because it's coming from what we input. It gave us an opportunity to pay really close attention to what we are putting into the system that's then being reported to the state.

Furthermore, the COE Court and Community School Administrators overwhelmingly believe the current Dashboard does not accurately portray the full story. Respondent Four said, "I think if we're just talking accuracy—yeah, just accuracy, I think it's accurate. I just don't think it accurately reports or reflects the work that's being done in County Office of Education programs." Administrators were also asked about their beliefs on how accurately the Dashboard presents areas of growth and strength for the Court and Community School programs.

Figure 2 displays the numerical results from the question regarding the accuracy of the Dashboard to display which student groups have needs that must be addressed. The mean ($M=3.08$) showed that on average, the COE Court and Community School

Administrators “slightly agree” that the Dashboard accurately displays which student groups have needs that must be addressed. The standard deviation (SD=.67) revealed that the responses are clustered closer together.

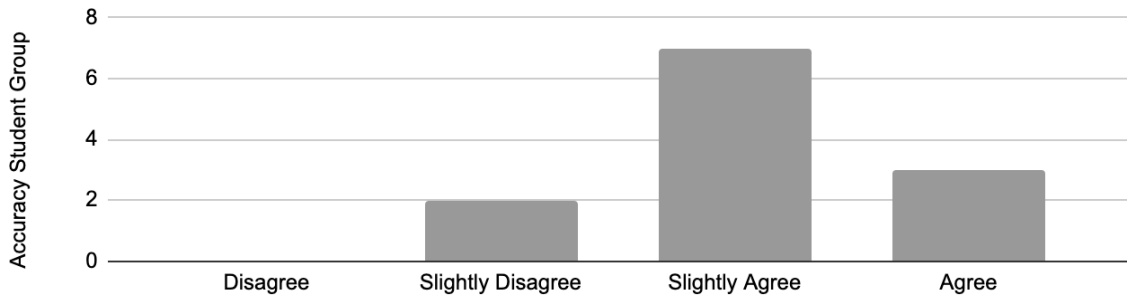


Figure 2. Accuracy of Dashboard/DASS to display which student groups have needs that must be addressed

Table 3 highlights the overwhelming majority of respondents indicating they “Agree” or “Slightly Agree” with the statement.

Table 3 Accuracy of Dashboard/DASS to Display which Student Groups Have Needs that Must Be Addressed - Frequency of Response

Items	Accuracy of the Dashboard	
	#	%
Disagree/Slightly Disagree	2	17%
Agree/Slightly Agree	10	83%

Note: N=12

The narrative responses in the survey addressed the importance of looking at student group data. Respondent One noted, “The predictability related to student achievement, in any public school setting, needs to continue to be emphasized and called out. That includes Court and Community schools.” Respondent Three added:

As with data trends across the state, in our Court and Community Schools as well we have certain groups of students that remain in the red grouping of students needing additional support. Although our programs have high numbers for Hispanic and African American youth, our data clearly shows our African American students have higher suspension/chronic absenteeism than our other sub groups. Just one example.

The disproportionality of certain student groups in COE Court and Community School programs as referenced by this administrator is further explored in discussion about Differentiated Assistance.

Narrative Data from Interviews: Dashboard Accuracy Areas of Growth

When discussing the accuracy of the Dashboard on displaying areas of needed growth Respondent Four mentions, “Oh, I think it highlights that very much. Yeah, it’s red everywhere.” Experiencing Dashboards that display almost all red require explanation to your stakeholders. Respondent One reflected:

I think we might have had one item in the orange, but I think everything pretty much was in the red. We were just upfront with people in saying that, ‘we acknowledge that there are things we have control over, and there are also things in Court and Community Schools because of mobility factor that you don’t have control over.’

It can be challenging to find specific areas of growth when overwhelmingly the Dashboard presents as red, however, the matrices within the Dashboard allow people to focus on specific student groups and areas. Respondent Eight reflected:

When you start really breaking those matrices down, I like how it’s color-coded and I like the matrix idea. When you start to really look at where you fall within the matrix and why, I would say that it is accurate, effective. I think it does point to areas of strength as well as areas that you can grow in as it has done with us.

Figure 3 displays the numerical results from the survey question regarding the accuracy of the Dashboard/DASS to display areas of strength. The numerical data from

the survey yielded a mean (M=2.25) and a standard deviation of (SD=.97) revealing a high variance between the responses.

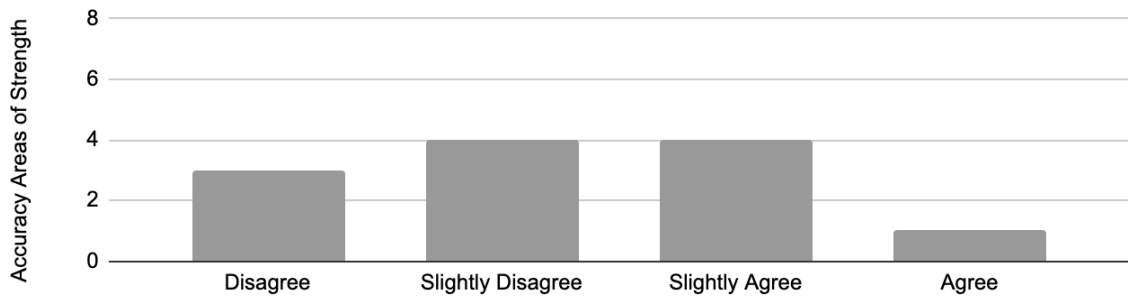


Figure 3. The California School Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) data accurately displays areas of strength

The responses were spread out and Table 4 shows the slim majority of respondents answered that they either “Disagree” or “Slightly Disagree” regarding the Dashboard’s accuracy of displaying areas of strength.

Table 4 The California School Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) Data Accurately Displays Areas of Strength - Frequency of Response

Items	Accuracy of the Dashboard	
	#	%
Disagree/Slightly Disagree	7	58%
Agree/Slightly Agree	5	42%

Note: N=12

Among the challenges stated by the administrators some COE Court and Community School Administrators believe the adjusted graduation cohort metric which changed from a four-year cohort to a one-year cohort allowed for their school to demonstrate some success. Respondent Six, “The only area that the Dashboard/DASS accurately displays strength is our graduation rate.” More commonly reported were statements regarding how

the Dashboard is not designed to accurately display success with Court and Community Schools, specifically with regard to the College and Career Indicator (CCI) as stated by

Respondent One:

Due to the high mobility factor we continue to experience with our students and families, it is near impossible to accurately capture the work we are doing related to the College and Career Indicator (CCI). This is something that continues to be worked on with various statewide groups; but more needs to be done. For instance, the number of CTE pathway completions is not a relevant indicator for high mobility schools.

The CCI came up frequently during interviews as a needed area of improvement with the Dashboard.

Narrative Data from Interviews: Dashboard Accuracy with Areas of Strength

When discussing whether or not the Dashboard displays areas of strength or success one theme that continuously rose to the surface was that the Dashboard did not at the time of this research/does not at present accurately capture successes and the hard work being done in COE Court and Community Schools. Universally, participants noted that the metric for academic achievement included in the Dashboard, the California Assessment for Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) did not reflect student academic growth while in COE Court and Community Schools. Respondent One discussed, “The academic achievement, I think needs to be looked at and if we could figure out a way to more accurately capture growth while students are with us, that would be helpful.”

Respondent Four expressed frustration with the academic achievement metric not capturing student growth:

I wish there was a way to measure growth that isn't just on some state assessment and be able to acknowledge that, yeah, these students have improved. Are they where they need to be? No, there's still work to be done, but just to have that only measurement

for their academic achievement be on those CAASPP scores—which again, we have different students every year...That’s where my frustration lies, in that part of the accountability system. I appreciate it, and I think it’s needed. I’m thankful for the modification that we do have, but I think that there’s more work to be done.

Aside from the Dashboard not accurately capturing and displaying academic growth, another trend that came up throughout interviews is connected to the CCI. Respondent One states:

In terms of the CCI, the College and Career Indicator, one thing I know we’ve been asking for and advocating for is rather than having pathway completions is having course completions. If I have a student that’s with me for six months, and he or she completes a CTE course, okay, let’s check that box. They’re not gonna be with us for two years in all likelihood...I’d really like to see that push toward course completion being included.

It is clear that COE Court and Community School Administrators are confident with their Career Technical Education (CTE) programs and advocating for changes with the Dashboard. Respondent Five discusses:

We have a terrible College and Career Indicator percentage, but that does not reflect—we’ve got these wonderful programs. We’ve got students who are learning the construction trade and medical things to help them go out and get a job even before they graduate. They’re learning these skills.

Furthermore, Respondent Three adds, “They’re holding us accountable for completers for CTE programs. We will never have completers. We’re not designed to be a system of kids coming in in the 9th grade and exiting in the 12th grade.” Despite the frustrations with the Dashboard not displaying strengths of Court and Community Schools, Administrators feel their concerns are being heard.

Figure 4 displays the numerical data results from the survey question regarding the accuracy of the Dashboard/DASS displaying data with an equity focus. Eleven out of the

12 survey respondents completed this question with a mean (M=3.09) meaning, “slightly agree” and a standard deviation of (SD=.70).

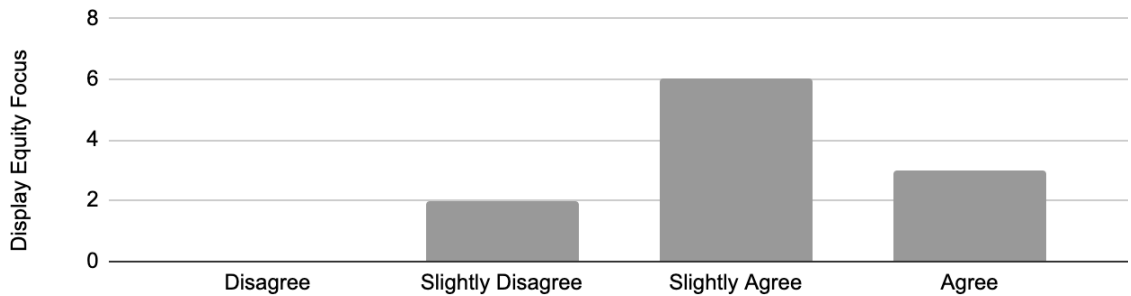


Figure 4. The Dashboard/DASS displays data with an equity focus.

Table 5 displays that overwhelmingly the respondents believe the Dashboard accurately displays data with an equity focus.

Table 5 *The California School Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) Data Accurately Displays Areas of Strength - Frequency of Response*

Items	Accuracy of the Dashboard	
	#	%
Disagree/Slightly Disagree	2	18%
Agree/Slightly Agree	9	82%

Note: N=11

The narrative data from the survey reveal how a few respondents discuss student groups. Respondent 10 wrote, “The subgroups within the Dashboard/DASS assist us with identifying underperforming subgroups. This enables us to dedicate resources and training towards addressing and improving the student performance in those subgroups.” Respondent 11 mentioned, “I know this is the intent, but this is not the way it feels.” With California’s System of Support focused on meeting the needs of all students, equity is

discussed throughout interviews and discussions about the Differentiated Assistance process.

Research Question Two

What are the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators about the efficacy of California's System of Support, specifically Differentiated Assistance, on impacting equity-focused change? This second research question is primarily explored through narrative data from the survey and interviews along with one numerical data analysis. The interviews provided details of the Differentiated Assistance process and unique experiences of the COE Court and Community School Administrators; they tell a story about the efficacy of the Differentiated Assistance process that is rarely captured.

Figure 5 displays the numerical results from the survey question regarding the effectiveness of the Differentiated Assistance process in creating equity-minded changes. This question produced the highest mean of all survey questions as well as the least variance. The mean ($M=3.5$) between "somewhat effective" and "effective" and the standard deviation ($SD=.52$) indicates there is low variance:

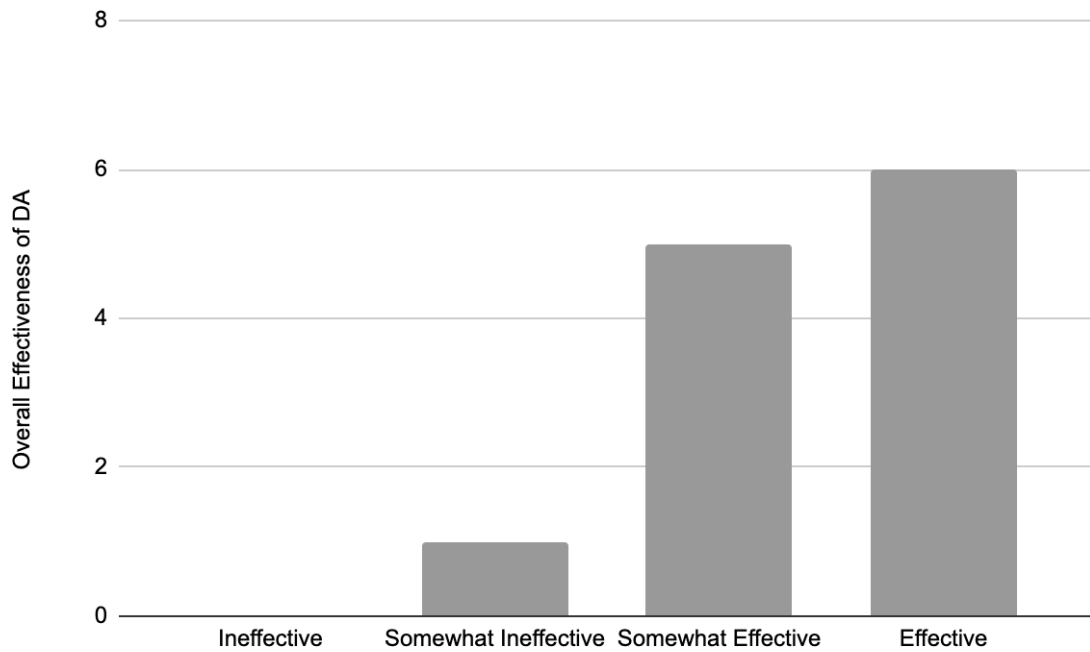


Figure 5. Overall, how effective is the Differentiated Assistance process in creating equity-minded changes in your organization?

Table 6 shows the overwhelming number of respondents who believe the Differentiated Assistance process is “Somewhat Effective” or “Effective”.

Table 6 Overall, How Effective is the Differentiated Assistance Process in Creating Equity-minded Changes in Your Organization - Frequency of Response

Items	Effectiveness of Differentiated Assistance	
	#	%
Disagree/Slightly Disagree	1	8%
Agree/Slightly Agree	11	92%

Note: N=12

The Differentiated Assistance process is a complex one that takes on a journey unique to each COE participant and the narrative data brings forth the multifaceted experiences and perceptions of the COE Court and Community School Administrators.

Narrative Data: Differentiated Assistance Collaborative Partnerships

When a COE Court and Community School program is eligible for Differentiated Assistance they have the opportunity to partner with other COEs and form a consortium or to work directly with the California Department of Education (CDE). It is important to note that the CDE also plays a supporting role with the consortiums as well. Of the 12 participants, from 11 different COEs, 10 of the participants reported that they worked with a consortium for Differentiated Assistance and two reported that they partnered directly with the CDE. Overwhelmingly, the narrative data reveals a positive impact of the collaborative partnership aspect of Differentiated Assistance.

Respondent Six reflected on the consortium partnership:

It was amazing because we speak the same language and we have the same struggles. We have the same celebrations. We get each other. I learned a lot from my counterparts in the other county offices. If that's what the process was meant to do, fantastic. I felt like it did.

Respondent One added, "I'm kind of a geek when it comes to that type of collaboration at will... Professionally, I enjoy that type of collaboration and that type of learning and using the Improvement Science model in particular." Respondent Two, who partnered with the CDE directly, also mentioned collaboration and their work with Improvement Science, "We have a very close relationship with our C&I. The people who do Differentiated Assistance with the districts also provide support to our programs. That's

the base level. It wasn't just me and the CDE." Respondent Eight who partnered with the CDE stated,

We worked with our team and the State representative through the analysis of why we we're in Differentiated Assistance and then did a root cause analysis and then started looking at ways that we were gonna tackle that to move the indicator and improve the situation.

Aside from the collaborative partnerships outside the respondent's COE, part of the Differentiated Assistance process involved creating a group of participants to be the team from each COE.

Across the board, the respondents describe their COE internal Differentiated Assistance team as being a diverse group of employees with different job responsibilities. COE Differentiated Assistance teams often consisted of classified and certificated staff, specifically, teachers, administrators, Special Education leaders, data specialists, English Language Learner specialists, and COE Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) leaders. Administrators express the importance of having varying perspectives Respondent Four stating, "We wanted to have varying perspectives." Respondent Five stated:

We selected a broad range of perspectives and areas of expertise by including representatives from Court School, Community School, classroom instruction, and IS instruction. We wanted to make sure there wouldn't be any barriers to what was put in place so we needed a variety of perspectives.

Adding to the benefit of having diverse perspectives, Respondent Six discussed:

The sharing, exchanging those ideas and knowing what works and what doesn't work, that was very helpful and really bringing the team together. I really enjoyed having a diverse group of people on our team and have these conversations with them because if you really wanna implement any kind of change or shift in a program from a systems lens, you need to have all of your stakeholders involved, right?

The internal and external collaborative partnerships are a fundamental aspect of the Differentiated Assistance process.

Narrative Data: Differentiated Assistance Process and Equity

When the COE Administrators were asked about how the Differentiated Assistance process focused on equity the answers include discussions about student groups, access, achievement metrics, and disproportionality. Respondent One noted:

I think when you talk about equity, we had kids, students at some sites that had no access whatsoever, no expectation that they were gonna go through a College and Career Readiness course. We had other students where that was a priority.

Through the Differentiated Assistance process this COE came to the realization as a team that access to CTE courses across their programs was a high priority. Some administrators note that their data dives through the Differentiated Assistance process revealed equity issues that impacted all student groups, specifically the graduation rate from 2018-2019 Dashboard:

We definitely looked at subgroup data. I'd say in our conversations in that team we felt like—in our Alt Ed programs, we have 65 percent Hispanic, and 15 percent African-American, and the rest are White or some other smaller subgroup. We just discussed it and felt like the services that we're providing don't seem to be subgroup specific.

Respondent Five from the same COE added, “We definitely looked at how we get into Differentiated Assistance based on student populations but... It was like, “No, nobody’s excelling in our grad rate.” Conversely, another Administrator discussed their experience looking deep into suspension data to find the opposite case.

The interviewee, Respondent Three, discussed how the data examination led to discovering the overrepresentation of one student population:

It was interesting to draw it down even further and say, “Look, guys, we have an issue here with—maybe our African-American population is less than 30 percent of our kids, but they’re the most suspensions we have of any other group.” We have to address that, so equity, definitely this has given us an opportunity to address that.

Districts and COE Court and Community School programs are eligible for Differentiated Assistance when a student group meets the criteria in two different priority areas.

When responding to the question, which student group(s) did their COE focus on through the Differentiated Assistance process from the eligibility year 2018-2019, the first year of the Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS), the responses were varied. The question allowed for respondents to select more than one student group and the majority of the respondents selected multiple. Students grouped as socioeconomically disadvantaged were selected as a student group of focus more than any other group. It is important to note that the entire student population in COE Court Schools are classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged. Focusing on a specific student group through Differentiated Assistance can be challenging when all or many meet the criteria and there is a common overrepresentation of student groups in COE Court and Community Schools.

The disproportionate representation of student groups, such as Hispanic/Latinx, African-American, and socioeconomically disadvantaged in COE Court and Community Schools came up from interviewees. Respondent Two stated:

I think the other thing that’s hard is that at least in the Court and Community Schools, you’re talking about a pre-selected group of people that we don’t choose, right, but there’s already this disparity. Our disparity in disproportionality is, I’m sure it’s large in many places, but it’s really amazing. I think African-American students are about six times disproportionately represented in our Court and Community Schools. Our disproportionality in incarceration is three times higher in our juvenile than our adult

system. We have some pretty big problems that have nothing to do with anything that we can control 'cause the kids just come to us.

Respondent Eight discussed, “In the Court Schools, 100 percent, in the Community Schools, 95 percent free and reduced lunch. We’re about 50 percent English Language Learners, 30 percent homeless, 10 percent Foster Youth, and 60 percent adjudicated.”

Unlike district schools, COE Court and Community Schools do not have a student population from their neighborhood boundaries. Students attend COE Court and Community Schools for a myriad of reasons, such as low attendance, placement at a juvenile hall facility, expulsion, or referred by the district, probation, or their families.

While many COE Administrators discuss the importance of disaggregating student data to support all individual students, there is a reality of inherent disproportionality in the system that must be acknowledged.

Narrative Data Analysis: Most Beneficial Aspects of System of Support

Overwhelmingly, the respondents report that the collaborative process of Differentiated Assistance, along with the shift of the CDE toward being a supportive entity, has been beneficial. As interviewees discussed their experience with their consortium as well as the CDE a sense of hope and excitement could be felt, even when discussing the logistics of meetings, which is often not the case when discussing accountability systems. Respondent Three described how:

One thing about what DA did for us is it forced us to come together for a full day several times throughout the year...Being able to pull your school leadership team together off site to look at our data and drill it down, that was value.

The same administrator discussed how prior efforts to collaborate with their team were often interrupted and the Differentiated Assistance process provides much needed

dedicated time. Time to collaborate over data and programs came up again with

Respondent Two:

Well, I think for us, it was really just applying some consistent, continuous improvement model, and not falling prey to solutionitis of like, “We gotta do something.” We just spent a lot more time studying what was actually happening...Then prioritizing it in everybody’s mind that this is something that’s important.

As previously mentioned, the administrators felt the benefit of spending this dedicated time with other COE Court and Community School teams who understand the unique qualities of the programs. Respondent Four described the most beneficial aspect, “I would say allowing County Offices to collaborate with other County Offices and share best practices and share some of the struggles. I think that’s extremely beneficial.” Aside from the collaboration between County Offices, the respondents also commented on the beneficial role of the CDE.

When discussing benefits of the System of Support the shifting role of the CDE came up frequently as Respondent Six stated:

It felt like years ago that the CDE, when you got a call from them, it was more of a gotcha. Versus now they’re wanting to come along beside us and be a thought partner and more supportive. I think that the approach that they’ve had in the past couple of years has been so much better.

Respondent Eight mentioned, “It’s not been punitive. It’s been, I believe, growth oriented and well supported. The attention from the CDE has been excellent. I’ve never seen them so engaged. It’s a very different feel than No Child Left Behind.” In addition to the time dedicated to collaboration with other COEs and the CDE, the use of Improvement Science and the effectiveness of the group leads came up as a benefit and as an impactful tool gained from the process.

Improvement Science is used as a tool during the Differentiated Assistance process to complete a root cause analysis and develop and implement action plans. When collaborating with a consortium of COEs or with the CDE there is at least one facilitator to guide the teams through the Improvement Science process. Aspects of the Improvement Science process were frequently referenced as a benefit. Respondent Seven reflected, "...we truly now say that we are a data-driven organization. Everything that we do focuses around, 'Did this methodology work?' If it didn't, let's try something else and continue to go on." The Improvement Science process has been referenced as a beneficial and impactful part of the System of Support.

Narrative Data Analysis: Needed Change for System of Support

When asked about the needed changes for California's System of Support, COE Court and Community School Administrators focused mostly on the Dashboard. The plea coming from COE Administrators revolved around continued modification of Dashboard metrics without excusing COE Court and Community programs from accountability.

When asked about needed changes to the System of Support, Respondent One responded:

I would just say an openness to thoughtful tweaks in the Dashboard to account for DASS schools without making excuses, and I think that's important anytime we have these discussions with elected officials or other people. We're not looking for excuses. We're looking for an understanding of the reality and also collecting meaningful data.

The administrator continued to describe how the College and Career Indicator is a perfect example of a metric that needs to be modified for COE Court and Community Schools.

Building on this notion of making adjustments to the system to better support COE Court and Community Schools, Respondent Three stated:

Well, we always feel like we're trying to make the square peg in the round hole fit in this overarching accountability system that really is designed for traditional school settings, so it would be nice if the CDE would have an open, honest dialogue with us on what we could show to showcase the good work we are doing...

Other administrators supported wanting adjustments to the metrics and making the system more meaningful for Court and Community Schools while maintaining accountability as stated by Respondent Four:

I think from all the people that I've worked with across the state that have worked in County Office programs, all of us want to be held accountable. We are excited about that because we wanna know if what we are doing is working. All of us work really, really, really hard to get these kids back on track. It can be exhausting and really take a toll on us, especially when you don't see the fruits of your labor. If you have data that reflects the work that we're doing, whether it's good data or bad data, positive or negative data, at least we know if all our efforts are worthwhile. If they're not, we need to redirect our focus of our energy.

Overwhelmingly, the administrators voiced a need to adjust metrics to make the system more accurate and meaningful for the COE Court and Community Schools.

Research Question Two Part A

What are examples of the most impactful actions taken by COE Court and Community School Administrators related to California's System of Support? This final research question dives into the specific actions that developed as a result of California's System of Support to directly impact equity-focused change. The design of California's System of Support, specifically the Differentiated Assistance process, allowed for each COE to develop a unique Problem of Practice based on their data analysis and Improvement Science process. Due to this, the impactful actions range from collaborative processes to data practices and internal programmatic changes.

Narrative data analysis: Impactful actions taken from System of Support

Improvement Science practices, data analysis, and collaboration were referenced by administrators as some of the most impactful actions taken by their organization as a result of the System of Support. Respondent Two revealed:

We really used our work with Improvement Science as the backbone—all Directors went to the six-day training from CCSESA and we used our absenteeism as our core project. We conducted empathy interviews and improved our tracking and communication systems—we improved our attendance rate by 11% and reduced our chronic absenteeism rate by 13%.

When asked about direct impacts, Respondent One described, “Number one was involvement of teachers and staff in input and bringing them into the process of going through fishbone activities, things like that. Including them in the whole Improvement Science process.” Respondent Two discussed the impact of utilizing the Improvement Science practices to address their Problem of Practice which focuses on chronic absenteeism:

We did empathy interviews first with all the teachers about the things that they felt. All these people from the County Office were going out to the sites and interviewing the teachers. That just made a difference right there that we were prioritizing it, right, and getting their ideas about what they thought would make a difference. Then we worked with the teachers—we worked with the teachers to create a student interview protocol. Then they conducted interviews.

The Improvement Science and the analysis of various forms of numerical and narrative data has directly impacted COE Court and Community programs as a result of the System of Support.

A renewed focus on analyzing data to promote equity-focused change has developed as an impactful practice from the System of Support, “...I think our big aha was that we need to have access to data now, frequently, accurately, and at all levels.” discussed Respondent Six. When asked about direct impacts from the System of Support,

Respondent Eight directly answers, “Improved data practices.” Aside from analyzing data, the collaboration and connection between colleagues, both internally and through the consortiums was noted.

One unique direct impact which emerged from the Differentiated Assistance process for a COE Court and Community School team was the development of trust huddles.

Respondent Four described:

One implementation that we carried out, at least until COVID hit, was we started—we read this book called *The Speed of Trust* by Franklin Covey, and after reading the book we started what’s called trust huddles. We did a monthly trust huddle at our administrative meetings every month. Then the school-site principals would take that same trust huddle...and they would do that at their monthly staff meetings at their schools sites. The plan was to have that progress to teachers who would do that with the kids...what trust huddle did was it was starting to address the Problem of Practice, where we wanted to increase trust amongst all the different stakeholders in our program.

This example highlights how the direct actions that each team took as a result of their participation were based on their unique needs, such as building trust.

Scenario Questions

The COE Court and Community School Administrators had the opportunity to provide their insight into the best actions they would take based on different Dashboard scenarios. This section of the survey provides unique narrative data related specifically to impactful Court and Community School actions.

Scenario one: the dashboard color is red for socioeconomically disadvantaged students for the college and career indicator. The respondents indicated they would recommend taking various actions, such as: promote and support dual enrollment opportunities, CTE pathways, more a-g courses, hire more counselors, and purchase new

curriculum. Additionally, the administrators provided specific insight related to Court and Community Schools related to previous discussions. Respondent Six stated, “Re-frame a meaningful way that CCI can be measured in Court/Community schools. The current measures are limited and, in some cases, unattainable because students are not enrolled in our program long enough.” The same administrator added, “I think industry certification and CTE courses are more relevant and attainable...” Respondent 12 tapped into the individual needs of students, “Ideally the priority/focus would be based on the individual student and their interests, situation and options available.” The theme of supporting students, even when they are in Court and Community Schools for a limited time, also came up with Respondent Five:

Since our students are often enrolled for a short period of time, it makes it difficult to secure dual enrollment opportunities. If they can participate in CTE options during their time with us, this will give them a skill set to take into the job market with them.

Scenario two: the dashboard color is red for English learners for the ELA academic indicator. For this scenario the administrators discussed actions such as professional development, hiring staff, data analysis, and purchasing new curriculum. The COE Court and Community School Administrators had the opportunity to expand on their answers. Respondent Three stated, “Our teachers spend the most time with our students and empowering them with the latest and greatest support for effective teaching/learning is always important. We need to stay at the forefront.” Respondent Seven discussed specific examples from their organizations, “We hired an ELD Assistant for each court school. This provides for small group and individualized instruction using the ELD-ELA standards.” Others advocated for using local assessments and discuss the

limitations of the current academic indicator as Respondent Six stated, “ELA Academic indicator is based on CAASPP data, not a relevant indicator for Court/Community schools. However, we have influence over students who are identified as long-term language learners. In this area, additional PD for teachers make sense.” The final scenario focused on the suspension indicator.

Scenario three: the dashboard color is red for Hispanic students for the suspension indicator. For this scenario the administrators discussed actions like providing professional development focused on Restorative Practices, implicit bias, and cultural competency. Once again, diving deeper into the personal experiences of the administrators provided more insight. Respondent Two reflected, “Implicit Bias probably the most but the issues are deep and hard to address with our mostly white, tenured teaching staff.” Respondent One discussed, “We have actively been implementing Restorative Practices for the last four years. Our MTSS Coordinator and all admin are supporting this effort.” Similarly, Respondent Seven stated, “The district hired consultants as well as a TOSA to provide intense and focused professional learning on Restorative Practices for staff, probation, and family members.”

Overall, this chapter presented the findings for this integrated methods study that explores the perceptions of COE Court and Community School Administrators regarding California’s System of Support including the Dashboard and Differentiated Assistance. The analysis of both numerical and narrative data revealed the benefits and needed changes for the System of Support as well as the most impactful actions taken as a result

of participation in the System of Support to promote equity-focused change. The conclusions of this study will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

Summary of Study

Chapter five highlights the significant findings and conclusions related to the research questions, as well as the participants themselves and their experience with alternative education. Furthermore, the recommendations and implications of this study will be discussed as well as a brief discussion of the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic. This integrated methods study highlighted the often-overlooked alternative educational programs of the County Office of Education (COE) Court and Community Schools. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of COE Court and Community School Administrators about the accuracy and efficacy of California's System of Support, specifically regarding the accuracy of the Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) and the effectiveness of the Differentiated Assistance process to promote equity focused change. Furthermore, the study explored the most impactful actions taken by COE Court and Community Schools as a result of participation in California's System of Support.

The study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators regarding the accuracy of California Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators about the efficacy of California's System of Support, specifically

Differentiated Assistance, on impacting equity focused change in COE Court and Community Schools?

RQ2a: What are examples of the most impactful actions taken by COE Court and Community School Administrators related to California's System of Support?

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic impacted every aspect of life and dramatically changed the educational landscape in March of 2020. The scope of this brief section will focus on the impact of the pandemic in relation to this research project. Approval for this research project was granted mid-March, 2020, as the researcher was on the cusp of having to transition school programs from in-person to distance learning along with their colleagues across the state. The timeline, structure, and participation of the research study shifted from its original conception and adapted to the fluid situation of surviving during a pandemic. The researcher wrestled with finding the best of the worst time to ask people to participate in this research study. With everything that people were going through personally and professionally it was inspiring to have participants so dedicated to the continuous improvement of the System of Support and COE Court and Community Schools that they took time to provide their input.

Participant Experience and Expertise

A study focused on the perceptions of COE Court and Community School Administrators about the accuracy and efficacy of California's System of Support, including the Dashboard and Differentiated Assistance, had yet to be completed before this research. The participants in this study are active advocates for COE alternative

education students and pioneers of this research. At the time of the study, eight of the 12 participants have 14 or more years of experience with COE Court and Community Schools and six have 18 or more years. With this amount of alternative education experience, the participants are the experts in the field of COE Court and Community School programs and the students they serve. They all actively seek out opportunities to continuously improve their programs through collaboration and statewide advocacy through various platforms such as the Juvenile Court, Community, and Alternative Schools' (JCCASAC) or the Student Services Programs Steering Committee (SPSSC) organizational branches of the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA).

Every person interviewed expressed a depth and breadth of experience and dedication to COE Court and Community Schools. One interviewee reflected on their first years teaching at COE program for homeless youth:

Couldn't ask for a better professional experience in my first two years of teaching and as being an educator just to learn the humanity and all the circumstances that our kids go through 'cause you can't learn that in a textbook. Unless you live it, you can't learn it. It was a tremendous experience.

Another administrator discussed the myriad of roles they had within alternative education over a 20-year span, "I started out as a paraeducator in the juvenile hall in the late 90s, I taught at the juvenile hall...I've been a teacher, a site liaison, Assistant Principal, and now my role is the Director of Educational Programs." Other participants also held multiple different positions in COE Court and Community Schools, some with experience at multiple different COEs and many who have long-term experience at one COE.

The length and depth of experience spanned well over a decade in most cases and included experience with multiple iterations of accountability systems. Aside from the expertise of the participants another highlight was their optimism and hopes for improvements with California's System of Support. One parting thought from a participant sums up the hopeful wishes heard from many:

We still have a lot of work ahead of us. I don't want this to be the end of our conversation with CDE in terms of what we need to do to accurately measure our students' progress and measure the work that is being done around. It is not a perfect system and I don't think you can ever come up with a one-size-fits-all. The fact that they've changed the graduation criteria, I think that is a big—that was a big deal. That was a great thing in the right direction.

Participation of COE Court and Community Schools in California's System of Support is still relatively new and the administrators, who are experts in their field, have expressed hope for this newest accountability system.

Significant Findings and Implications of Research Question One

Dashboard accurate with flaws. The first significant finding was that while administrators will admit that the data portrayed in the Dashboard represents the data inputted and is accurate, there are flaws with the system. The survey and interview data provided much needed insight and details of the perceptions of COE Court and Community School Administrators regarding the accuracy of the Dashboard/(DASS). While the numerical analysis showed great variance with the results as the standard deviation was (SD=.98) and the mean represented an average between "slightly disagree" and "slightly agree" when grouping the responses, it became clear that the majority of the respondents, 67%, answered in the "Slightly Agree" or "Agree" categories. The narrative data revealed how conflicted the participants were in answering this question. While

literature does not currently exist that can connect to these findings, when superintendents and curriculum and instruction administrators were surveyed through a Policy Analysis for California Education study by Plank, Humphrey, & O’Day (2019), the majority, 73 percent, of superintendents believed in the Dashboard’s ability to provide an accurate measure of which districts need support while only 41 percent of CISC members agreed. The study and the results of this research reveal there is some conflict over the accuracy of the Dashboard.

When asked about specific accuracy of the Dashboard, the respondents had higher perceptions of accuracy with the exception of one question about the Dashboard displaying areas of strength. Regarding the accuracy of the Dashboard with displaying which student groups have needs that must be addressed, 83% of the respondents believe the Dashboard is accurate. When asked about the Dashboard’s accuracy of displaying areas of strength, 58%, the slim majority of respondents, answered that they either “Disagree” or “Slightly Disagree”. Regarding the accuracy of the Dashboard/DASS displaying data with an equity focus, the vast majority, 82% of respondents, reported that the Dashboard accurately displayed data with an equity focus.

Specific flaws with the dashboard. The second significant finding revealed two types of flaws with the Dashboard/DASS accuracy. The first problem stemmed from internal data practices at their organization and the second issue involved the metrics used to analyze the data, especially for the Academic Indicators and the College and Career Indicator (CCI). Figuring out where each data point in the Dashboard is sourced was revealed to be an overly complex system and even more daunting was the creation of

internal systems within the COE Court and Community Schools for who is responsible to enter and confirm the accuracy of the data. The first release of the Dashboard for COE Court and Community Schools was the point at which many COEs realized the flaws in their internal students and the overwhelming complexities of ensuring data accuracy for programs that have such a mobile student population. One administrator stated: There are amazing reports available within the Dashboard if you really start spending time to go around that tool. If you were to ask me right now, I want you to hone right in on exactly what puts you in red for the College and Career Indicator and pull that report that led to that, that would be very difficult for me to do. I think they need to make it more user friendly. I think they need to simplify things.

The second theme that arose focused on issues with the metrics for certain indicators.

The two indicators that came up throughout the survey and interviews were the Academic Indicators and the College and Career Indicator (CCI). Participants noted that it was challenging to find areas of strength and areas of growth when the Dashboard displays predominantly red. Notably, at the time of this research, the English Learner Progress Indicator was still underdevelopment, therefore it cannot be viewed as truly being analyzed by the participants. Not a single participant expressed belief that using the California Assessment and Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) was a good measure for academic achievement for COE Court and Community School students.

There are many reasons why there are flaws with the academic indicator. A commonly voiced concern was that overwhelmingly, students come to COE alternative education programs because of gaps in their education and significant hardships; because they are not commonly placed in one program for a long period of time, it was challenging to assess them comparatively to their peers in traditional programs. The report from the National Center for Youth Law (2021) described the problematic part of

holding alternative education schools accountable for students who on average attend for less than one school year. Numerous administrators mentioned the internal assessments they use, and expressed desire for a growth index for the Academic Indicator. There was also a sense of defeat with this indicator, unlike with the CCI which many participants expressed hope for modifications.

For the CCI, the participants' issue was not with the accuracy of the data but rather the metrics used. For a student to meet the criteria for the CCI, there is a complex roadmap with different options, many of which are not applicable for COE Court and Community School Students. The pathways that are most applicable for COE alternative education students revolve around Career Technical Education (CTE) and completion of college courses. The majority of respondents focused on the CTE course options because their programs offer a wide variety of CTE courses for students. The concern that arose for this metric is that, as it currently stands, it is nearly impossible for any COE Court and Community School student to meet this standard despite the fact that they might not only have access to rigorous and relevant CTE courses, they might have also obtained industry certificates. The National Center for Youth Law report indicated that the College and Career Readiness Rate is 15 times higher in traditional schools compared to alternative education programs (2021). The COE Administrators urge the California Department of Education (CDE) to modify this metric to honor the career readiness work that their students are doing and that their programs are providing.

Overall, there is a sense of urgency to work with COE Court and Community School teams to modify metrics to ensure the Dashboard is a relevant and useful tool for these

unique programs. As previously mentioned, the Dashboard/DASS is relatively new and there still remains hope that this system will continue to evolve—but it is necessary for the CDE to continue to participate in the conversation and push for change. A Dashboard that does not accurately reflect the growth or progress of the students and programs will likely in time be dismissed as not having value. As one administrator reflected when they reviewed the Dashboards of COE Court and Community Schools across the state:

At least the first year, I'm assuming the second year, I don't know for sure, but that every County Office that could possibly qualify for Differentiated Assistance did qualify for Differentiated Assistance. To me that's like, if a teacher is giving a test and everyone fails, maybe it's the test. Maybe it's not necessarily the teacher, not to say we shouldn't be held accountable or anything like that. If everybody that could possibly be in trouble is in trouble, it just feels like that that's not maybe the best measurement tool...

The Dashboard accuracy can be improved by better internal COE data collection and the continued modification of Dashboard metrics to make the Dashboard more accurate and meaningful for COE Court and Community Schools.

Significant Findings and Implications of Research Question Two

Differentiated Assistance is effective. The data from the second research question revealed that the respondents believed the Differentiated Assistance process was accurate. Overwhelmingly, 92% of respondents reported that the Differentiated Assistance process was effective in creating equity-minded changes in their organization. Furthermore, themes emerged with the perceptions of County Office of Education Court and Community School administrators regarding the efficacy of California's System of Support, specifically Differentiated Assistance, on impacting equity-focused change in COE Court and Community Schools. Primarily, the administrators felt the dedicated

time, collaboration, partnership with the California Department of Education (CDE), and the use of Improvement Science, helped promote needed change. It is important to note that this is the first research study of this kind and this descriptive study has limited literature review to connect to these findings.

Dedicated time and collaboration with COE partners and the CDE is effective.

During the 2018-2019 school year, the first year that COE Court and Community Schools participated in the Differentiated Assistance process, each consortium had dedicated work days that were often off-site. Respondents expressed that the design of these meetings enabled participants to set aside the demands of their daily work and allowed participants to assign a heightened level of importance to focus on the work at hand. It might seem like an obvious necessity, but time cannot be undervalued when doing work which involves many people, deep data analysis, and questioning the status quo of an organization's policies and procedures. During year two of Differentiated Assistance for COE programs, the 2019-2020 school year, in-person meetings were discontinued in the Spring due to the pandemic, but the consortiums stayed connected.

The overarching goal of California's System of Support is to, "...help local educational agencies (LEAs) and their schools meet the needs of each student they serve, with a focus on building local capacity to sustain improvement and to effectively address disparities in opportunities and outcomes" (CDE, 2020). To address disparities in opportunities and outcomes and build local capacity, the Differentiated Assistance process was developed for collaboration. The research participants overwhelmingly agreed that the collaboration—internally, externally, and with the CDE—was a beneficial

aspect of the System of Support. Fullan and Rincon-Gallardo (2017) argue the right drivers of education reform include: capacity building; pedagogy; collaboration; and systemness. The participants looked forward to and were excited about collaborating with other County Offices. There was a genuine expression, from the administrators, that they wanted to not only learn from each other and build capacity, but that they also felt comfortable being vulnerable and having hard conversations surrounding data and program practices. As one participant noted, the accountability system has shifted from a punitive, “gotcha” style to one that is rooted in continuous improvement.

The Improvement Science process is an effective part of Differentiated Assistance. The respondents referenced their Improvement Science work throughout the survey and interviews as a benefit to drilling down to find equity issues in their organization. Having a protocol to follow with expert leadership was well received. Some of the participants had taken longer workshops in Improvement Science that were supported by their County Superintendents; they noted that the training, which required a great time commitment, was worth it. Along with collaboration, the administrators remembered the different activities, such as the root cause analysis, empathy interviews, creating their problem of practice, continuous data analysis, implementing change, and making adjustments.

Significant Findings and Implications of Research Question Two A

Each participant had examples of the most impactful actions their programs took that were related to California’s System of Support. Improved data practices, collaboration, and Improvement Science processes were all used to tackle the unique challenges faced

by each COE Court and Community School team. Regardless of what the project was, each team described utilizing data analysis, collaboration and capacity building, and Improvement Science. One previously referenced example, regarding improving the chronic absenteeism rate, was successful due to data analysis, collaboration, and use of Improvement Science:

The attendance project that we did, we really did make some huge differences. I think it was 10 and 13 percent difference...I do think it also was a decision on the part of the Superintendent and of the COE to have all the people at the director level be trained in Improvement Science.

Another administrator discussed how the data analysis, collaboration, and use of Improvement Science was a welcomed challenge which promoted difficult conversations and change. The administrator described the importance of bringing the teachers and support staff together to participate in the Improvement Science process and evaluating data. The participant stated, “It really does force you to have hard discussions with the admin team and with teachers and support staff and say, “It’s not okay.”” Furthermore, the administrator described how the Improvement Science process allowed for a focus on one very important element as opposed to trying to tackle everything at once:

I really appreciated that and how it focuses or asks you to focus on a Problem of Practice and not make it this big, huge thing. You can’t eat an elephant in one sitting so to speak, but you can tackle a recognizable problem, in small chunks. I really enjoyed that they took that approach.

This approach was especially helpful for COE Court and Community Schools which were often faced with a Dashboard that displayed potential problems across all indicators. To conclude, the data suggests that the most impactful actions taken as a result of participation in the System of Support were focused mostly around the process of

problem solving, including data analysis, collaboration and capacity building, and Improvement Science.

Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher recommends future research to support the effectiveness of California's System of Support to promote equity-focused change in COE Court and Community Schools. A larger study is needed, and it would be beneficial to add other types of COE Court and Community School participants with experience with the System of Support such as teachers, support staff, other types of administrators, and students. Additional perspectives to include in future research outside of COE Court and Community School teams would be CDE System of Support team members and the Improvement Science facilitators who are often Educational Services administrators.

Furthermore, as exposed through the review of literature in this study, there exists a gap in research for alternative education programs, specifically COE Court and Community Schools. There are many different types of alternative education programs and each county has different types of educational opportunities. COE Court and Community Schools, despite appearing similar, can have vastly different types of programs from county to county. There currently exists a great opportunity to explore alternative education in California.

Conclusions

As California's System of Supports continues to be refined and utilized by COE Court and Community Schools, this research adds a unique and currently lacking perspective of COE alternative education administrators. The key findings in this limited

study reflect the new System of Support is a step in the right direction for COE Court and Community Schools and there is still much work to be done. Drawing from the results of this study, important themes emerged.

First, implementation of a system such as the Dashboard is useful for COE Court and Community Schools. The Dashboard's accuracy and efficacy can be improved by improving internal COE data practices and through re-evaluating and modifying the metrics used for the different indicators, including the CCI and the Academic Indicators. Second, collaboration is important to the continuous improvement of COE Court and Community Schools. The most beneficial and effective aspects from the Differentiated Assistance process were described as having dedicated time to focus on the work and collaboration internally and externally.

Overall, when COEs engaged in a project to address a problem of practice, there was a sense of importance and urgency that was built into the system that helped push the work forward. Alternative education programs, specifically COE Court and Community Schools, are under-researched, often invisible, entities that exist within our public education system. This study brought to the forefront the perceptions of the experts in this field. Continued research and collaboration of alternative education programs will benefit not only the efficacy of California's System of Support but the students it serves.

Epilogue

It was an immensely fulfilling experience to research alternative education. As discussed in this study, alternative education programs, including County Office of Education (COE) programs, are often invisible and left out of research. The students,

families, communities, and staff who are involved with COE Court and Community Schools have experiences and expertise that the general public, educational leaders, researchers, and policy makers need to hear. The survey and interview data reveal the dedication of the administrators to their programs, students, families, and communities and their commitment to continuously improve their programs and services.

The literature review revealed a limited amount of research on alternative education programs, specifically, COE Court and Community Schools. The limited research did discuss the ambiguity of alternative education as well as the history and types of alternative education programs. The term alternative education has struggled with a negative connotation historically, implying that it is different from the normal or traditional public school programs. I would argue, now more than ever, as we navigate through the pandemic, alternative education programs are looked to for their innovative designs and student supports. As traditional schools transitioned to distance learning, cohorts, and hybrid programs, for the first time, many alternative education programs had been innovatively redesigning school programs for years. Additionally, alternative education programs which are designed to meet the needs of the whole child, often have more robust counseling and support services available for students and staff.

The process of interviewing the expert COE Court and Community School administrators was heartwarming and their sentiments have been heard for years. Most systems are not designed for alternative education programs, specifically accountability systems. The System of Support is a shift in the right direction, as articulated by the respondents, but there is still much to do to make the system meaningful and effective to

produce positive equity-focused change. The Differentiated Assistance process which brought together different COEs and the California Department of Education was well-received and meaningful to the participants because of the collaborative nature and capacity building that was woven into the process.

To continue to improve the efficacy of California's System of Support for COE Court and Community Schools, a better understanding of the unique aspects of these programs is needed as well as how alternative education programs function in the larger context of public education in California. This conversation is just starting and I look forward to the continued collaboration and research.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Consent

SJSU Izant Gonzales Interview Consent Form

TITLE OF STUDY

The Effectiveness of California's Dashboard and System of Support as Perceived by County Offices of Education Alternative Education Administrators

NAME OF RESEARCHERS

Jennifer Izant Gonzales, Doctoral Candidate, San Jose State University.
Dr. Reis, Research Advisor, San Jose State University.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to gather perceptions from California County Office of Education Court and Community School Administrators about (a) the accuracy of the California Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status and. (b) the effectiveness of California's System of Support, specifically Differentiated Assistance.

PROCEDURES

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked several follow-up questions related to the survey that you already completed online. The questions serve to elaborate and to gain a better understanding of your experience with California's System of Support, specifically Differentiated Assistance, as well as the Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS). In this voluntary interview, you will be asked to discuss your perceptions of the accuracy of the Dashboard/DASS in highlighting areas your programs need to focus on as well as areas of strength and the effectiveness of the Differentiated Assistance. The interview will take approximately 30-60 minutes and I will use a teleconferencing vendor approved by SJSU, such as Zoom to conduct and record our sessions to assist with note-taking, these recordings will not be shared. The transcriptions of the interviews will be included in the results and dissemination of the study findings. At no time will any identifying information be published or shared in this study.

POTENTIAL RISKS

Some people may feel nervous about taking part in a research study. There is a chance participants could be identified based on contextual information provided in the transcripts. This study will be published and when necessary, ID numbers and pseudonyms will be used when analyzing and disseminating the results in the final report.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

While we do not anticipate any direct benefits to individual participants, surveys and follow-up interviews will help us to better understand the effectiveness of California's System of Support, specifically Differentiated Assistance, for COE Court and Community Schools. The findings may offer implications for strengthening the accountability system for alternative programs.



Appendix B: Interview Questions



Opening:

1) Please tell me about your experience working with COE Court and Community Schools.

Introduction:

2) Briefly describe your experience with regard to Federal and State Accountability, such as California's System of Support.

Transition:

3) What do you think makes an effective accountability system for COE Court and Community Schools?

A brief review of the research topic and research questions.

Key Questions:

4) Describe your role and experience with the Dashboard/Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) (RQ1).

5) How confident are you with regard to the accuracy of the Dashboard/DASS data (RQ 1)?

6) How accurately does the Dashboard/DASS display the areas of growth of your programs (RQ 1)?

7) How accurately does the Dashboard/DASS display areas of strength for your programs (RQ 1)?

8) Please explain how accurately the Dashboard/DASS data emphasizes equity (RQ 1)?

9) Tell me about your experience with Differentiated Assistance (RQ 2).

10) How did your program decide how and with whom to collaborate with through Differentiated Assistance?

11) What was/were your Problem(s) of Practice during Differentiated Assistance (RQ2)?

- 12) How was the Differentiated Assistance Process focused on equity (RQ 2)?
- 13) If you participated in Differentiated Assistance during the 2018-2019 school year, what were the direct impacts of this process (RQ 2A)?
- 14) If you are in Differentiated Assistance in 19-20, what were the direct impacts of this process or what are your anticipated impacts of the process (RQ 2A)?
- 15) Tell me about who from your team was involved in the Differentiated Assistance process and how that was decided (RQ 2).

Ending:

- 16) Describe the most beneficial aspects of California's System of Support, including the Dashboard/DASS and Differentiated Assistance for COE Court and Community Schools (RQ 1, 2, 2A).
- 17) Describe needed changes for California's System of Support, including the Dashboard/DASS and Differentiated Assistance to make the system more effective to produce equity-focused change(s) in COE Court and Community Schools (RQ 1, 2, 2A)?
- 18) With the impact of the pandemic, how can California's System of Support modify to meet the needs of your COE Court and Community school(s)?
- 19) What are the most pressing equity issues facing your COE Court and Community School(s) during the pandemic?
- 20) What actions has your organization taken to mitigate these issues during the pandemic?
- 20) What else would you like to share with regard to accountability and COE Court and Community Schools (RQ 1, 2, 2A)?

Appendix C: Approved IRB



Office of Research
Division of
Research and Innovation

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

IRB Notice of Approval

Date of Approval: 3/30/20

Study Title: The Effectiveness of California's Dashboard and System of Support as Perceived by County Offices of Education Alternative Education Administrators

Primary Investigator(s): Dr. Noni Reis

Student(s): Jennifer Izant Gonzales

Other SJSU Team Members:

Funding Source: None

IRB Protocol Tracking Number: 20081

Type of Review

- Exempt Registration: Category of approval (d)(2ii)
- Expedited Review: Category of approval
- Full Review
- Modifications
- Continuing Review

Special Conditions

- Waiver of signed consent approved
- Waiver of some or all elements of informed consent approved
- Risk determination for device:
- Other:

Continuing Review

Is not required. Principal Investigator must file a [status report](#) with the Office of Research one year from the approval date on this notice to communicate whether the research activity is ongoing. Failure to file a status report will result in closure of the protocol and destruction of the protocol file after three years.