The 51st State

LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING:
What is Leadership's Role
in Supporting Success
for Every Student?

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WHEN WE BEGAN

From the beginning, the Center for Innovation in Education has held a strong internal commitment to perpetually "walk our talk" by aligning the content and the way we work with the principles and core values we believe are essential for all system leaders: to be driven first by a commitment to each and every learner's identity, agency and competency, interested in innovation as a mechanism to dismantle systems that reproduce inequity and transform them into equity-seeking systems, and centered in the belief that systems will not achieve those outcomes for students unless the system works in partnership with local communities.

Building on our experience in SEAs and at the national level, we think a great deal about the essential role of state-level leaders at the SEA and in intermediary organizations in parlaying local place-based initiatives into whole scale systems change. We focused on helping systems leaders think and act systemically as they took on complex challenges, so **we set out to both support and learn with states.**

We also began with a strong belief in partnership. **We work with partners to build capacity** rather than trying to grow our own organization. We maintain a community of critical friends, partners and fellows with perspectives, experiences and expertise that complement our own. We place high value on those who diversify our perspective, who can make unique contribution to specific pieces of work, and who challenge and thereby enrich our thinking on an ongoing basis.

ESSENTIAL LEARNING

Over our first five years, we have worked and learned in partnership with field innovators from around the country and leading content experts to take on: school finance, future accountability systems, leadership for learning, essential skills and dispositions, assessment for learning practices and systems of assessment. With a range of partners, **we learned and shared important insights** in each of these areas.

1

Over time, we began to notice patterns emerging across these bodies of work. We noticed parallels between how teachers had to shift to become learner centered, and how effective state leaders were shifting to value and work with local wisdom.

Student agency can only grow in an environment in which there is true belief in the capability and promise of each child paired with expertly provided invitations to learn, instruction, feedback and support. Local communities can only be successful when a true belief in local capability and wisdom is paired with expert learning, network facilitation, data analysis, and differentiated supports. Stated most simply, **a system cannot produce something it does not practice**. We have been shifting the values and goals at the core of our system without attending to shifting the design and practices that permeate the system to align with this new vision of the instructional core.

We have begun to codify this understanding in **an [organizational declaration regarding equity](), and a [framework]() that illustrate the essential strategies and behavior of system leaders seeking to transform their systems into equity-seeking systems.** These assets are at the center of our ongoing work and learning agenda. We are working with SEA leaders, state level intermediaries and local innovators as they strive to change practice of the SEA & LEAs and their state and local policy environments. These leadership partners are driving the equity seeking transformation of their system so that it becomes the center of new partnerships, systemic learning and scaling of ideas generated through deep investments in local systems. We feel that continuing to foster this system transforming work is our deepest responsibility to the field.

"Using learner-centered practices in a compliance driven system can be dangerous"

In our observations, and in states' own reporting, we have seen that when system leaders seek to scale work such as Social Emotional Learning or competency-based learning while staying in a compliance mindset, they execute illogical implementations in which they produce and disseminate tools and directions for local educators and expect that they will be used with fidelity. The best outcomes of such endeavors are shallow and short-lived, but the worst are actually harmful to individual learners and end up reinforcing of patterns of bias and inequity. Conversely, when we see system leaders work in authentic partnership with local educators, students and community members in these same areas, sometimes even modeling their work on the same research basis - their work remains focused on agency and growth and ultimately positively impacts students.

2

ESSENTIAL LEARNING CONT.

Using learner-centered practices in a compliance system mindset can be dangerous, and system leaders bear the responsibility of moving their systems forward with the mindsets, behaviors and values necessary to ensure that innovation oriented practices don't become instruments of greater injustice. As we look at our most distinct competencies at C!E, and how we think they can be put to use to achieve the most significant impact, we believe we should invest deeply in helping state and local system leaders learn to shift their mindsets, behaviors and policies to align with an equity-seeking instructional core.

In addition to helping system leaders transform their practice, we have begun to expand our partnership strategy so that not only do we benefit from the expertise and diverse experience of others, but we seek to organize our peers and colleagues to participate in shared learning and impact efforts. We have established an informal partnership with a handful of other like-minded organizations to share learning, coordinate complimentary work, identify shared priorities and shared language that we use to offer input to relevant policy processes

KEY COMPETENCIES

Having tested our talents with a wide range of partners, we now have a sharper understanding of our most unique and impactful competencies. Going forward, we plan to focus even more narrowly on playing these roles while continuing to partner with individuals and organizations who complement our lived experience, knowledge base and skills. In the ecosystem in which we work and with our organizational goals in mind, our most important and distinct competencies are:

LEADING LEARNING
Initiating and stewarding learning communities

CATALYZING
Surfacing and activating system change levers

SENSE-MAKING
Analyzing patterns to identify important insights, opportunities and risks

ARTICULATING COMPLEXITY
Helping make complex phenomena accessible

CONVENING PEERS
Coordinating shared learning, work and advocacy

POLICY + PRACTICE
Seeing implications of ideas from different vantage points across the system

C!E

Facilitates **Learning Communities** engaged
with the **System Transformation Framework**

MOVEMENT *of* LEARNING

PARTNER LEARNING COMMUNITY

STATE LEARNING COMMUNITY

ALP LEARNING COMMUNITY

+1 LEARNING COMMUNITY

SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION
FRAMEWORK
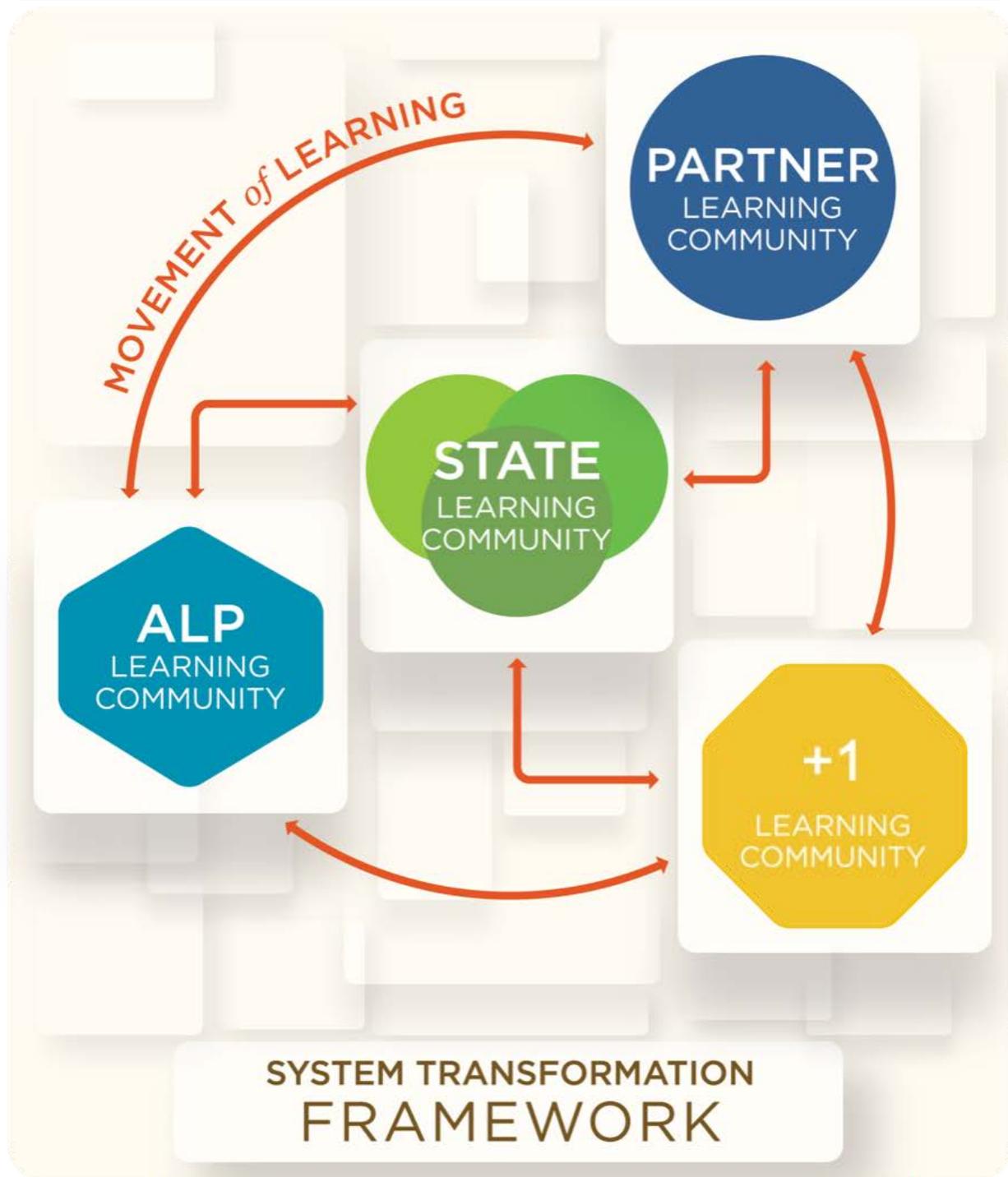
Driven by our vision of learners and the characteristics of equity-seeking systems, the **System Transformation Framework** captures learning from across the communities about how leaders from all parts of the system can shift their practice and redesign policy to lead the education system forward.

Members of each learning community engage with the Framework as a way to share and accelerate their learning about equity-seeking systems practice and policy. C!E fosters the development of learning communities in which members themselves drive the **MOVEMENT of LEARNING** within and between communities.

4

As a Learning Community, we:
- Learn about and refine the vision of equity-seeking systems together
- So that we can each sharpen our individual practice and roles
- So we can coordinate:
  - Field partnership work, as needed
  - Policy influence
  - Voice to shape national narratives

A group of related place-based learning communities:
- Performance Assessment Community
- Other content-specific communities over time
- Specific sub-community of practice for Statewide Intermediaries
- Shared learning agenda about equity-seeking systems transformation, captured in the System Transformation Framework

A robust Learning Community:
- Field innovators and leaders
- Exploring learner centered assessment practices
- Producing findings, insights and tools
- Scaling within their systems and acting as original innovators for peers in different contexts

Future Learning Community launching in the Winter of 2022:
- Seeking a +1 opportunity, where we bring our community launch and facilitation skills to a group that a partner is launching, in an area that aligns with our learning agenda and system's interests.
- Currently, leading areas of interest include: Essential Skills & Dispositions, SEL, and career pathways. Any topic would be taken on with a concurrent focus on equity-seeking system transformation.

OUR ORGANIZATION GOING FORWARD

As we look toward the future, we believe that if we put our key skills to good use facilitating learning within and across these communities that we will continue to identify and raise up insights that help drive the field forward. Such insights can be used by equity-seeking leaders to change core dispositions of their system to become responsive and thoughtful partners with learners and local communities. Such insights can also inform policy-makers at both the state and federal level. We hope that our efforts will support the shift of the system itself so that educator and leadership practice aligns with an equity-seeking and learner centered instructional core, and that policy aligns and supports those shifts.

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