
Our Work

The Integration of Collaborative Capacity-Building with Teaching and Learning



An Explanation of CEC's Theory of Action

Consortium for Educational Change - June, 2015

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Introduction: What is CEC?

Established in 1987, the Consortium for Educational Change (CEC) is a not-for-profit educational organization that specializes in wrap-around, long-term support for schools and districts. CEC began as a network of Illinois school districts committed to a mission of building labor-management collaborative relationships and structures for the purpose of improving school system performance and student learning. In the last quarter century, CEC has since dramatically grown from twelve member districts to nearly ninety by 2015.

CEC specializes in “boots-on-the-ground” support for schools and districts. Embedded in CEC’s work are its core beliefs that collaborative cultures are foundational to ongoing, positive change and that school systems must build and sustain their own internal capacities in order to continuously improve. These ideas are the foundation for CEC’s Theory of Action.

In the last several years, CEC has become a regional and national player with multiple partners in reforming teacher unions, transforming the teaching and school leadership professions, and focusing on the learning and achievement of all students. It has also become increasingly involved in special project partnerships and state, regional and national education policy discussions.

CEC believes that its long record of experiences in local districts and schools allows it a unique perspective regarding impactful partnerships and educational policy. CEC knows and wants to partner around what “works on the ground” with those in the district/ school transformation and policy areas.

cecillinois.org

CEC's Theory of Action

CEC's Theory of Action Describes CEC's work by answering four questions around *what, why, how, and where*.

CEC has a **Theory of Action** to describe its work, which is articulated through the answers to four questions:

1. *What* is CEC's work?
2. *Why* is CEC's work important?
3. *How* does CEC do its work?
4. *Where* does CEC do its work?

The remainder of this Theory of Action explanation will answer each of the four questions.

Defining CEC’s Work: The What

CEC’s work requires a *collaborative* approach to *capacity building* through the provision of *targeted support* that results in *improvements in student learning*. This commitment to providing services through **collaborative capacity-building** is reflected in CEC’s Mission and Vision statements.

CEC’s Organizational Mission: *The Consortium for Educational Change builds collaborative structures, processes and cultures with and among key educational stakeholders, including labor and management, to transform educational systems to continuously improve learning and achievement for all students.*

CEC’s Strategic Vision: *CEC will be a best practice exemplar of a system of support to build capacity in districts and schools in Illinois and across the country in order to move them to higher levels of performance.*

What separates CEC from other educational improvement entities is this commitment to providing services through collaborative capacity-building. Further, CEC’s commitment to promote change through the “three anchors” – the board of education, the superintendent of schools and administration, and the teachers union or representative group –has been its philosophic cornerstone for decades.

As a result, CEC has been deeply engaged in consistently building and supporting collaborative relationships among teachers, school and district administrators, school board members, union leaders, and community leaders, all to pursue continuous improvement throughout all levels of a school system.

CEC believes that only through the collaborative and aligned work of the “three anchors” can difficult, day-to-day improvement efforts be sustained.

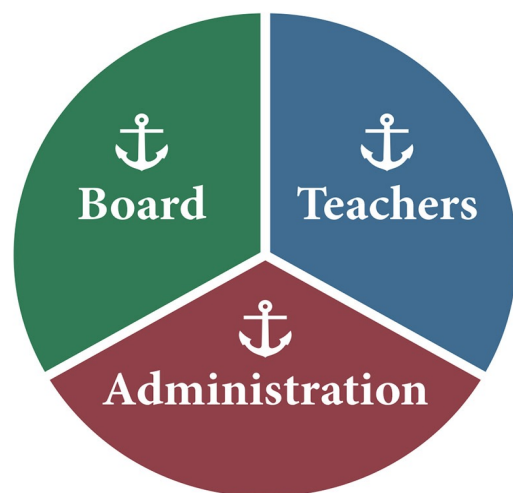


FIGURE 1: CEC’S THREE ANCHORS

It is CEC's strongly held belief that such organizational change requires a depth and breadth of research-based knowledge and practice in student learning, assessment, pedagogy, distributed leadership models, and labor-management collaboration. All, in combination, are necessary to bring about continuous improvement in student learning.

But this kind of organizational change is hardly easy, even for those schools or districts best prepared to attempt such change. This level of change requires an organizational commitment to difficult, sustained work over many years.

CEC seeks to provide assistance to schools, districts and states to (1) build the collaborative structures, processes and cultures needed for learning success and (2) bring to those cultures, structures and processes the effective practices and impactful educational research findings that are most likely to positively impact that particular local setting. To this end, CEC provides an ever-evolving (as learning research itself continuously evolves) set of services that can assist at student, teacher, leader (both administrator and teacher), and system levels. These services represent effective, research-based practices that CEC matches to the particular environment of the local district or school.

CEC's commitment to providing collaborative capacity-building services that improve learning for all students answers the question
What is CEC's work?

Illustrating the *Why* and the *How* of CEC's Work

CEC recognizes that its work must have meaning and that there must be an overall approach for how CEC does that work. The *inside-out* Framework for Change defines the purpose and meaning behind CEC's work through descriptions of four belief-based guiding elements. CEC's *outside-in* collaborative capacity-building describes how CEC does its work through a five-step Collaborative Pathway to Continuous Improvement (Pathway) and a Capacity-Building Coaching Delivery Model (Coaching Delivery Model).

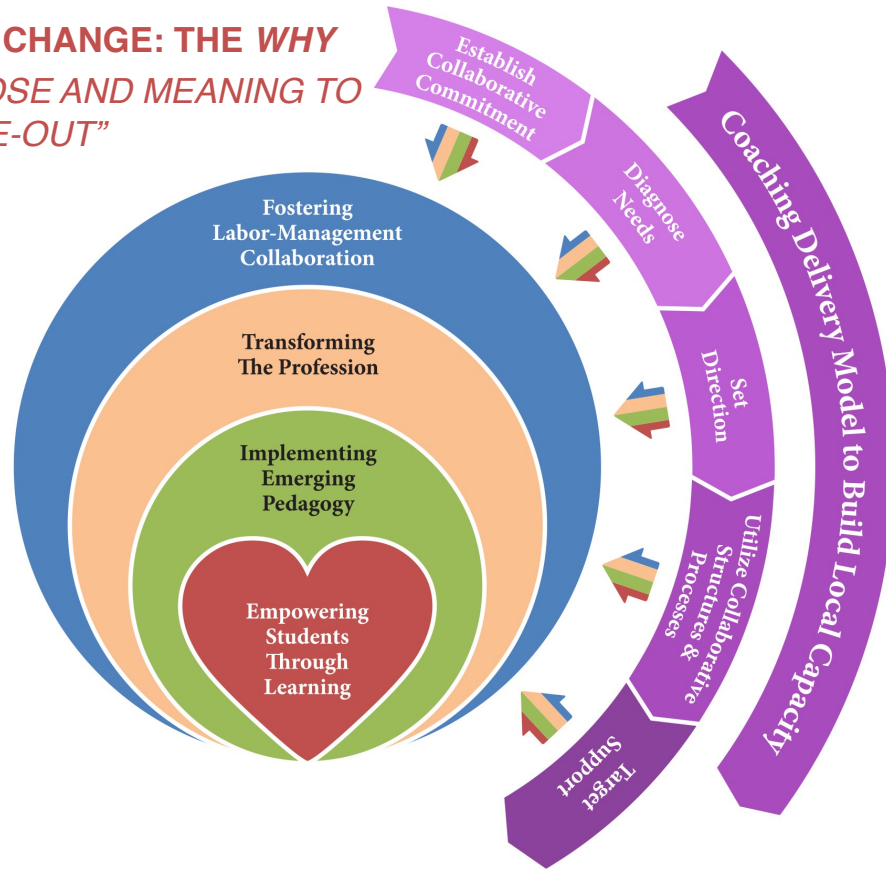
CEC 's Work – Illustrating the Theory of Action's *Why* and *How* – is graphically demonstrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 begins with CEC's Framework for Change, represented by the four concentric circles (elements), working from the red center heart-shaped circle outward. The green, tan and blue elements are all driven by the need for Empowering Students Through Learning. This represents the *inside-out* portion of Figure 2 – the four elements that represent the purpose for and meaning of CEC's work.

The *why* and the *how* represent the purpose and meaning behind CEC's work and the ways in which that work is carried out.

The *outside-in* portion is represented by the multi-colored arrows pointing to the right side of the circles. These arrows represent the work that is done through CEC, which is applicable to any of the four elements. The arrows evolve from the Pathway's five steps of "doing the work", represented by the different shades of purple that make up the inner arc. The outer arc represents CEC's Coaching Delivery Model, which supports the Pathway by moving districts and schools toward continuous improvement self-capacity.

FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE: THE WHY
PROVIDING PURPOSE AND MEANING TO OUR WORK “INSIDE-OUT”



COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY-BUILDING: THE HOW
DOING OUR WORK “OUTSIDE-IN”

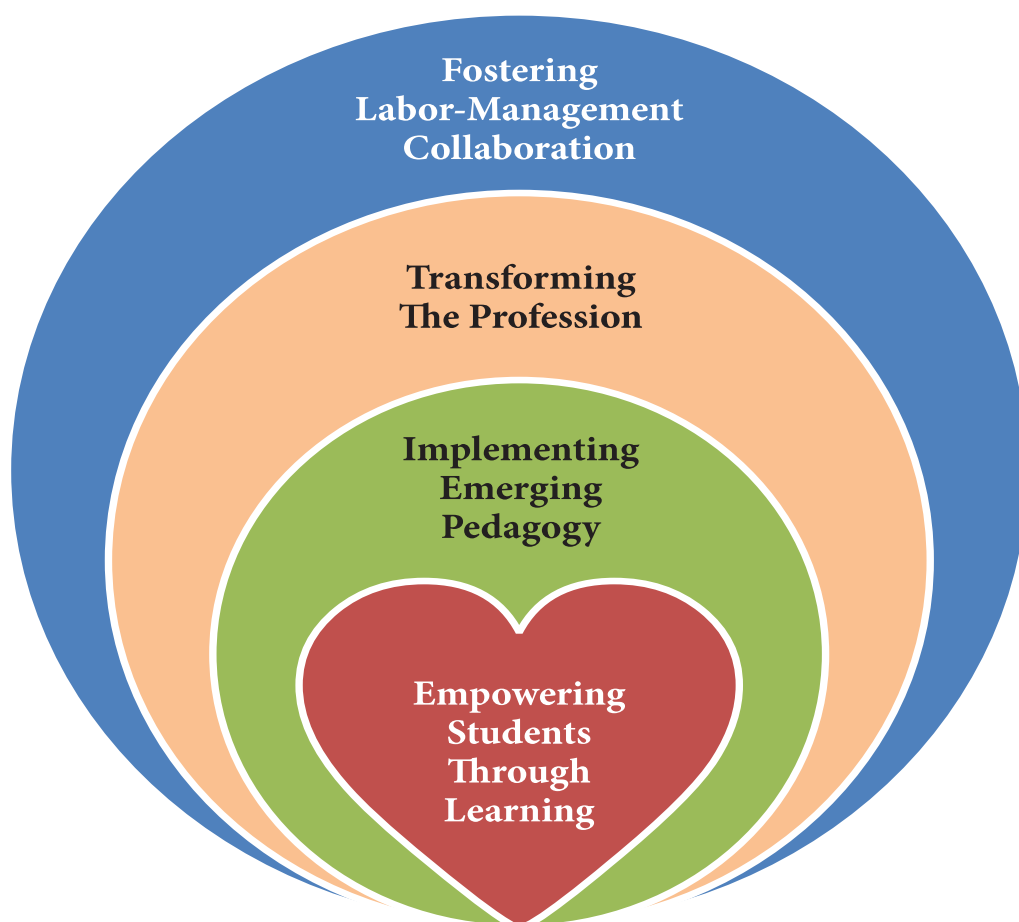
FIGURE 2: CEC'S WORK - ILLUSTRATING THE THEORY OF ACTION'S WHY AND HOW

The rest of this Theory of Action explanation will detail the *inside-out* and *outside-in* approaches to CEC's work. Links throughout the text will provide access to CEC's research base, examples of CEC services, and supporting documents.

The next section focuses on CEC's *inside-out* Framework for Change. The Framework for Change is summarized graphically in Figure 3 on the following page.

Giving Purpose and Meaning to the Work: *Inside-Out* Framework for Change

CEC'S FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE: THE *WHY*



PROVIDING PURPOSE AND MEANING TO OUR WORK *"INSIDE-OUT"*

FIGURE 3: CEC'S *INSIDE-OUT* FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE

The Framework for Change provides the purpose for and meaning of CEC’s work. The Framework is conceptualized as four systemic elements graphically represented by concentric circles, with each circle being supported by the circle surrounding it. Everything moves *inside-out* from Empowering Students Through Learning – “the heart of it all” – to give purpose and meaning to the circles surrounding it.

As illustrated in Figure 3 above, CEC’s Framework for Change is centered around Empowering Students Through Learning. CEC believes that students are empowered

CEC’s belief in and commitment to its Framework for Change answers the question *Why is CEC’s work important?*

through learning as they become more directly and personally responsible for their own learning progress. In turn, this responsibility for one’s own learning allows students to become partners with adults – their teachers, parents and guardians – in an ongoing learning process that becomes life-long.

The first supporting element in the Framework for Change is Implementing Emerging Pedagogy – good and impactful instruction through the use of effective learning tools and strategies. In turn, such emerging pedagogy is best supported in a learning culture that is Transforming the Profession by expanding leadership and mentoring roles for teachers as well as clarifying and rethinking leadership roles for principals and other administrators. However, support for transforming the profession can only occur within the context of an environment that is Fostering Labor-Management Collaboration.

Each element improves conditions for the element directly beneath it. This makes the four elements *interdependent*. Because the elements are interdependent, all have influence to address Empowering Students Through Learning. This influence is increasingly more direct the closer – the more *proximate* – the element is to Empowering Students Through Learning. Even though the three supporting elements do not have equal influence – equal proximity – all three, in combination, are required to improve student learning for all students.

The Framework for Change impacts CEC’s work from the **inside out** because, while Empowering Students Through Learning is the central focus, that focus is impactful only when the other three elements are surrounding and supporting it.

What makes this truly *inside out* is the common commitment, at each of the other three elements, to impact the improvement of student learning. CEC’s Framework for Change doesn’t start in boardrooms, the superintendent’s office or at union meetings. It starts in

classrooms with an unrelenting focus on students, how they are learning, and how they can take control over that learning. Without that common focus, the three supporting elements stand alone, isolated from outcomes for students and, until recently, largely isolated from each other.

Consider how a student-centered outlook works. Improving pedagogy misses the point if it doesn't result in improved student learning. Merely tabulating increased skill sets of teachers, disconnected from student learning results, only assist the adults, not the students. Likewise, expanding and focusing on professional opportunities is only of benefit if those opportunities translate to expanded learning opportunities that lead to empowerment for students.

It is without that common connection to student learning that each supporting element diminishes in both power and purpose.

Otherwise, the benefits never reach the targeted group schools are intended to serve. And collaborative labor-management relations and actions must be made with the ultimate eye on impacting student learning via adult-based decision-making, policies and working conditions. Otherwise, all of that collaboration only benefits the adults while excluding the students.

This emphatically is *not* an argument against the importance of the outer three circles. Quite to the contrary. When aligned to a focus on student learning, they create a powerful momentum, both individually and collectively, toward needed educational improvements for both adults and students.¹ (See also Appendix D)

Now let's look at how each of the Framework For Change's four elements give purpose for and meaning to CEC's work.

¹ *A Collaborative Culture Has an Impact on Shared Leadership.* cecillinois.org/collaborative-cultures-impact-shared-leadership/



Inside Out: Empowering Students Through Learning The *Why*

The ultimate aim of CEC’s work is to help actualize
continuous improvement in student learning.

CEC uses the expression “student learning” because it includes, but means more than, high academic achievement. This expanded notion of learning has significant implications for what is now expected of learning in schools and, by extension, the nature of CEC’s work.

In the past, the notion of “school” was to prepare individual students for mastering basic knowledge and skills for citizenship, the workplace and general U.S. cultural, social and patriotic understandings and practices. Today preparation is also highly technological, multi-lingual, international in perspective, and group as well as individually oriented.

Currently schooling is focused well beyond yesteryear’s definitions of knowledge and skill acquisition. Problem-solving and analysis, conceptual applications to real-life situations, and creative syntheses of disparate knowledge to original new products and solutions represent just a few of the new learning expectations. And all are expected to occur within a school environment that is physically, psychologically and emotionally safe, personally engaging, participative, and challenging for all. That is, today’s schools must address the needs of the “whole child”.

All of the past expectations
are still there, with all of
the new expectations
added to them.

These expectations go well beyond what most schools and districts are presently designed to deliver. As a result, CEC helps schools and districts link these new learning expectations for *what is to be learned* through the development and implementation of standards-based learning content and varied and multiple assessment approaches.

Because perception data can identify how students feel about their orientation toward learning, CEC also helps schools and districts assess *how learning is perceived* through utilizing satisfaction surveys and other forms of qualitative data.

In combination, aligned standards, assessments and perceptions can accurately identify what is and isn't being learned. In turn, this comprehensive bank of information and approaches better inform instruction.

And instruction is increasingly directed toward applying strategies that encourage students to take responsibility for the own learning actions and accomplishments – how to set goals for themselves, how to track their own learning through data, and how to report on their progress to parents, guardians and teachers. This offers the potential for student organizations, such as Student Councils, to now expand their responsibilities beyond just social considerations. They can also inform the adults about what motivates them to learn and how they understand their learning to be progressing. This moves students closer to being engaged partners in an ongoing learning process.

This focus on what is to be learned, how well the learning is occurring, and how students feel about their learning experiences, all to better inform instruction and encourage student learning responsibility, are at the heart of determining how CEC approaches the work of continuously Empowering Students Through Learning.



Implementing
Emerging
Pedagogy

Inside Out: Implementing Emerging Pedagogy The *Why*

CEC specializes in helping schools and districts **bridge theory to local practices** - *what is to be taught and how to teach it.*

Given recent brain research, never before has the learning process itself been more clearly described. Never before has research better identified effective practices that promote successful learning. Never before have we known so much about how to improve learning through teaching as we do now.

The challenge is to move today's rich body of research on learning and effective practices from theory to the classroom. This effort defines the change potential embedded in the emerging pedagogy. How do we make this research and these effective practices accessible to the teachers and principals who work directly with students to improve student learning? Someone needs to **translate theory into practical, applicable strategies and tools** that teachers and principals can understand and replicate in classrooms.

CEC recognizes that teachers and administrators are unlikely to effectively perform this translation themselves. They cannot be their own research experts, staying current with a continually evolving educational research base, and still be productive, full-time teachers and administrators. CEC knows that educators in schools lack the time to sort through all of the research possibilities that now exist, much less distinguish what will work from what won't work in each school's unique educational settings and students.

CEC serves as a “matchmaker” to link, from the full range of research-based effective practices, those practices that are most likely to be successful in each unique local educational setting.

Further, CEC supports the understanding that educators must partner with medical and social service entities to address the needs of the “whole child,” particularly for those coming ill-prepared for school due to a variety of adverse childhood experiences.

CEC seeks to help fill this void through guiding and coaching districts in developing and implementing standards-based curricula; building instructional models; aligning unit design and common assessments to standards; identifying specific instructional practices; partnering with external entities; and assisting in teacher assessment and instructional skill development through utilization of the four domains of the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching².

By so doing, CEC can serve as that bridge between the practical needs of educational practitioners and the resource possibilities that research and effective practices can provide.

²cecillinois.org/danielsonframework



Transforming the
Profession

Inside Out: Transforming the Profession The *Why*

At the heart of CEC’s vision is transforming teaching from an isolated individual’s practice to collective communities of practice where teacher-based leadership opportunities naturally emerge.

Current school reform efforts still focus on the individual teacher or principal as the key to improving public schools. Not so for CEC, which embraces a team-based approach. This approach looks at improving teaching and student learning through a lens of supportive, collaborative professional learning structures rather than isolated, individual teacher improvement efforts.

Integrated, coordinated leadership – a distributed leadership model - is required at central office, principal and teacher levels if the profession is to be truly transformed.

In doing so, a vision of a new profession emerges³: *taking the profession from isolated silos of individual practice to collaboratively designed communities of practice and from single to distributed leadership models.*

As one transformative example to achieve this vision, teacher evaluation systems need to move from being highly compliant to ones supported by communities of practice as a process for

social learning (See Appendix A). The key shift is in moving from practices and procedures that are “done to” a teacher to ones where teachers grow and improve their practices “together”.

Part of that vision includes working with principals to assist them in becoming more collaborative educational leaders. Such collaborative leaders coordinate across the various grade level and department communities of practice in his or her school, much like an orchestra conductor leads a symphony orchestra – not by playing every instrument, but by

³ cecillinois.org/transformingtheprofession

setting the tempo (expectations) by which all instruments are able to produce a pleasing, integrated sound.

To transform the profession in this way requires time and opportunities for teachers and principals to reflectively work and learn together. Educators at all levels need timely, ongoing access to academic, demographic, process and perception data to guide decisions pertaining to teacher practice and student learning needs. This is because a transformed profession requires (1) data describing instruction and learning outcomes, (2) relevant, high quality and targeted professional development, and (3) empowered communities of practice.

CEC is well positioned to address these transformative requirements through its extensive experiences with teacher and principal evaluation models, leadership coaching, teacher induction and mentoring systems, and the development of school leadership teams and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Such experiences emphasize the creation of collaborative grade level/department teams as communities of professional learners and principals as facilitators of effective, teacher-led learning practices.

Inside Out: Fostering Labor-Management Collaboration The *Why*

By creating an overarching organizational environment for a collaborative culture, labor-management collaboration becomes foundational to transforming the profession.

Labor-management collaboration utilizes interest-based problem-solving approaches to promote distributed leadership and collective responsibility. This requires teacher unions to move from an Industrial Model to a Professional Model⁴ (with the ultimate aim of reaching the level of the Social Justice Model) to become vehicles for professionalization analogous to, for example, the American Medical Association (AMA) or American Bar Association (ABA).

But labor-management collaboration must be embedded within the larger context of educational reform if collaboration among the “three anchors” is to result in teaching and learning improvements. Such collaboration can provide the resources and support for real-time, collective work by teachers to change curriculum and pedagogy needed to improve student learning. This makes labor-management collaboration a pre-condition for a change process that requires input, buy-in and support from all stakeholders in the system to reach the ultimate goal of improved teaching effectiveness and student learning.

CEC promotes its “three-anchor” collaboration efforts in multiple ways.

First, CEC guides districts in creating written documents like “constitutions” and “compacts” to provide foundational underpinnings that help sustain collaborative cultures. This contractually memorializes collaborative approaches, structures and processes. (*The Importance of Negotiations in a Collaborative Culture*.⁵)

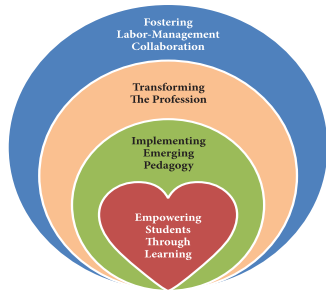
⁴ cecillinois.org/threeframesofunionism

⁵ cecillinois.org/importance-negotiations-collaborative-culture/

Second, CEC trains districts in interest-based problem-solving strategies, productive working relationships, and collaborative skill-building through new structures and processes. (*The Three Areas of Labor-Management Collaboration*.⁶)

Third, CEC facilitates and coaches the implementation of collaborative structures and processes, such as district leadership teams, school leadership teams, *professional learning communities* (PLCs), and strategic planning teams.

⁶ cecillinois.org/about/guiding-documents/3-areas-labor-management-collaboration/



Summary - Giving Purpose and Meaning to the Work *Inside-Out: The Why*

The *inside-out* Framework for Change represents a crucial aspect of CEC’s work – what CEC believes gives its work purpose and meaning. The elements within the Framework for Change are grounded in *research and effective practices*⁷.

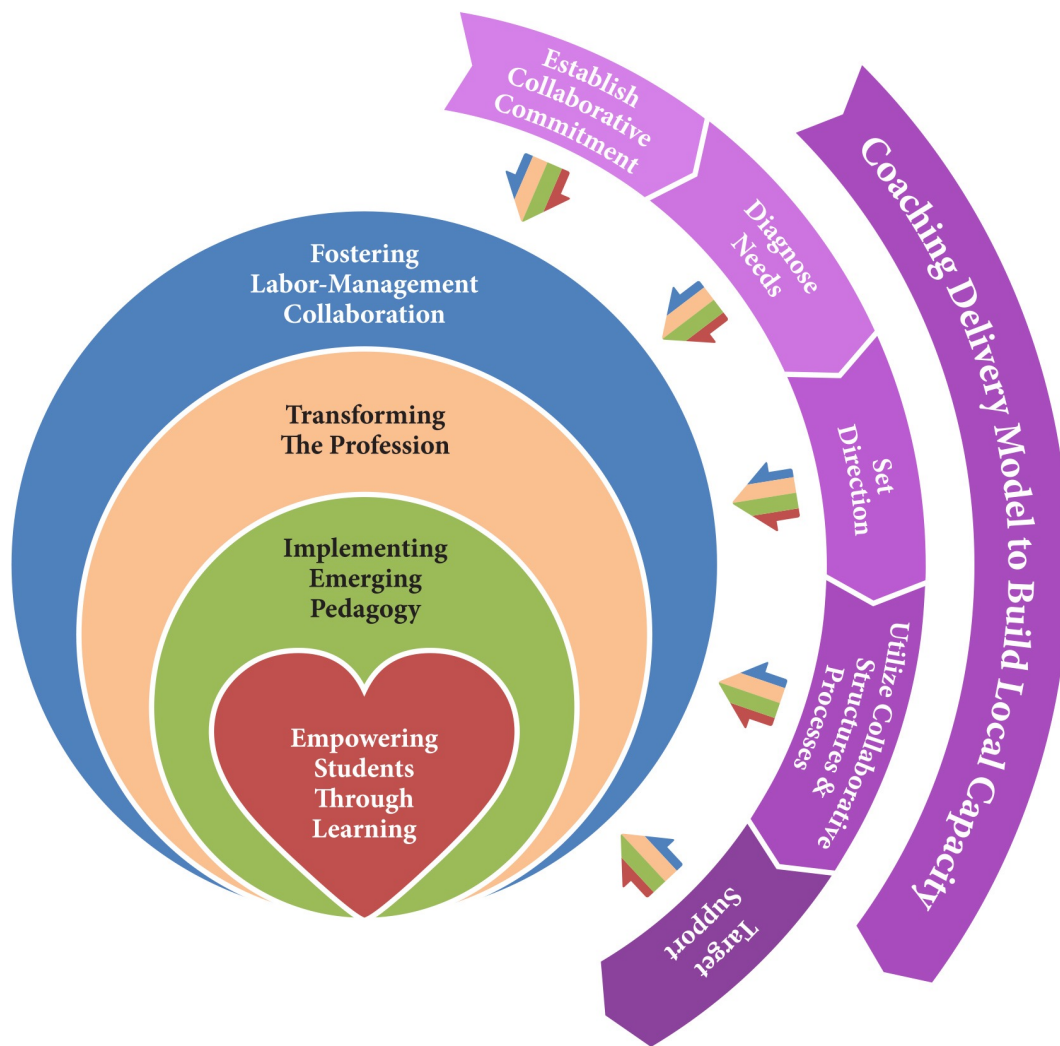
Each element of the *inside-out* Framework for Change exerts influence on CEC’s mission of helping actualize continuous improvement in student learning. Most directly, CEC helps schools and districts translate theory into practice to deliver a research-based pedagogy. In turn, this, requires CEC to assist educators in transforming the profession from an isolated individual’s practice to collective communities of practice and from single to distributed leadership. Foundational to such a transformation is an overarching collaborative organizational environment that is the result of the productive relationships CEC builds between labor and management in school systems.

The next section on *outside-in* collaborative capacity-building describes how CEC does this work and is graphically presented though the purple sections within Figure 4.

⁷ cecillinois.org/about/cec-research-base/

Doing Our Work: *Outside-In* Collaborative Capacity-Building

CEC'S COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY-BUILDING: THE *HOW*



DOING THE WORK “OUTSIDE-IN”

FIGURE 4: DOING OUR WORK - CEC'S *OUTSIDE-IN* COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY-BUILDING

Implementing CEC’s Framework for Change requires collaborative capacity-building – targeted CEC support that works from the outside in to improve school, district and labor-management results. CEC provides “outside” targeted support that assists the “inside” school, district or labor-management group on its continuous improvement journey.

CEC provides its targeted support through a service delivery pathway – CEC’s **Collaborative Pathway to Continuous Improvement (Pathway)**, represented as five sequential steps within the inner purple arc in Figure 4. Such services are designed to collaboratively develop

results-driven improvement in both student and adult learning.

CEC’s Collaborative Pathway to Continuous Improvement, carried out through its Capacity-Building Coaching Delivery Model, answers the question **How does CEC do its work?**

Figure 4’s outer purple arc represents CEC’s use of a **Capacity-Building Coaching Delivery Model (Coaching Delivery Model)** as a way to develop internal capacities in a school system to continue its own improvement work independent of CEC.

The multi-colored arrows in Figure 4 illustrate that CEC can utilize entry points through any one or more of the four *inside-out* Framework for Change elements in order to apply Pathway services through the Coaching Delivery Model.

The rest of this section describes each step of CEC’s *outside-in* Pathway and Coaching Delivery Model approaches. The first five subsections explain each step of CEC’s Pathway of targeted support to schools, districts, and labor-management groups. The last subsection details how CEC’s Coaching Delivery Model builds local capacities for continuous improvement.

Through its Pathway and Coaching Delivery Model, CEC converts **giving purpose and meaning** to our work from the *inside-out* to **doing** our work from the *outside-in*.

Collaborative Pathway to Continuous Improvement

CEC's Collaborative Pathway to Continuous Improvement (Appendix B) describes a five-step process CEC utilizes to match its research-based, targeted support services to unique local school system needs and capacities. The Pathway is premised on a collaborative working relationship among the "three anchors" in order to:

1. Establish **Collaborative Commitments**
2. Assess readiness by **Diagnosing Needs**
3. Define the work by **Setting Direction**
4. Systematically support the work through utilizing **Collaborative Structures and Processes**
5. **Target Support** to impact the work.

When carried out as collaboratively designed, the Pathway allows CEC to "match" the most impactful research-based services to the greatest systemic needs of each local district or school.

CEC's Pathway does not slight on its commitment to utilizing research-based effective practices. And CEC does not waver in its dedication to "three anchor" collaboration. But this does not mean

CEC will refuse services to districts and schools that do not want to commit to these conditions. It merely means that CEC begins its work at that baseline level – addressing the foundational conditions necessary for improvement to occur. The rest of this section will detail each step of the Pathway.

Because CEC does not market "one-size-fits-all" products to districts or schools, it is the Pathway that makes CEC services unique and allows CEC to become that bridge between research-based theory and local practice.

Outside-In Pathway Step 1: Establish Collaborative Commitments

Ensures all “three anchors” are equally committed to identifying and carrying out the work.



The first step is to *agree to agree*.

Embarking on a continuous improvement journey is hard work. To successfully accomplish that work, a district has to begin at the beginning with agreement from the “three anchors” to take on the challenges of this hard work *together*. The salient question at this step is “Do we have a *We?*”

This question can only be answered by “three anchor” agreement around a shared vision of a desired collaborative culture, evidenced by an established and *formal* commitment to ongoing labor and management collaboration going forward.

To CEC, this is the obvious first step. To many school districts, it is the last step they seriously consider, more often determining that if the board or administration feels it is important enough, everyone else will follow along.

This isn’t yet a commitment to the specific structures or details of the work, which have to be identified and developed through steps 2 – 5. But it is a formal agreement that all “three anchors” want to embark on such work and that all three are committed to working collaboratively and in concert to make the work’s accomplishment successful.

It requires a recognition that the work cannot be successfully accomplished if the “anchors” aren’t fully aligned. It is also a first step in recognizing that, absent a previous history of strong labor-management collaboration, this work will be approached very differently from work of the past.

For this reason, CEC offers programs and services to enhance management-labor collaboration as well as to organizationally improve districts and schools. These include:

- ◆ Comprehensive Union Leadership Development and Training
- ◆ Interest-Based Bargaining – Team, Trainer & Facilitator Training
- ◆ Local Union’s System Assessment for Capacities and Needs
- ◆ PERA Joint Committee Facilitation (for Illinois teachers unions)
- ◆ Shared Accountability
- ◆ Shared (Distributive) Leadership
- ◆ TURN Coordination & Facilitation

Outside-In Pathway Step 2: Assess Readiness by Diagnosing Needs

Identifies where improvement is needed by documenting district or school comparisons to effective practices.



CEC's diagnostic entry points define *how district or school needs are determined.*

CEC diagnoses a school or district's needs as a system before determining which services will be the most beneficial. While some schools or districts have a clear and accurate idea of what services they need, many more have either no idea or mistakenly think they do.

CEC understands that effective, research-based practices cannot simply be grafted onto all districts or schools in the same way. It is the synergy of the local organization's unique culture with selected effective practices that are matches for that culture that become the most impactful.

CEC has diagnostic tools and approaches that identify the strengths and deficits – “opportunities” according to CEC – of each district or school to determine its *readiness baseline* – the place where its own unique continuous improvement journey should start.

That readiness baseline will fall somewhere along a continuum from organizationally broken to very accomplished. Depending on where any given district or school falls along

that continuum, services will vary in order to be maximally impactful. This requires that CEC use diagnostic tools and approaches which identify each organization's unique readiness baseline before impactful continuous improvement work can begin.

CEC calls these diagnostic tools and approaches its *diagnostic entry points*. Experiencing a CEC diagnostic entry point is a district's or school's entry into the rest of CEC's Pathway to Continuous Improvement.

CEC utilizes four diagnostic entry points, each of which can be used independently or in combination to assess the district's or school's readiness baseline. The first is a district or school **system assessment**⁸. CEC provides a team of outside educators who are trained to rate the school or district based on a set of effective organizational criteria, e.g., a Professional Learning Communities (PLC) or Baldrige frameworks. (See Appendix C for more information). The selected framework presents a comprehensive set of effective, research-based organizational practices. The presence or absence of these practices will define various levels of a baseline of readiness.

CEC can provide shorter or longer versions of system assessments. Such versions can be used to match the preparedness level of the district – What is or is not already in place?

The second diagnostic entry point is a **strategic planning process**, where a representative district group comprised of the Three Anchors, support staff, parents, and community

members create a strategic plan facilitated by CEC. The information from a system assessment often provides baseline data for the strategic planning process. Because CEC facilitates rather than designs the strategic plan, the plan is owned by the district planning team, increasing the team's commitment to seeing it through – "Living the Plan".

Strategic Plan goals and strategies address five district or school areas:

1. Student Growth and Achievement
2. Learning Environment
3. Professional Environment
4. Community Partnerships
5. Finances and Resources

The third diagnostic entry point is determined by **grant criteria**. Specifically, CEC has done substantial *School Improvement Grant (SIG)* work in schools that meet grant definitions for

high need due to a history of low student achievement and systemic organizational failure. Because the grants are state-determined and access federal dollars, the grant criteria are extensive.

The simple act of addressing such a complex grant application requires a diagnostic approach since the grant requires a detailed plan as to how grant recipients will reverse historically ingrained achievement trends. Typically, CEC draws from its considerable service delivery experiences to identify a proposed "game plan" to address organizational deficits that have

⁸ cecillinois.org/system-assessment-background/

led to the history of poor achievement. As in the first two diagnostic entry points, this too becomes a systems-wide look at a comprehensive set of intervention strategies that match a particular situation's unique needs.

CEC does not commit to quick solutions that will ultimately not lead to effective, sustainable improvement.

Fourth, and most commonly, CEC receives **individual district requests** for services. Because not all districts have what is needed to support a successful implementation of their request, CEC often has to try to leverage those requests into more comprehensive, sequential plans for long-term continuous improvement, while simultaneously building capacities within the district or school to eventually sustain the plan on its own.

Often initial requests of CEC are around how to assist in the district's implementation of new state mandates. When the immediate need to meet a mandated deadline collides with the time needed to implement something sustainable and with efficacy, CEC must determine how its assistance in the immediate circumstance can be leveraged into more sustainable training, coaching and support in the long-term. (See Appendix D)

CEC will partner with districts to meet close deadlines if that initial work can be leveraged into a commitment for more sustainable, effective practice-based follow-up work.

Outside-In Pathway Step 3: Define the Work by Setting Direction

Crafts a plan by matching selected effective practices to the capacities and needs of the district or school.



Based on its diagnosis, CEC sets direction by *linking a district's or school's most pressing needs to a services plan* that will put the organization on a sustainable path toward continuous improvement

CEC puts together a **services plan** that is tailored to the district or school's greatest areas of need (GANs), as defined through a CEC diagnostic process. This prioritizes the direction of the district or school for the near to mid-future. The purpose of the plan is to put the district or school on a sustainable path toward continuous organizational improvement. This plan represents *setting direction* for the district or school.

The key decision in crafting a plan is determining from the diagnosis whether the district or school's GANs require an achievement-based emphasis or a culture-based emphasis. If achievement-based, the service plan is primarily a *support plan*. There are sufficient cultural strengths in place to have the services plan focus primarily on improving student achievement. In such circumstances, a plan might emphasize the alignment of the curriculum around standards, the development of a formative and summative assessment system, the implementation of a progress monitoring system, or any number of other services, all of which support improving the academic achievement of students.

The services plan depends upon the answers to two key questions:

1. Is the primary emphasis achievement-based or culture-based?
2. Is this primarily a support plan or a transformation plan?

However, some districts or schools do not have the foundational collaborative structures required for sustained systemic change in place. In such settings, emphasizing achievement

alone is a wasted effort. The focus needs to be on building or repairing relationships and structures that can support a collaborative culture. As those structures become more established, the emphasis can then shift to an achievement focus.

But this represents transformational, not support, work – a multi-year commitment to building trust and a collaborative organizational culture where neither presently exist. This results in a *transformation plan* and represents nothing less than reinventing the organization’s belief and commitment systems, top to bottom. This is beyond hard work. But it is essential prerequisite work if the district or school is ever to be able to effectively address needed improvements in student achievement.

CEC believes a successful services plan requires the collaborative support of the “three anchors” – Board, Administration and Teachers Organization. All, in alignment, are needed to be successful, whereas any one of them failing to be a collaborative partner at any step in the Pathway can stop or reverse any organizational progress.

Setting sustainable direction for continuous improvement can only be done when the “three anchors” are aligned in supporting what the district’s direction is to be, the purpose of Pathway Step One. For CEC’s services to be successful, at least a minimal level of sincere, collaborative commitment among the “three anchors” must be present. When such commitment is not present, successful transformational change is not possible.

Setting direction is first about determining whether CEC’s *initial services* will primarily be around achievement or around culture. When this is determined, CEC puts together a service offerings plan that is either primarily achievement-focused or culture-focused, though typically, and particularly with a transformation service plan, the plan as a whole addresses both. In either case, the purpose is to eventually, and collaboratively, set in motion processes, tools and habits that will lead to continually improving student learning.

Outside-In Pathway Step 4: Systematically Support the Work Through Utilizing Collaborative Structures and Processes

Ensures the work is systematic by applying collaborative structures and processes that align district, school and PLC teams.



Whether the work is supportive or transformational, achievement-based or culture-based, collaborative structures and processes must be utilized.

Sustaining collaborative structures and processes are central to enduring organizational change. To that end, CEC initiates a *distributive leadership* approach through the “three anchors”. This puts a premium on collaborative and cooperative labor-management relations at all levels of the organization to develop a common direction and commitment to joint improvement efforts.

For CEC, distributive leadership means developing leaders at all levels of the school system – leadership must necessarily emerge from the boardroom to the classroom and all levels in between.

If the primary emphasis of that direction is transformational, collaborative structures and processes are the vehicles by which to rebuild a more trusting, results-based culture. **In transformational settings, culture rebuilding is the work.**

If the primary emphasis of that direction is supportive – that is, an achievement-based emphasis – there still need to be

collaborative structures and processes in place by which to process achievement-based decisions and actions. In supportive settings, even though increased student achievement is the work, that work must be done representatively and collaboratively in order for it to be sustainable. Representation and collaboration don’t occur in a vacuum. They need an ongoing commitment to collaborative structures and processes to ensure their continued system-wide presence.

So what do collaborative structures and processes look like?

CEC's collaborative structures and processes bring board, labor and management representatives together to set, carry out, and monitor progress toward organizational priorities. This is done through a scaffolding of aligned leadership teams.

In either case – transformational or supportive – collaborative structures and processes are foundational to ensuring sustainable success.

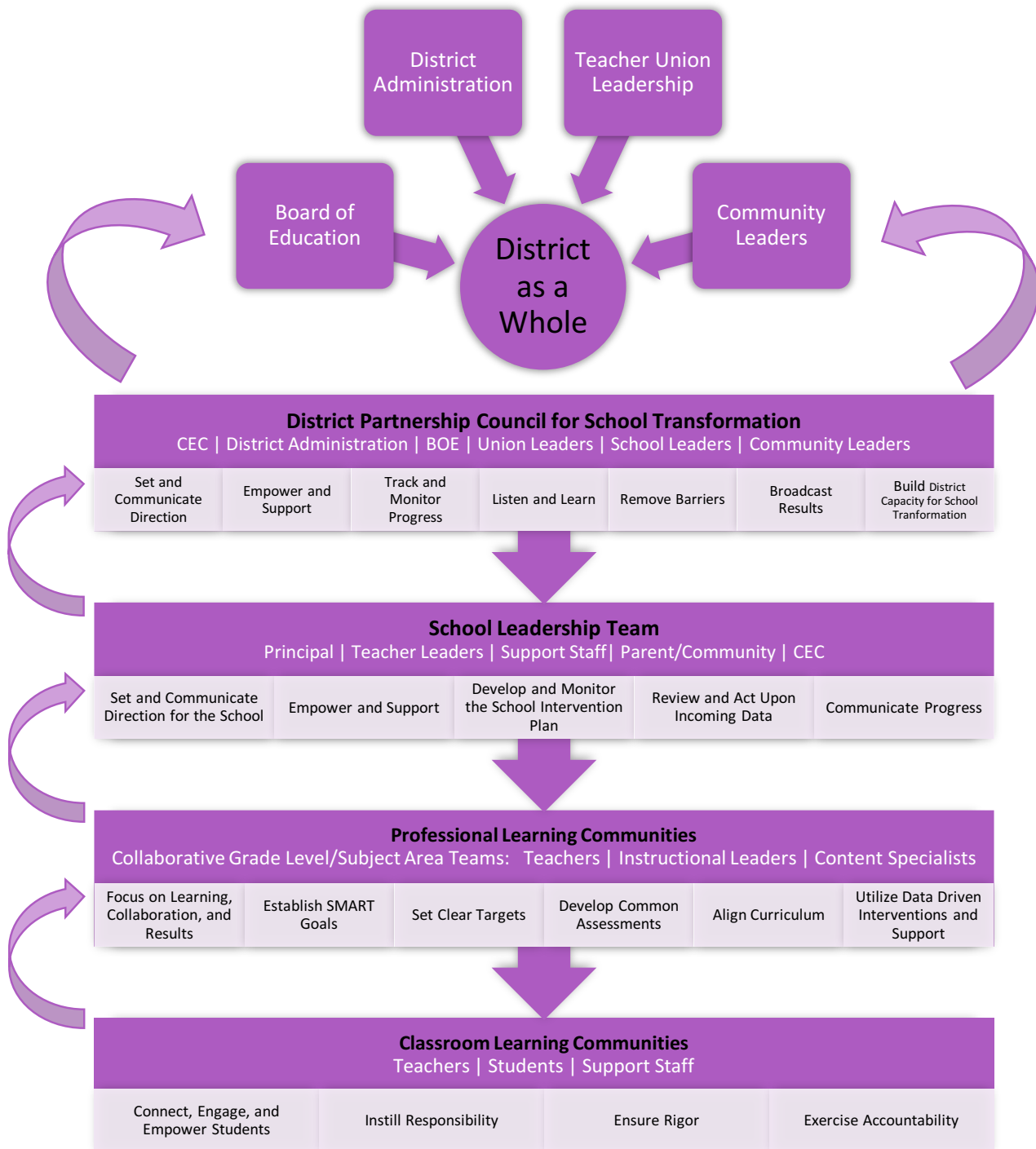
A District Leadership Team (DLT) makes sure the work of the district is aligned, supported and monitored throughout the organization. The DLT defines and protects the district's multiple year priorities, which emphasize improving student achievement within a supportive, collaborative culture. Participants include board, administration, teacher organization, parent and, occasionally, community and/or student representatives.

School Leadership Teams (SLTs), within the parameters of the DLT's priorities, set their own achievement and culture priorities, document the support needed from the DLT and produce evidence of progress toward meeting their priorities. Participants include school administrators, teacher leaders, and, occasionally, parent and student representatives.

Instructional Leadership Teams, generally modeled after Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), are typically focused on two things: improving student achievement and improving instructional practices. In both instances, measurable team goals are set and evidence of progress is collected and analyzed. Participants include the teachers from that grade level or department.

Figure 5 illustrates CEC's comprehensive distributed leadership approach applied to a district transformation setting.

FIGURE 5: DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP –
CEC'S COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE FOR SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION



Most crucially for the adult teams, the members must first learn how to be an effective team before they can successfully perform the important work of a team. Simply providing teams time to meet doesn't magically create an effective team. And becoming an effective team isn't an innate skill. Like any other important learning, it takes training, practice and effort before the necessary team skills are learned and successfully applied.

The best teams first spend serious time learning and practicing how to be an effective team before actually tackling its work.

Such team skills include norm-based team behaviors, decision-making strategies, purposes and non-purposes of the team's work, shared roles and responsibilities of team members, management of team time, demonstration of objective evidence of progress, and documentation of accomplishments. Once these are mastered, the team is ready to embark on its real work: ensuring increasingly improved instruction and student learning.

Successful teams necessarily develop leadership opportunities at every level of the organization. As those leadership opportunities emerge, a distributive leadership model emerges as well. Such distributive leadership is particularly important in ensuring the work of all teams is aligned and supportive, one to another.

Distributive leadership, when aligned across a district or school, creates a powerful structure and set of processes that can ensure the continuation of a strong, collaborative working relationship among board leaders, the superintendent and immediate administrative staff, principals, and teacher organization leaders, even when key individual leaders depart the organization. Because the collaborative structures and processes remain, systemic collaboration becomes organizationally sustainable. It becomes baked into the culture of the organization.

CEC's Distributed Leadership Structure

- ◆ Board, Administration, Teacher Union, Community
- ◆ District Leadership Team
- ◆ School Leadership Teams
- ◆ Instructional Leadership Teams
- ◆ Independent Student Learners

Outside-In Pathway Step 5: Target Support to Impact the Work

Carries out the work through an effective, research-based set of services that continually evolve, expand and are refined.



CEC provides targeted support through its content-based services and adapts the content to district or school needs through its Wrap-Around Services approach.

CEC targets support to districts and schools by offering a variety of services, based upon research and effective practices, which are form-fitted to meet the specific needs of a district or school. These targeted support services represent the training *content* of CEC⁹.

CEC employs staff members and consultants, each of whom have expertise in portions of CEC's content. So depending on the content-based services required, a district or school may interface with a number of CEC staff or consultants. This allows CEC to integrate its support by matching staff or consultant expertise to the needs of local districts or schools. This makes CEC support targeted to meet a district or school's specific needs.

CEC's content, as delivered through services offerings, defines its targeted support.

Yet CEC also understands that its work with districts or schools is as much about forming and sustaining good, professional working relationships as it is about content expertise. As a result, much of CEC's work, particularly the culture-building work, develops powerful relationship connections between CEC individuals and individual leaders within the district or school.

Therefore transitions among people and content are built into the delivery of CEC services. These transitions allow for overlaps in service delivery so solid professional working relationships can be transferred to the development of new relationships around new content

⁹ cecillinois.org/programs-services/

CEC's targeted support merges effective, research-based content with strong professional relationships that, in combination, deliver needs-specific training and coaching through a wrap-around services delivery approach.

expertise and new CEC deliverers of that expertise.

This approach enables CEC to provide *wrap-around services* – services that account for both complex content needs and sustainable CEC / district or school relationships. Because district and school improvement needs rarely sort themselves into discrete service categories, such needs are typically complex, so the services required must necessarily integrate across multiple service offerings.

This makes what CEC offers expansive, diverse and uniquely responsive to local needs. CEC does not provide generic, “one-size-fits-all” services. It delivers research-based practices and improvement processes, rather than marketed generic products, and it seeks to selectively match those practices and processes to the local needs of the district or school.

This wrap-around services approach is most frequently used when a district requires Step 4's transformation-level structural services. Initial and intense culture redesigns, followed by preliminary work around aligning instruction and curriculum as well as establishing data collection, management and analysis processes, require multiple years of CEC support.

But transformational work can also be achievement-based. This occurs when the culture has some collaborative elements in place but achievement levels are poor and the system-wide approaches toward instruction, curriculum and data are either not present, are not properly designed, or are not systematically followed.

In either case, multiple services are required. In these cases, targeted support requires the delivery of multiple services within the capacities of the local district or school to successfully absorb them. Through its wrap-around services approach, CEC has developed the ability to integrate its service offerings to meet multiple, complex district and school needs¹⁰.

¹⁰ cecillinois.org/impact/

Capacity-Building Coaching Delivery Model

**The Point of it All:
Build local capacity for
transformational change.**



CEC's commitment is to build a local district's or school's capacities to eventually carry out its own successful continuous improvement journey.

While utilizing multiple interventions and establishing long-term professional relationships with districts and schools, the ultimate goal of CEC's work is to **build local capacity** at all levels and in a variety of ways. (See Appendix D) Figure 4 illustrates a sequential set of entry

For CEC, capacity building means training and coaching the district or school to ultimately become self-sufficient in what it needs to do to continuously improve.

points within any of the four elements of the Unifying Framework for Change where it is possible to build capacity. The multi-colored arrows in Figure 4 illustrate that CEC can identify entry points at any one or more of the four Framework for Change elements to develop and sustain district or school capacities that can help address their continuous improvement efforts.

Such capacity building must extend to labor and management, teachers and administrators, and board members and citizens so that all can develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that an implementation of the Framework for Change will require.

This work entails a series of purposeful and proven processes and services to build capacity, given the following assumptions:

- ◆ One size does not fit all;
- ◆ Organizations must be diagnosed before interventions are made;
- ◆ Customized activities and services are the most effective; and
- ◆ All four elements of the Framework for Change must be addressed.

CEC's capacity-building efforts focus on initiating or strengthening the leadership and cultural aspects of labor-management collaboration. That foundation allows schools, districts and states to support new roles for teachers and principals that align their curriculum and instruction toward emerging new pedagogy and research to improve student learning.

As part of CEC's strong commitment to building capacity within a district, school or labor-management group, CEC delivers its content through a particular consultation approach – a Capacity-Building Coaching Delivery Model (Coaching Delivery Model). In this way, the Coaching Delivery Model impacts a variety of CEC delivery options – training, facilitating, networking and mentoring.

CEC builds local capacity by providing content and structural services, transitioning both through its Coaching Delivery Model that, over time, hands more and more improvement responsibilities to the district or school.

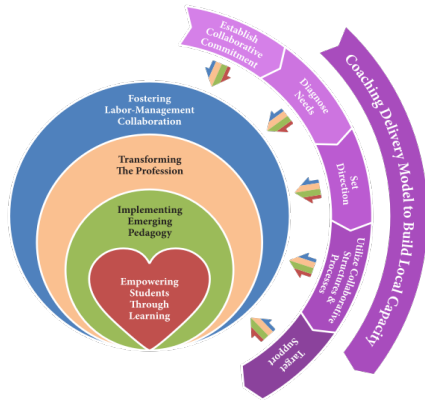
Most CEC consultants serve as coaches in order to be able to ask the right questions at the right times in helping to move intervention efforts forward. This models a problem-solving approach to district or school leaders that applies to almost any situation they may encounter. Coaching becomes a key tool for assisting districts or schools in building their own self-sustaining capacities.

CEC serves as the bridge between theory and practice. CEC's Coaching Delivery Model "trains local trainers" to make impactful improvement strategies, based on research and effective practices, accessible to those who daily do the work of teaching and guiding students.

The coaching influence permeates all of CEC's delivery options. Following *training*, coaching provides informed reflection and support to those leading out new implementations in a district or school. Following *facilitation*, coaching helps set clear direction and assists those leading out an implementation to ensure actions are progress monitored so as to provide a real return on the initial investment. Following *networking*, coaching helps those leading out an implementation how to connect,

collaborate and communicate across districts and schools to meet common implementation goals. Finally, following *mentoring*, coaching helps those leading out an implementation to understand the importance of their role and responsibilities in providing support to those being mentored.

CEC consultants utilize all of these delivery options, as each individual district or school context requires. This means CEC does its work in ways far beyond simply presenting content and materials. CEC's Coaching Delivery Model ensures that CEC's efforts toward capacity building are collaborative, adaptable and rooted in the realities of day-to-day district and school life.



Summary – Doing Our Work *Outside-In*: The *How*

CEC’s Collaborative Pathway to Continuous Improvement (Pathway) and its Capacity-Building Coaching Delivery Model (Coaching Delivery Model) demonstrate how CEC provides *outside-in* targeted support for districts and schools.

This targeted support is delivered through the Pathway as CEC consultant-based services. The Pathway requires a collaborative services approach across the “three anchors” – the board of education, the superintendent of schools and administration, and the teachers organization or representative group. Services are determined by CEC consultants, in collaboration with district or school leadership at administrative and teacher levels, from a continuum of effective research-based practices to identify those that “match” to local capacities and needs of the district or school being serviced.

The Pathway has five steps:

1. **Establish Collaborative Commitments**
2. **Diagnose Needs**
3. **Set Direction**
4. **Utilize Collaborative Structures and Processes**
5. **Target Support**

The service delivery system is through CEC’s Coaching Delivery Model. Because the emphasis is on “training local trainers” and implementation support from ongoing CEC consultant coaching, CEC’s Coaching Delivery Model is designed to create local capacities that eventually allow the school system to carry on continuous improvement work without direct CEC support.

The next section describes where CEC is engaged in doing its work.

CEC's Work at Multiple Levels: The *Where*

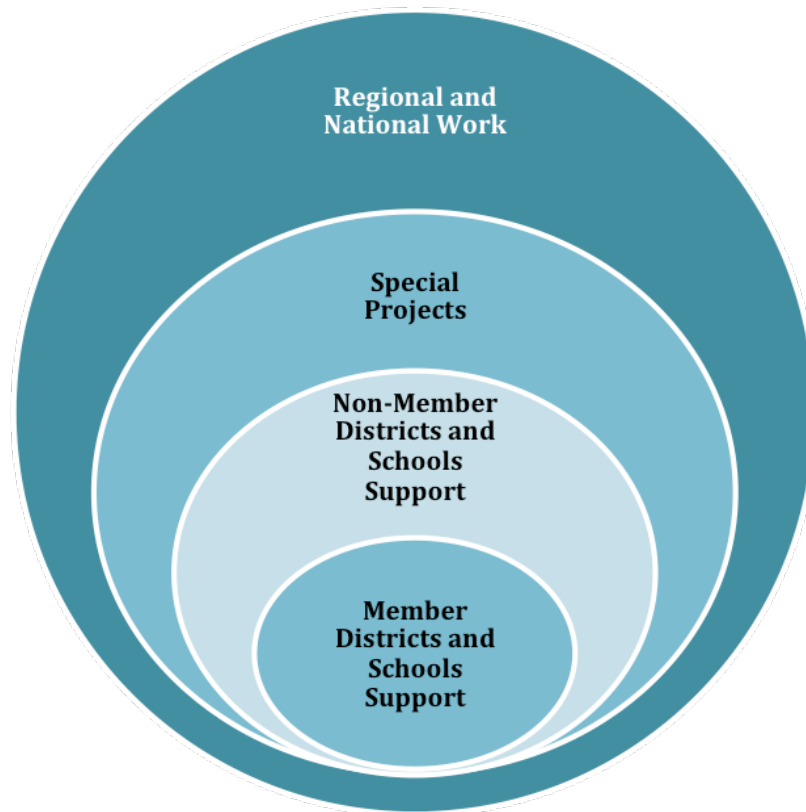


FIGURE 6: CEC'S WORK AT MULTIPLE LEVELS

CEC carries out its work at local, regional and national levels.

For decades, the lifeblood of CEC's work has been "on the ground" in local CEC-member districts and schools. From its inception to the present, local districts and schools have been CEC's "petri dishes" where CEC learns how to match the "best fitting" research-based, effective practices to that district's or school's local contexts, present capacities and unique needs. This is how CEC learns what will and what won't work in differing district and school settings. (See CEC's School/District-Based Offerings¹¹).

CEC understands that districts or schools are at different points on a continuous improvement journey's continuum. That journey usually involves confronting complex

¹¹ cecillinois.org/programs-services/

challenges, so CEC's services *wrap around* those challenges through an integrated approach, accounting for where the school or district is on the continuum. This typically makes CEC's services more individualized than generic and represents a distinctly holistic, systems-based approach to providing capacity-building assistance.

Though CEC began its work in Illinois and still performs the majority of its work within its Illinois member districts, CEC now extends its reach beyond just Illinois' borders in two important ways.

CEC will always stay true to its historic roots: serving local member districts and schools.

First, CEC has recently involved itself in multiple special projects – grant-based and otherwise – that call for integrating CEC services to address seemingly intractable systemic issues, particularly in large, struggling school districts. (For example, Illinois initiative: SIG Grants¹²).

Increasingly, CEC's work involves translating big-picture policies and expectations to proven and successful impacts in schools and classrooms under a variety of challenging fiscal and cultural conditions. In this effort, CEC partners with other organizations to intervene in a coordinated and integrated fashion to provide comprehensive services at multiple levels. Some of CEC's many partners include the Danielson Group, Dolan & Associates, and SMART Learning Systems¹³. (Read more about Illinois Partnership Initiatives¹⁴)

Second, CEC has become increasingly involved in regional and national efforts¹⁵. For a number of years, CEC has helped develop regional and national networks to promote labor-management collaboration through the use of interest-based processes (IBP). CEC is a coordinating force for the TURN (Teacher Union Reform Network) series of regional and national conferences that seek to bring teacher, administrative and board leaders together to focus on educational topics such community-

CEC's core work of serving districts and schools onsite, enabling CEC to lend successful, practical knowledge and experiences to special projects and regional and national work, answers the question *Where does CEC do its work?*

¹² cecillinois.org/programs-services/sig-grants/

¹³ cecillinois.org/about/partners-affiliates/

¹⁴ cecillinois.org/programs-services/illinois-partnership-initiatives/

¹⁵ cecillinois.org/programs-services/regional-national-cec-work/

building, leadership models, learning standards and assessments, and the use of data to guide decision-making. CEC is also becoming involved in the Southland Education and Health Initiative, a marriage of school and medical services to combat the damaging effects of adverse childhood experiences.

Finally, CEC, in coordination with eight national education service organizations including the U.S. Department of Education, has developed On The Same Page 2.0, a set of collaborative processes, team-building strategies, online resources and a rubric for implementing a standards-based curriculum and assessment system. On The Same Page 2.0 outlines how every level of a school system aligns its various responsibilities and actions to successfully implement organization-wide initiatives.

Within all of these service venues, CEC can demonstrate that providing research-based services and coaching to districts and schools, through collaboration and capacity-building, can result in real and significant changes in how all students successfully learn.

Summary

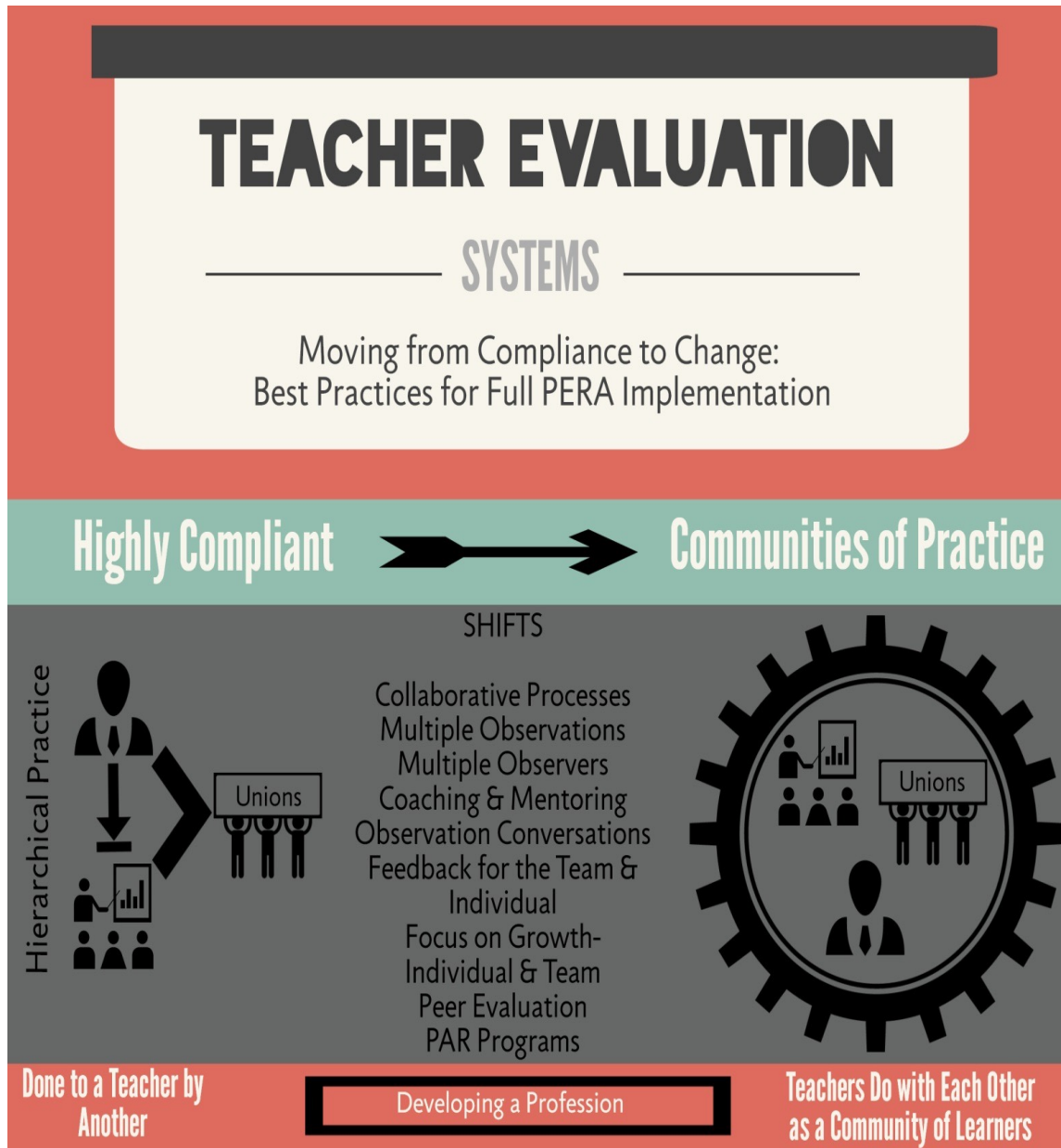
CEC seeks to be recognized as influential in its approach to school and district improvement. Its Theory of Action describes a commitment to capacity-building and a dedication to collaboration by working with and through the “three anchors”, defining *what* CEC’s work is about. CEC addresses this work through a blending of *why* it does its work - a vision for change dedicated to fostering improved student learning as articulated through its *inside-out* Framework for Change - with *how* it does its work - effective, research-based targeted support provided through its *outside-in* Collaborative Pathway to Continuous Improvement and supported by its Capacity-Building Coaching Delivery Model.

Augmented by partnerships, CEC’s work focuses upon local districts and schools as well as at regional, state and national levels, all representing *where* CEC does its work. CEC is well positioned, given its experience, partners and expanding networks, to access and diagnose district and state systems and then follow up by prescribing and delivering tested training programs and coaching services in ways that positively impact teaching and learning. Even so, CEC will never lose touch with its historic roots – to provide impactful direct services, on site, to individual schools and districts.

Appendix A

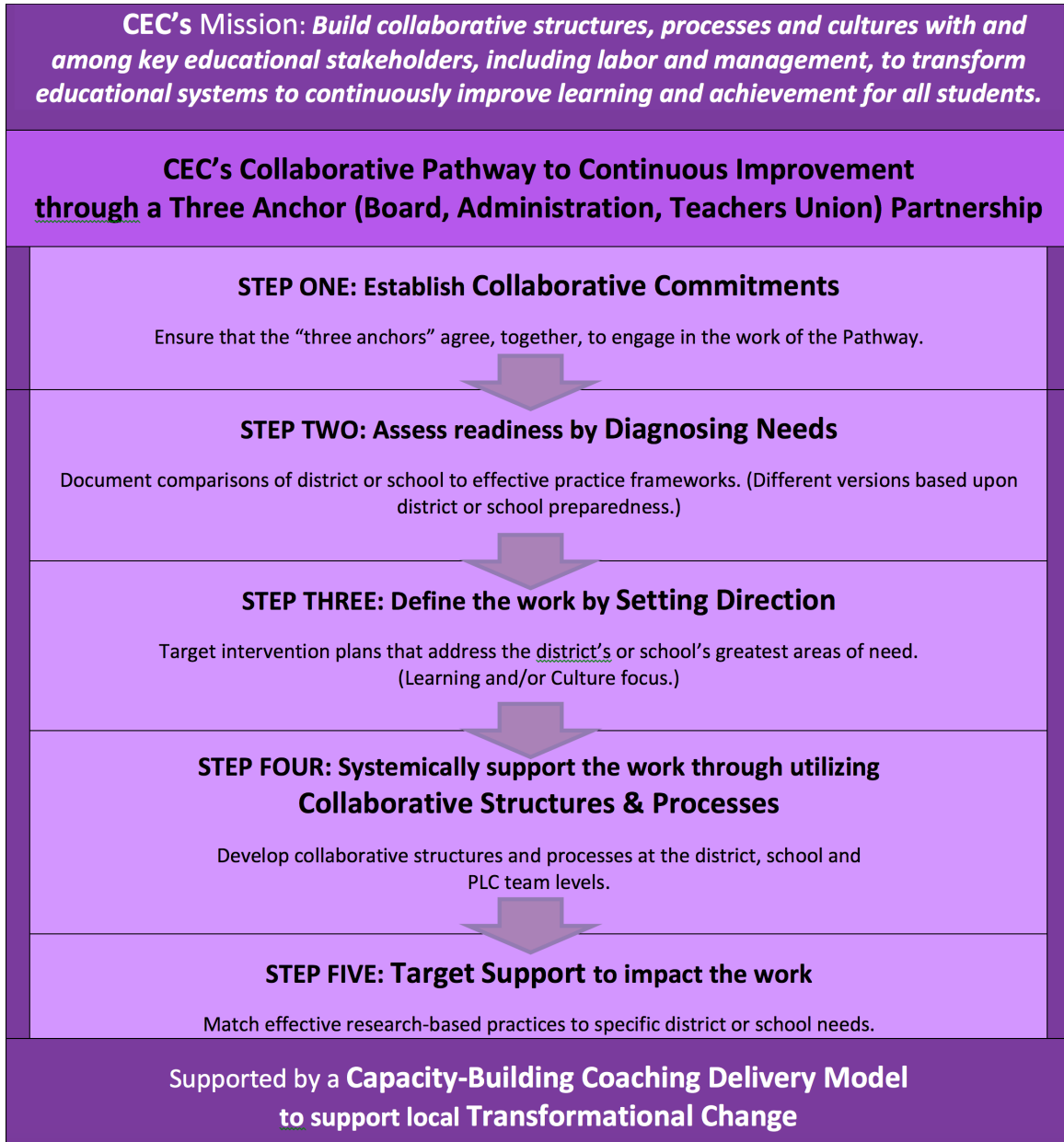
Illinois Teacher Evaluation (CEC)

PERA refers to Illinois' 2010 Performance Evaluation Reform Act, which specifies the State's teacher and principal evaluation requirements.



Appendix B

Collaborative Pathway to Continuous Improvement



Appendix C

Focus on Learning Indicators

Focus on Learning: We acknowledge that the fundamental purpose of our district is to help all students achieve high levels of learning and therefore we are willing to examine all of our practices in light of their impact on learning.

A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

- | | |
|----|--|
| A. | Establishing the Curriculum: We set student learning outcomes across all schools and classrooms to build shared knowledge regarding common core state standards, district curriculum guides, trends in student achievement and outcomes for the next course or grade. |
| B. | Executing the Curriculum: We expect that each teacher give priority to the identified learning outcomes in every unit of instruction to guarantee that each student has equal access to those learning outcomes in all classrooms for the grade level or course. |
| C. | Clarifying and Communicating the Curriculum: We expect that every teacher is able to assist each student and their parents (families) know the essential learning outcomes so they can assist in monitoring performance in relationship to those outcomes. |

Formative and Summative System of Assessments

- | | |
|----|---|
| D. | Defining the Assessment System: We ensure there is alignment and balance between common, formative assessment data to guide instruction and learning; and common, summative assessment data to reflect on teaching, programs, interventions, and periodic student progress reporting. |
| E. | Assessing What Each Student Knows and Needs to Learn Next: We expect each teacher to monitor the learning of all students, aligned to the learning outcomes per unit, to identify what each student knows, is able to do, and needs to learn next. |
| F. | Providing Frequent and Timely Descriptive Assessment Feedback: We ensure there is frequent and timely feedback regarding the performance of our students on classroom, team, school, district, and state assessments. |
| G. | Using Assessment Data and Information to Drive Instruction: We expect teachers to use assessment data aligned to student learning outcomes per unit to differentiate instruction and respond to students when they either demonstrate they have not learned or are ready for more challenge. |
| H. | Using Assessment Data and Information to Recognize Growth and Achievement.
We regularly recognize and celebrate individual and collective student growth, mastery, and success aligned to appropriate unit learning outcomes. |

Differentiation: Instruction, Interventions and Enrichments

- | | |
|----|---|
| I. | Differentiating Instruction: We expect Instructional activities are engaging and differentiated to meet individual and small group needs within the classroom. |
| J. | Aligning Interventions: We ensure a system of interventions that guarantees each student will receive additional time and support for learning if he/she has not demonstrated mastery of grade level or course unit learning outcomes. |
| K. | Aligning Enrichments: We ensure teachers extend and enrich the learning of students who have mastered common learning targets so every student is challenged. |

Ensuring a Focus on Learning

- | | |
|----|--|
| L. | Providing Conditions for an Optimal Learning Environment: We expect all learning environments to be safe, respectful, and engaging while supporting a climate of high expectations for social emotional learning. |
| M. | Examining Learning Practices: We provide opportunities for teachers to examine homework, grading, report cards, etc. to ensure there is clarity and consistency across all classrooms, teams and schools. |
| N. | Judging Quality Work: We expect all teachers to clarify the criteria by which they will judge the quality of student work and practice applying those criteria until they can do so consistently. |
| O. | Providing Training and Support: We provide sufficient training and follow-up support to assist teachers with expectations in the alignment of assessments, and instruction within a standards-driven curriculum. |
| P. | Organizing and Allocating Resources: We organize and allocate resources of people, time and money with a focus on learning as opposed to a focus on teaching. |

Appendix D

Key Terms

Collaboration As Systemic Glue (p. 11)

Collaboration is essential to the *inside-out* work of CEC. The word “collaboration”, as it is used in this context, means an ability of the major partners – in CEC’s case, its three anchors – to communicate and act in an open, transparent, trusting, and truth-telling fashion with respect to all facets of the work and workplace. As the three anchors create this organizational culture, they are able to stretch into areas of innovation and experimentation far beyond a system in which each word and phrase is subject to suspicion and the need for clarification and protection.

This makes **collaboration** the “**systemic glue**” required to help bring about system-wide change. It holds together the people and ideas that are required to induce change into a system. This “systemic glue” has particular ramifications for the four circles in Figures 1 and 3 that represent CEC’s Unifying Framework for Change.

The impact of collaboration upon labor-management interactions is well documented and predictable. The more collaboration between the two parties, the greater the range of possibilities for mutual agreements and organizational change. But management-labor collaboration is also required to bring increased professional teacher options within the workplace. Possibilities around expanded teacher leadership, training, mentoring and performance opportunities will have to break through a school or district-based professional delivery system that has too often been highly restrictive, undernourished or both in its past professional teacher offerings.

Likewise, a collaborative rather than individual approach to improving pedagogy, through team learning, studying, mentoring, coaching and practice, has potential to deliver improvements on a large scale and far more sustainably than in the past. Perhaps most intriguing, student learning itself can be more collaborative. In both students as group learners and performers – a 21st Century employment demand – and the conversion of a teacher from “sage-on-the-stage” to facilitator in a learning partnership with the student, the direct impact of collaboration through and with students has profound potential for improving learning.

Mandate Example (p. 27)

One such urgent, mandated example is Illinois’ PERA principal and teacher evaluation processes, which require the identification of student learning objectives (SLOs) and student growth measures attached to a specific implementation deadline for all Illinois districts.

Through in-depth discussion on how CEC offerings can address the immediate deadline issue, a more comprehensive improvement plan begins to develop. In the SLO example, growth metrics may be based on faulty data that don’t align to standards, to what is actually taught, or to how what is taught is being assessed.

These foundational needs around standards and proper assessment measures, along with the originally requested SLO training, all become parts of a more comprehensive CEC intervention plan. Such foundational needs must be put in place before the original request to meet the PERA deadline can be implemented with any efficacy.

In this case, CEC will assist only if it knows the plan being developed will actually help teacher practice to improve. It is not enough to simply meet the letter of the mandate, but to no real improvement end.

Collaborative Capacity-Building Assistance to Distinguish “What” From “How” (p. 36)

Embedded within CEC’s capacity-building work is its commitment to collaboration at all levels. The *outside-in* version of collaboration derives from a systems point of view, where real systemic change cannot occur in isolated silos or at some, but not other, levels of decision-making and practice. *Such change, to be impactful and sustainable, must align throughout all levels* of a school or district.

Yet CEC believes that one size does not fit all and customized activities and services are the most effective. This is where collaboration becomes the translator between what must be common for all (the “What”) and what can be discretionary or individualized (the “How”).

The “What” is what an organization stands for and in what it believes. It is why it exists and what it seeks to become at its best. The “What” is usually represented through an organization’s mission, vision, common commitments, common organizational language, long-term goals and high-level change strategies. For CEC, its “What” is represented through its Unifying Framework for Change’s four elements and its two collaboration and capacity-building pillars. If one is going to ‘get on the CEC bus’, one has to embrace these nonnegotiable core CEC commitments.

The “How” is more individually and culturally-based. Within an organization’s core commitments, there are many options for going forward in pursuit of those commitments. This is where customization and multiple sizes fit in. CEC customizes its capacity-building offerings because each school or district represents a different culture with different needs. Even though impactful research and effective practices are finite, they can be implemented in an infinite variety of ways – but only a few of those ways are just right for any given school or district culture.

So it is collaboration that once again serves as the systemic glue, this time to bind the nonnegotiable “What” to the many options for “How. As an example, for leaders of the three anchors, collaboration is successful when the expectations around “What” are clear but there is flexibility and choice in the “Hows”. They get the “What-How” balance right. When the three anchors cannot collaborate successfully, it is usually the case that the organizational “What” is too vague and the “Hows” too prescriptive. Collaboration cannot be sustained when the “What and the How” are out of balance.