C!E System Transformation Framework: The Policy Side

How can system leaders create policies that foster Equity Seeking Innovation?

Public Education System Policy and Practice Changes are Imperative

Since the introduction of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act, as a nation, we have had a stated shared public priority to invest in public education as a means of addressing inequity in our nation. Because as a nation, we believe in meritocracies. And, as described in "A Nation at Risk" even those less idealistic among us recognize that it doesn't benefit our global competitiveness as a nation to let social class, race and gender bias prevent us from uncovering some of our greatest human capital.

Historically our systems have had two ways of operating in service to this shared value, either to give primary authority to local communities or to place significant authority at the federal level. It has been our observation that neither approach yields profound and sustaining results across large, complex systems and the many systems within systems. And, in the current social and technological context, our very standardized top-down approach is not only falling short of producing equitable outcomes on a narrow set of measures, it also appears blind to the realities of how non-standardized the workforce has become and runs the risk of being intolerably inauthentic to young people accustomed to a very high level of agency in their ability to independently learn, access and share information.

At C!E we have begun to believe a new approach to public education governance is emerging. An approach in which leadership of the system is neither top down, nor bottom up, but something more collaborative and complex. An approach in which shared innovation endeavors drive system change and it is understood that innovation investments are made in service of transforming the system to produce ever more equitable outcomes while building trust and partnership between system leaders and communities. An approach in which scaling is not assumed to happen by means of replicating best practices or models, but by helping each local community approximate others' innovations to fit their context.
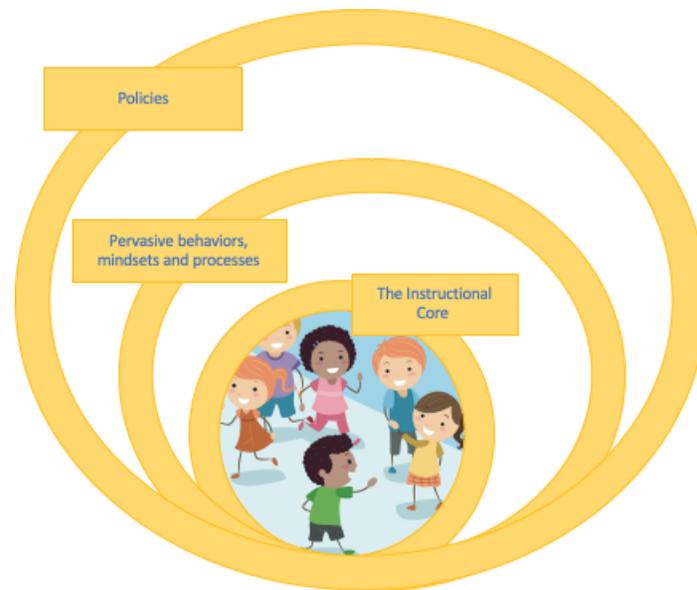
To make such a shift, both the practice of system leaders and the policy environments in which they lead will need to change. The C!E System Innovation Framework is written in two parts to address changes in both of these parts of an education system. This document contains the policy portion of the framework.

C!E built this framework based on observations and learning with our partners in both our State Performance Assessment Working Group and the [Assessment for Learning](#) network. It is not presented as, "the answer", nor do we profess to be revolutionizing the field of implementation science -- instead, we are learning from leaders in implementation science, learning from the work of other system leaders, and reflecting on our own experience in a number of system leadership roles to offer insights and possibilities for system leaders and local communities to work together differently, as they advance a future oriented equity-driven vision.

We look forward to further field testing this framework with you, our partners. And, as we do so, we seek to play the role of continuing to provoke, capture, and build learning from our shared inquiry. We hope you will find value in testing this framework together, and in continuing to inquire together about how to best play your role as leaders in each of your systems, as you strive to envision and enact a future driven, collaborative and equitable education system.

The C!E Team

The Instructional Core, those practices and mindsets so common that they come to define most of a learners day, year and education experience. The core is also where most educational innovations emerge, as they directly involve the growth of student learning. In an equity seeking system they are interrogated and implemented with intention, to ensure alignment of the instructional core with shared vision of learners, learning and graduate profile.

Behaviors, mindsets and processes are informal but powerful influences on the instructional core. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these pervasive patterns reinforce views about students, communities, teachers, the purpose of the system, and how learning & change happen. In an equity seeking system shared leadership strives to align all of these to be in symmetry with the instructional core, to bring alignment and integrity to what the system believes and how it behaves.

Policies define system values and processes. They define priorities and sometimes dictate what is possible and not possible. They reflect public beliefs, prescribe governance and finance parameters, and establish expectations and consequences.

We are too used to thinking that policy drives habits which drive instructional practices. In this common frame, we believe that if we could just get the policy right, outcomes would automatically follow. In reality, those leading the implementation of policy have tremendous informal influence over how the field comes to understand the intention and also implement the policy. In equity seeking systems, partners from across these circles work together to create room for original innovation, systemic learning, storytelling, and to facilitate scaling. **The system then responds to systemic learning by making changes in policy to continue to promote alignment and symmetry across the system over time.**

At C!E we have defined an equity seeking vision for the instructional core in the following way.

> All children are capable and curious people with multi-dimensional identities who belong to local and global communities, who learn in different ways, and who need to be prepared for a wide range of societal, civic and professional possibilities.

Although we hope that this has been sufficiently informed by others to ring true for each of our partners, we expect that each state policy context will have its own definition of an equity seeking instructional core. The process of interrogating beliefs about learners, learning and how you would define readiness is something that must be done locally, and when doing this work in a specific place, the product is more specific to context and granular than what we can express as a grounding vision for work we do with partners across the country.

Key behaviors, mindsets and processes of an equity seeking system are in symmetry with the instructional core. Aligned with C!E's view of an equity seeking instructional core, and based on patterns of successful endeavors we have observed in systems with similarly defined instructional cores, C!E believes the key behaviors of an equity seeking system are as follows:

> Equity seeking systems…
> - Recognize the historical origins of the system and seek to help individuals reflect on their personal histories and experiences and move to productive action based on what they see
> - Seek to help all actors build relationships across lines of difference
> - Seek to help each learner build academic and essential skill competencies
> - Seek to help each learner build identity as an individual and member of local, connected and global communities
> - Seek to help each learner grow in their agency

In an equity seeking system policy must also shift to become symmetrical with the equity seeking vision of learners and learning inside the instructional core. If we define the key behaviors, mindsets, and processes as the informal influences to either protect or transform education systems, then we can define local, state and federal policy as formal system influences. In any effort to change the instructional core, both the informal and formal influences must be addressed. If left unchanged, they will undermine and unravel investments in transformation of the instructional core. Only when there is symmetry among the instructional core, informal and formal influences will the system perform well.

In the C!E interstate learning community, we work together to learn how to use deep partnership to radically shorten the distance between these three circles – to lead initiatives to the place where these circles intersect, to practice radically inclusive leadership to create equity seeking systems.

What are the characteristics of equity seeking system transforming policies?

This framework is the living document in which we capture our shared understanding of the parameters of policy design that align with a clear vision of the instructional core, offer new permissions and resources to innovate in service of that instructional core, and are built to foster and spread learning.

Such policies do not say WHAT to do or put guardrails around the content of what can be tried, instead, these policies have guardrails describing HOW ideas are developed, implemented, documented, evaluated and shared.

We have monitored state responses to 1204, and we have watched local communities try to respond to state innovation programs. Our observation is that 1204 is too constrained to foster the development of a range of solutions to an intractable problem of national importance and that many states are still failing to take advantage of the ongoing opportunities within ESSA on which some advancements could be made. And at the same time, there is concern that innovation funds in some states have missed the mark in one of two extremes. Either they awarded efforts that represented modest incremental improvement of legacy systems, or they funded new approaches without sufficient rigorous study of original context and early impacts. This left the public unsure about whether the investment was yielding quality, trustworthy learning and, if approximated across the system, would dramatically impact equity and if so, how.

Our proposed solution is to define criteria carefully for a quality public innovation process: one built on a strong theory of action, that requires rigor and transparency through all stages of the project and has high demands, but also offers supports for documentation of learning and research. Such a process could be offered, along with resources, aligned to specific issues or opportunities of large-scale importance at federal or state levels. In this way, the legislation would identify a very clear priority, and offer up innovation permission, flexibility and resources to generate state or locally designed solutions – while requiring state or local innovators to have sufficient rigor to their practice of inquiry and innovation that the public investment yield not only one interesting pilot, but learning that has value to other system leaders. There is an opportunity in this work to redefine the role of research and to use more emergent approaches that engage practitioners directly with the research community. With an expanded view of the intended learning, researchers and practitioners can identify and evaluate a broader set of evidence of student learning and developing teaching capacity - to offer insights as the work is being done, rather than only at the end of lengthy studies in a retrospective fashion.

Some state leaders will have opportunities to work with state lawmakers to incorporate these ideas into new policies this year. But, even in states where there aren't such opportunities this year, SEA leaders may still incorporate these ideas into practice by bringing them into competitive grant programs. SEA staff could use this approach to replace the language they currently have in one or more RFP for state or federal grant programs.

Whether used in policy or in an RFP, the framework is built to specify quality criteria for two different innovation approaches: original innovation, and approximation[1] of an existing model. Defined as such:

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[1] 2019, Coburn, et al. We intend to use the term "approximation" similarly to Coburn et.al's use of the term "adaptation" and believe, similarly, that approximation is an effective method by which innovation can spread through an ecosystem.

Original Innovation:	Approximated Innovation:
An Innovation that was generated as a new idea by the local community or an idea coming into application in education from another field (such as personalization or brain science).	When a community learns about the approach undertaken by another community and analyzes that model to understand the way it works in the context in which it was designed, and then redesigns it for use in their context.

Approximation is intentionally distinct from replication, and is defined as a kind of innovation because redesigning a model for use in a different context requires many of the same behaviors to ensure quality as an original innovation. And yet, there are quality criteria unique to each approach. This policy framework is divided into two sections:

- The first is a theory of action. There are significant differences in the quality criteria for the theory of action for original innovation and approximated innovation. They are presented in sequence below with color coded text indicating where the two criteria differ.   Red text connotes content that is only included in the original innovation criteria, and blue text connotes content that is only in the approximation innovation criteria. Black text connotes content in common across the two.
- The second is an Implementation Plan. These quality criteria are the same for BOTH kinds of innovation plans, so it is only presented once.

Theory of Action for an Original innovation
- Demonstrate that the primary goal of the innovation is to serve all children and their communities in line with their shared vision of learners and equity seeking systems
- Is built on a thorough needs assessment and analysis of current performance in the local context
- The theory of action is compelling -- the proposed innovation clearly has BOTH the potential promise to do better and is unlikely to do harm
- The theory of action has depth, it needs to include changes that are consequential in and of themselves so that the theory has the weight to attract interest in change.[2]
- If the original innovation is based on the study of analogs from other industries those analogs are fully explained and connected to the theory of action
- If there are any predictable risks they have been explained and mitigated in the theory of action
- The rationale is supported by a logic model that can be interrogated before implementing and
- The logic model identifies and explains how even in the earliest phases of implementation they will be able to gather feedback and data to evaluate effectiveness and to surface information regarding needed course corrections
- Is not only built on user feedback from students about the current problem, teachers and relevant community members, but as a prototype concept -- the proposed original innovation has been

[2] 2019, Coburn, et al. , Coburn uses the term "depth" to describe the relative size and importance of a change initiative and states that the change must have enough inertia to pull parts of the system to change with it.

tested with students, teachers and relevant community members and they believe the prototype should be implemented.[3]

Theory of Action for an Approximation innovation

- Demonstrate that the primary goal of the innovation is to serve children and their community in a way that would be profoundly better than the current
- Is built on a thorough needs assessment and analysis of current performance in the local context
- The theory of action is compelling -- the proposed innovation clearly has BOTH the potential promise to do better and is unlikely to do harm
- The theory of action has depth, it needs to include changes that are consequential in and of themselves so that the theory has the weight to attract interest in change.[4]
- Includes a thorough analysis of the model being approximated in this innovation. This analysis includes the following
  - What were the key capacities in place before they began the innovation?
  - What were the key performance issues they wanted to address?
  - What were the key leadership characteristics and behaviors?
  - What were the key values about learners from both families and educators?
  - What capacity did they need to build and how did they build it?
  - What resources did they need?
  - What time, leadership, PD, and instructional delivery structures did they have/did they build?
- Includes a thorough comparison of the original context to the approximating context -- essentially identifying where they are similar and different and then explaining the implications of the differences on their theory of action.
- The theory of action explains why and how this model, with specific changes, is a good fit for a new context.
- If there are any predictable risks based on the difference in context they have been explained and mitigated in the theory of action
- The theory of action identifies and explains how even in the earliest phases of implementation they will be able to gather feedback and data to evaluate effectiveness and to surface information regarding needed course corrections
- Is not only built on user feedback from students about the current problem, teachers and relevant community members but, as a prototype concept, the proposed approximation innovation including the initial selection of a model to approximate has been tested with and is supported by students, teachers and relevant community members.[5]

Innovation Implementation Plan for BOTH Original and Approximated Initiatives

- Clearly identify how leaders within your system have and will continue to shift their practice or change local policies to enable the implementation of the Innovation endeavor.
- Plan must be built on a short-cycle innovation practice with short cycles of testing, observing, measuring, synthesizing, communicating and adjusting taking place within the local system(s) in

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[3] 2019, Coburn, et al. , Coburn refers to "ownership" of the change endeavor, stating that those who implement the change must own the change.

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which the innovation is being deployed. Length of cycles are tied to the content of the innovation and mutually determined by the state leaders and field innovators.
- The plan anticipates and deals with known barriers
- The data collection and learning agenda plan make the following clear:
  - How, using which tools and on what cadence the implementers will collect data to drive the revision of the innovation
  - That communication must go both ways in learning agenda, and is the foundation of trust in a quality public innovation… and as such they have a clear plan for both how they will collect and share information about the impact of the innovation. The learning agenda plan specifies:
    - How and on what cadence the implementers will learn from students, teachers and relevant community members about their perceptions of efficacy and impact of the innovation
    - How and on what cadence the implementers will summarize patterns and trends across data feedback and share such information both with stakeholders and state leaders
  - What role they would like the state leaders to play in helping to observe and collect data
  - What role they would like the state leaders to play in helping document and distribute learning
- Identifies technical advisors or other external partners and their roles in the innovation endeavor are identified[6]
- Includes resources and adequate time for capacity building for teachers and leaders to build new knowledge and skills they will need to implement the innovation with quality
- Identifies state flexibilities, waivers, or permissions as well as the state-specific mechanisms to be used to grant such flexibilities.
- Spells out, If and as this innovation proves to be effective, the plan to review of the overall system and eliminate any redundancies or components now deemed to be ineffective or inefficient
- Identifies indicators and measures the innovation leaders believe should be used to determine whether the innovation endeavor should be scaled or ended after the initial term of approval

Closing
As our partners continue to test this framework in local policies and RFP parameters, C!E will continue to learn about the characteristics of policy and regulation that best promote shared learning and equity seeking innovation. It is equally important that C!E and our partners pay close attention to how such endeavors result in changes not only in traditional impact measures such as state standardized assessments, but also on measures aligned with other aspects of the system's instructional core and learner vision. This means learning to bring rigorous process to the use of emerging evidence of student learning, and it means finding high quality research partners to come alongside these initiatives. We look forward to sharing more learning as we and our partners continue this work.

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[6] 2019, Coburn, et al., Similar to Coburn's idea of creating a "sustainable" system with appropriate supports, policy, and practices.