Building Organizational and Individual Capacities in State and Local Education Agencies

The First Five Years of the Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety

As state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs, or districts) make efforts to improve schooling on a larger, systemic scale, their efforts are often held back by inadequate capacity (e.g., content expertise, systems or structures to facilitate change) within these organizations (Coleman, 1988; Darling-Hammond and Ball, 1998; Honig, 2003; Spillane and Thompson, 1997; Sunderman and Orfield, 2006). Researchers and policymakers often cite capacity as a key component in the implementation of school reform (Darling-Hammond and Ball, 1998; Elmore, 2002; Honig, 2003; McDonnell and Elmore, 1987; Mintrop, 2003; O’Day, 2002). Nonetheless, definitions of capacity and capacity building remain underspecified, and approaches to capacity building vary substantially.

Education researchers have suggested frameworks for understanding capacity that are built on a combination of inherently interrelated individual, social, and organizational components (Stoll, 1999; Stoll, 2009). This combination makes capacity building a “multifaceted” and “complex endeavor” (Fullan, 2007; Stoll, 1999; Stoll, 2009) of attending “to the capacities of teachers and to the development of schools as inquiring, collaborative organizations” (Darling-Hammond, 1993, p. 755). Capacity building can be thought of as the process through which educational organizations create and maintain the necessary environment (conditions, culture, structures), facilitate learning experiences, and ensure synergy among their interrelated component parts (Stoll, 2009; Stoll and Temperley, 2009).

To help support improvement efforts within SEAs and LEAs, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) funds various technical assistance centers, with the goal of providing expertise and building the capacity needed by SEAs, regional education agencies, and LEAs to effectively implement federal education programs and, in turn, to support schools (ED, 2021a; ED, 2021b). These centers are structured in several ways. For example, some centers are established to support SEAs and LEAs in geographic regions, while other centers are topically focused and serve all U.S. states and territories (e.g., Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports).
These centers—funded by ED and operated by organizations external to ED, SEAs, and LEAs—are not the sole providers of technical assistance for educators in the United States. SEAs and LEAs often combine supports from multiple technical assistance providers—including national, regional, or local organizations, from free or fee-for-service operators—to address their capacity-building needs (Wrabel, Bush-Mecenas, and Woo, 2021). However, ED centers, which offer support to recipients at no cost, are key players in the technical assistance ecosystem. There are 20 comprehensive centers (one national, 19 regional), ten regional educational laboratories, and four regional equity assistance centers. This set of ED’s centers and technical assistance provision accounted for more than $120 million of ED’s budget in fiscal year (FY) 2023 (ED, 2023). Not all of ED’s technical assistance is provided via a formal technical assistance center; some offices and grant programs (e.g., Office for Civil Rights, Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants) also have responsibilities to provide technical assistance folded into their operational expectations and budgets (see ED, 2023).

The literature on how federally funded technical assistance centers build capacity in SEAs and LEAs remains relatively thin (see Blase, 2009; Dunst et al., 2019a; Tanenbaum et al., 2015; Turnbull et al., 2011; West et al., 2012, and Wrabel, Bush-Mecenas, and Woo, 2021). Research demonstrates that the ED Regional Comprehensive Centers and Content Centers use a variety of approaches to technical assistance, including providing direct support through consultation, providing research collections and syntheses, and engaging participants in project planning, training events, and conferences (Turnbull et al., 2011). Less is known about which capacities SEAs and LEAs require and how technical assistance activities contribute to building those capacities.

### KEY FINDINGS

- The Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety (CISELSS) made purposeful efforts to define and organize supports for SEAs and LEAs around five focal areas. Clearly identifying focal areas and differentiating methods of capacity building within those focal areas was a beneficial strategy to improve coherence across technical assistance offerings.

- CISELSS’s efforts to assess needed capacities and readiness for change among prospective technical assistance recipients were underdeveloped. Pre-identifying target capacities and ensuring recipients have the prerequisite capacities to fully engage with the planned support may improve the effectiveness of technical assistance.

- CISELSS was responsive to the needs of its technical assistance recipients and sought to integrate elements of co-design in its work. While co-design allowed for greater input from recipients on preferred activities, this approach to technical assistance led to limited clarity among recipients. Technical assistance co-design, when used, may be best suited as a component of the planning phase rather than the implementation phase of support.

- Technical assistance recipients identified individual capacities and access to expertise as existing strengths. They desired additional support in developing organizational capacities. CISELSS’s support helped technical assistance participants develop individual capacity, organizational skills, access to expertise, shared goals, organizational culture, and organizational alignment. Focusing on organizational skills rather than just individual skills may provide for more-sustainable capacity within organizations, particularly those facing the intractable challenge of staff turnover.

### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CISELSS</td>
<td>Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>coronavirus disease 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>U.S. Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY</td>
<td>fiscal year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA</td>
<td>local education agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEA</td>
<td>state education agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL</td>
<td>social and emotional learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The literature on how federally funded technical assistance centers build capacity in SEAs and LEAs remains relatively thin (see Blase, 2009; Dunst et al., 2019a; Tanenbaum et al., 2015; Turnbull et al., 2011; West et al., 2012; and Wrabel, Bush-Mecenas, and Woo, 2021). Research demonstrates that the ED Regional Comprehensive Centers and Content Centers use a variety of approaches to technical assistance, including providing direct support through consultation, providing research collections and syntheses, and engaging participants in project planning, training events, and conferences (Turnbull et al., 2011). Less is known about which capacities SEAs and LEAs require and how technical assistance activities contribute to building those capacities.
Purpose of This Report

Providing and using technical assistance for capacity building within education agencies is a complex endeavor. In this report, we explore how the technical assistance efforts of one federally funded center contributes to the development of specific capacities for SEAs and LEAs, defined through a review of the literature on organizational and individual capacity. Our analyses reveal important insights and implications for technical assistance providers and recipients. We explore these topics through the case of the Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety (CISELSS), a federally funded technical assistance center established in 2018. The charge of CISELSS is to provide support to and build the capacity of SEAs and LEAs for implementing social and emotional learning (SEL) and school safety–related policies, programs, and practices. Over its first five years, CISELSS provided technical assistance to SEA and LEA staff and teams across three levels of intensity: Tier 1 (General) support provided via publicly available reports, webinars, and toolkits; Tier 2 (Targeted) support provided via professional learning networks, known as collaboratives; and Tier 3 (Intensive) customized consulting support. More details are provided in the “Technical Assistance Planning” section of this report.

Building on our prior report (Wrabel, Bush-Mecenas, and Woo, 2021), which described CISELSS’s early development and attempts to balance demands and resources, we examine the first five years of this center’s operation to address the following questions:

1. How did CISELSS develop and modify its structures for technical assistance to build the capacity of SEAs and LEAs?
2. How and to what extent did CISELSS’s support build the organizational and individual capacities of SEA and LEA technical assistance recipients?

Our analyses are guided by a conceptual framework, presented in the next section of this report, combining elements from the literatures on technical assistance and organizational capacity building to propose a framework for capacity building in SEAs and LEAs. We draw on data collected from interviews with CISELSS staff and partners and with technical assistance recipients (n = 21 in 2022, n = 19 in 2023); feedback form data from individuals who engaged with CISELSS in Year 5 (n = 24 in 2023); and artifacts and documentation. We analyzed interview data through a process of iterative coding, memoing, and using analytic matrices to uncover patterns. We use simple descriptive analyses to summarize feedback form responses. More information about the data sources, analytic methods, and limitations of this study are provided in the appendix.

This study examined a single, federally funded technical assistance center from its launch through its fifth year of operation (the full grant period), which included the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and a period of historic racial reckoning in the United States. This study reflects a unique case under shifting contexts. Of note, we did not interview all individuals associated with CISELSS, and the perspectives shared during interviews may not reflect those of all CISELSS staff or technical assistance recipients. The feedback form was administered anonymously and had a low response rate (17 percent); we were unable to weight responses in ways that might better reflect the full set of CISELSS’s technical assistance recipients. Given these limitations, we consider our analyses exploratory, with analytic generalizability and transferability to similar settings.

Conceptual Framework

To understand CISELSS’s work, we draw from the literature on technical assistance to SEAs and LEAs (e.g., Dunst et al., 2019b; Childs and Russell, 2017; Howley and Sturges, 2018; Murphy and Ouijdani, 2011) and organizational capacity (e.g., Connolly and York, 2002; Cox et al., 2018; Vinzant and Vinzant, 1996). Our conceptual framework (see Figure 1) integrates the key processes and components of technical assistance provision with the capacities identified in the research literature as necessary to assist SEAs and LEAs to better understand, promote, and support SEL and school safety policy and practice, as well as to support districts and schools. This framework is not normative in nature; there are multiple approaches to providing technical assistance and building specific capacities within organizations. We
use this framework to guide our analysis and presentation of (1) CISELSS’s technical assistance planning and implementation and (2) how this center supported the capacity building of SEAs and LEAs.

First, we identified the key aspects and common features of the technical assistance process as documented in the literature (Dunst et al., 2019a; Dunst et al., 2019b), shown in the white boxes in Figure 1. These features include a technical assistance provider’s preparation to provide support (e.g., needs assessment, organizational buy-in), establishing a plan for the technical assistance (e.g., a theory of change, planned intervention practices), practices used by providers in the implementation of technical assistance (e.g., consultation, professional development), common approaches to evaluating the support provided, and the processes or procedures for ensuring the changes brought about by the support are sustainable (Dunst et al., 2019a; Dunst et al., 2019b).

These are the activities in which a technical assistance provider may engage when providing supports to SEAs and LEAs. In this study, we used these key aspects as a framework to describe CISELSS’s development and adaptation of its approach to technical assistance provision.

Second, we identified key elements of organizational and individual capacity in education agencies from the broader literature. Several capacities emerged repeatedly in the literature on capacity and capacity building in educational organizations, shown in the blue hexagons in Figure 1. We situate individual capacity at the center of the aspects of organizational capacity. This capacity describes the characteristics of individuals that influence their abilities related to work activities and organizational engagement (Floden, Goertz, and O’Day, 1995; O’Day, Goertz, and Floden, 1995; Johnson and Thomas, 2007; Stoll, 1999). In their examination of
teacher capacity, for example, Floden, Goertz, and O’Day (1995, p. 20) specify individual capacity as the “factual and procedural knowledge, skill, disposition and sense of self . . . mindset, self-beliefs, persona, and goals.”

In addition to these individual capacities, many researchers acknowledge the inherently social nature of capacity building (Coleman, 1988; Stoll, 1999; Stoll, 2009), as well as key elements of the organizational environment (Beaver and Weinbaum, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Spillane and Thompson, 1997; Stoll and Temperley, 2009). The broader literature on organizational capacity, both in education agencies and in similar organizations, has identified several aspects of capacity, including organizational human capital (e.g., Rogers, 2014; Sobeck and Agius, 2007; Jochim and Murphy, 2013; Tanenbaum et al., 2015; Childs and Russell, 2017),

leadership (e.g., Connolly et al., 2003; Claussen, 2011; Moullin et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2018; Mitchell and Sackney, 2016), goals and vision (Jochim and Murphy, 2013; Howley and Sturges, 2018; Fernandez and Rainey, 2006), organizational alignment (Childs and Russell, 2017; Moullin et al., 2019; Kinghorn and Levinger, 2021; Cox et al., 2018), organizational culture (Sobeck and Agius, 2007; Jochim and Murphy, 2013; Cosner, 2009; Fernandez and Rainey, 2006), and access to external partnerships (Jochim and Murphy, 2013; Childs and Russell, 2017; Murphy and Ouijdani, 2011; Fernandez and Rainey, 2006; Tanenbaum et al., 2015). Drawing on this broad organizational capacity literature, we identified the key capacities for SEAs and LEAs, defined in Table 1. Together, these organizational and individual capacities are likely to assist SEAs and LEAs in driving changes to policies, strategies, tools, or practice in use across the state and local levels.

In what follows, we organize our findings according to our research questions and our conceptual framework. First, we address our initial research question by describing how CISELSS developed and organized its technical assistance efforts, following the phases and elements identified by Dunst and colleagues (2019b) and shown in the white boxes of our conceptual framework (see Figure 1). Next, we address our second research question in exploring how, and to what extent, CISELSS supported capacity building for SEAs and LEAs, in terms of the organizational and individual capacities shown in the blue hexagons of our conceptual framework (see Figure 1). We conclude with a discussion of our findings and implications for technical assistance centers.

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual capacity</td>
<td>The skills, knowledge, dispositions, and mindset that each individual possesses. Individual capacity can be built through formal and informal education and through experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared goals and vision</td>
<td>The extent to which an organization (e.g., SEA or LEA, also within a team or department) shares similar, specific goals, priorities, or aspirations for their work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational alignment</td>
<td>The degree of alignment of the organization’s structure (e.g., departmental silos), routines (e.g., methods of communication, work processes), and activities (e.g., professional development for district administrators).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational skills</td>
<td>The capacities held within the organization or team, including the ability to use and make sense of data, internal and external communication skills, and methods of monitoring and supporting LEA or school work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational culture and politics</td>
<td>The nature of the organization’s or team’s culture, in terms of creating space for innovation or new ideas, openness to collaboration, level of responsiveness to LEAs or schools, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broader access to knowledge or expertise</td>
<td>The organization or team’s broader access to expertise through their networks, support providers, and other knowledge resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong leadership</td>
<td>The support and strength of leadership to prioritize work and direct resources and staff to its completion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Did CISELSS Develop and Modify Its Structures for Technical Assistance to Build the Capacity of SEAs and LEAs?

To answer our first research question, we draw on two key sources of information. We primarily rely on interview data from CISELSS leaders and staff. We supplement our interview data with data gathered from a small number of technical assistance recipients through an annual feedback form.

Technical Assistance Preparation: CISELSS Prepared for Technical Assistance by Focusing on Broad Visioning Activities

Dunst and colleagues (2019b), in their scoping review of technical assistance providers, identified common elements of preparation for providing technical assistance. These elements included visioning (i.e., identifying what success for the organization would look like), conducting a needs assessment (i.e., determining the needs and gaps in the field), and assessing readiness for change (i.e., assessing an organization’s commitment to make desired changes, as well as how well the organization is positioned—through the allocation of people and resources—to make those changes).2

Especially in its early years, CISELSS engaged in several efforts to prepare for technical assistance. First launched in October 2018, CISELSS is led by WestEd and charged with enhancing the capacity of (1) SEAs to support their LEAs and (2) LEAs to support their schools.3 ED funded CISELSS with a budget of $1 million annually for up to five years, a limited budget compared with that of some ED content centers (see ED, 2018). As documented in our previous report (see Wrabel, Bush-Mecenas, and Woo, 2021), CISELSS partners spent much of CISELSS’s first year (i.e., FY 2019) building internal and external partnerships and establishing CISELSS’s vision for SEL and school safety technical assistance. These efforts included building relationships with other technical assistance providers, connecting with SEAs and LEAs in need of support, and identifying focal areas for its technical assistance.

CISELSS’s initial mission and vision, centered on this goal of providing technical assistance to SEAs and LEAs around SEL and school safety, broadened to include whole-person initiatives. In the words of one leader,

The mission and vision has always been about working with system leaders at the state, regional, and local level, to build their knowledge and capacity of evidence-based practices around social and emotional learning, school safety, and whole-person initiatives. I think that has been consistent, and the vision has always been one around equity and well-being and excellence for learning communities, for young people, and the adults who care for them, their families, and their educators.

This mission translated to a publicly communicated vision for success that reads as follows:

When all children are educated in places of equity, safety, and learning and when they receive the integrated academic, social, and emotional supports that meet their individual needs, then they can achieve their greatest potential in K–12 education, as well as in college, career, and life. (CISELSS, undated-a)

Together, this mission and vision provides the broad framework for CISELSS’s provision of technical assistance but still required the center to specify the content of technical assistance support.

CISELSS’s Needs Assessment Identified Five Focal Areas That Informed Its Technical Assistance

During CISELSS’s first year, its partners conducted a targeted needs assessment to identify the field’s most-pressing SEL and school safety needs and to guide CISELSS’s initial areas of focus. This process included one-on-one and small group conversations with researchers, leaders, and staff from other technical assistance centers, as well as practitioners at various levels of the education system. The process also included reviews of SEL and school safety literature and a short questionnaire administered to educators regarding current and evolving areas of need. As
CISELSS’s evaluator, researchers at the RAND Corporation analyzed the interview and questionnaire data and reviewed the literature to highlight themes across the SEL and school safety needs of education agencies. Leveraging RAND’s analyses, CISELSS identified five focal areas: equity, integration (of SEL and school safety with academic outcomes), alignment and coherence (of whole-person initiatives), data-driven cycles of improvement, and sustainable implementation (CISELSS, undated-b). These priorities became the basis for CISELSS’s work.

Some of CISELSS’s priorities shifted over time to address its various focal areas. Early technical assistance involved a collaborative learning experience for SEA leaders, focused on developing alignment and coherence in SEL, school safety, and whole-person efforts within the SEA. As part of this collaborative, CISELSS piloted an alignment and coherence guide (see Walrond and Romer, 2021; and Walrond, 2021), a broadly accessible document intended to help any SEA leader conduct similar work in their own setting. In CISELSS’s later years, it placed a greater emphasis on data-driven cycles of improvement through a new collaborative effort, the Data for Truth and Action collaborative, which focused on helping SEA teams examine and generate the kinds of data necessary for supporting more-equitable whole-person outcomes. CISELSS also more explicitly prioritized sustainable implementation in its later years through its comprehensive school safety work, which included supporting LEAs and school leaders with the implementation of restorative practices and developing a statewide framework that contained recommendations and strategies for supporting comprehensive school safety.

CISELSS Integrated Focal Areas Across Work Streams

As CISELSS identified and adapted its focal areas and work streams, it made purposeful efforts to integrate these topics across its various areas of work. The integration of focal areas across various topics (e.g., strategic communications on SEL, school safety, restorative practices, data use, kindergarten transitions) was intentional and, in some cases, emerged from ongoing activities. For example, although CISELSS’s emphasis on different focal areas shifted over time, it maintained a focus on equity across various technical assistance activities. CISELSS identified equity as one of its focal areas, which is unsurprising given that principles of equity (e.g., inclusivity, asset-based framing, cultural responsiveness) are central to the implementation of SEL and school safety programs and practices (Saavedra and Nolan, 2018; Schlund, Jagers, and Schlinger, 2020; Hernández and Darling-Hammond, 2022; Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019). But the center’s ongoing focus on equity was particularly relevant, given the context in which it operated. Both the COVID-19 pandemic and historic racial reckoning highlighted a heightened need for support around SEL and racial equity. As previously documented (see Wrabel, Bush-Mecenas, and Woo, 2021), CISELSS responded by providing technical assistance recipients with more resources focused on navigating the pandemic and racial reckoning, such that CISELSS’s focus on equity was considered by technical assistance recipients and external partners as one of the center’s strengths.

Even as the pandemic receded, CISELSS continued threading equity throughout its technical assistance activities. A CISELSS leader noted that “the through line has always been equity, but I think it’s becoming clearer and more evident.” In our interviews with them, center leaders and staff articulated an approach toward complex system change that centered equity and emphasized the role of adaptive
Beyond its focus on equity in technical assistance, CISELSS made purposeful efforts to build connections among the various focal areas.

and relational elements (i.e., individual mindsets, values, and beliefs and the cultivation of relationships and community) that underlie technical or programmatic changes. For instance, CISELSS’s collaboratives, focused on Restorative Practices and Data for Truth and Action, included discussions about the mindsets, relational trust, and social capital necessary for policy or practice change and how existing systems or routines may instantiate and reproduce racism. Tier 3 support for specific SEAs focused on such topics as articulating SEL competencies in more equity-centered ways.

Yet, center leaders acknowledged the difficulties inherent in such complex systems change work, noting that technical assistance recipients sometimes experience discomfort with the ambiguity and time it takes to iterate on new approaches. Literature on the implementation of equity-oriented reforms similarly highlights the importance of the adaptive and relational aspects of policy change, as well as the challenges of shifting mindsets, values, and paradigms to support sustained systemic reforms (Oakes et al., 1997; McKenzie and Scheurich, 2004; Kozleski and Smith, 2009).

All CISELSS leaders and staff interviewed brought up connections to equity in their technical assistance work. In the words of one CISELSS staff member,

I think the center has been able to be much more innovative and front and center with perspectives and change work that centers racial equity . . . We’re hearing . . . what’s important to [the systems that we support] and what they’re grappling with and what they need help with. And so we are putting content out there that is transformative and is about having the difficult conversations . . . when it comes to race, oppression, systemic oppression in this country and in our systems and the way in which our systems have been designed to oppress the very people that they’re supposed to serve. So I think that that shows up in our writing, in our guides, our tools, our briefs, I think it shows up in how we provide technical assistance. I think it shows up in the content of . . . the learning experiences that we provide for educational leaders.

Beyond its focus on equity in technical assistance, CISELSS made purposeful efforts to build connections among the various focal areas. For example, one SEA that received technical assistance during the Alignment, Coherence, and Strategic Communication collaborative used the alignment and coherence guide (see Walrond and Romer, 2021) and what they learned from the collaborative to develop a statewide comprehensive school safety framework (see Ali, 2022), which provided evidence-based practices for schools to guide their work with staff, students, and families. CISELSS’s conceptualization of its comprehensive school safety work, in the words of one CISELSS leader, was “a natural progression out of the alignment and coherence” work because comprehensive school safety inherently involves both “psychological and physical safety” and an examination of systems across “education, health, justice, [and] public safety.” Alignment and coherence also manifested in CISELSS’s other technical assistance activities, including its support of SEAs and other partnering state organizations in the analysis of multiple forms of whole-person data. In the words of one CISELSS leader,

That alignment and coherence work is everywhere. Everywhere we look, we see it. And I think fundamentally what we’re seeing is that alignment and coherence is the work of an SEA. Regardless of whether it’s transforming kindergarten or thinking about discipline practices or everything we are working on
related to SEL and whole-person initiatives, fundamentally for our system leaders it has been about how do we set a coherent vision for this work, and how do we align our efforts to achieve that vision? It’s all the systems change work.

Therefore, CISELSS’s focal areas represented not just key topics for support, but fundamental and interrelated focuses of capacity building.

**CISELSS Took a Responsive Approach to Readiness Assessment**

While CISELSS and its partners made purposeful efforts to assess the needs of the field and to integrate the identified focuses across their technical assistance, the center took a more open-ended approach to identifying the readiness of technical assistance recipients. Rather than identifying necessary criteria for participation in technical assistance activities, CISELSS generally sought to engage the majority of the SEAs and LEAs that requested assistance, with differentiated supports. This approach demonstrates one way the center considered equity in its provision of technical assistance. The center sought to privilege the expertise and assets of the recipient organizations, allowing for wider participation of interested organizations in center activities.

Across almost all of its collaboratives, CISELSS typically administered a questionnaire to interested SEAs or LEAs, asking about their goals or aims in participating, needs for support, and current work. This feedback was integrated into programming decisions, and CISELSS took a responsive approach to addressing these identified needs. This process did not include a systematic assessment of readiness for capacity building. For example, the intake process did not identify criteria for participation (e.g., support of senior leadership, existing policies, investment of financial resources) or evaluation of existing capacities (e.g., knowledge or skills of participants, organizational skills or culture). Instead, the intake process functioned mainly to inform technical assistance planning and to adjust activities to meet SEA and LEA participants in their current form.

**Technical Assistance Planning: CISELSS Took Time to Develop Its Model for Building Capacity**

Developing a plan for technical assistance is another key component of technical assistance provision for centers, which often includes identifying a theory of action for technical assistance and describing key intervention practices to use and resources to provide (Dunst et al., 2019b). Throughout the center’s five years of operation, CISELSS leaders and staff sought to develop and adapt these elements of their technical assistance plan in response to changing contextual conditions and new learnings from technical assistance participants (see Wrabel, Bush-Mecenas, and Woo, 2021, for more on the responsiveness of CISELSS’s technical assistance). As CISELSS’s technical assistance evolved over time, ongoing planning work involved identifying a model for how CISELSS would support SEAs and LEAs in their learning and change processes.

During our interviews with them, CISELSS leaders and staff members explicitly described their model of capacity building as situating capacity within three interrelated dimensions:

- the individual dimension, including an individual’s mindset and beliefs and the importance of building an individual’s knowledge, as well as their sense of agency and self-efficacy
- the interpersonal or collective dimension, encompassing trusting relationships, decreased siloes, the development of new partnerships and intra-agency teams, and enhanced social capital
- system capacity, described as the ability to enact supportive policies and practices and to challenge systemic and organizational arrangements that promoted inequity.

Foundational to their conceptualization of capacity building was the understanding that CISELSS would be involved in developing the skills, knowledge, and abilities of SEA and LEA staff and their organizations, described by one CISELSS staff member as “make sure that I’m building your capacity and not doing for you.”
Co-designing technical assistance experiences with technical assistance recipients was a key principle undergirding CISELSS’s conceptualization of how to build SEA and LEA capacity. CISELSS leadership described the co-design process as one in which the strengths and expertise of technical assistance recipients are honored, such that participating SEAs and LEAs become “advisers” on the design of their own technical assistance experience. Through this process, CISELSS iteratively shaped its technical assistance to meet the needs of participating SEAs and LEAs. As one CISELSS leader described, “So it’s a little nebulous when we first start and we’re reaching out to see what people are needing and wanting. And then we’re going back and developing some things and then going back to them. And so then they . . . opt in or opt out of that.” This overarching philosophy toward planning for technical assistance, which, in part, reflected CISELSS’s emphasis on being responsive to the needs of SEAs and LEAs, led CISELSS leaders and staff to develop their theory of action for technical assistance and to identify opportunities for supports and resources as the collaboratives unfolded.

In light of this focus on co-design, however, several technical assistance recipients noted a lack of clear messaging about the supports and resources that CISELSS would provide. Two participants mentioned that they did not have a clear understanding of what to expect from the collaborative experience. Another participant reported that they “were very interested in the topic, but things were a lot looser in the beginning and CISELSS relied on us for input . . . I wish there had been more structure because we might have been able to get things moving faster.” While CISELSS appeared responsive to the needs of the SEAs and LEAs they serve, a few participants were looking for greater structure in terms of the goals and expected outcomes of the collaborative.

Technical Assistance Was Organized into Tiers of Support by Intensity

CISELSS structured its technical assistance offering through a tiered system, providing three levels of support. The first, or General, tier was intended to serve a broad audience of education agency staff and educators and consisted of widely accessible products, such as webinar trainings, reports, protocols, and toolkits. Tier 1 supports were created by CISELSS staff alongside a variety of partnering organizations and were designed to lend expertise on particular topics. All materials were curated on the CISELSS website for free, public access. One example of a Tier 1 resource is *The Toolkit Before the Toolkit: Centering Adaptive and Relational Elements of Restorative Practices for Implementation Success* (Trout, 2021), which formed the basis for the CISELSS’s work in other tiers. A second example is the “Rooting Social and Emotional Well-Being Efforts in Equity: A Reflection Guide” (Walrond, 2022), which broadly aligned with CISELSS’s focal areas but was not specifically keyed to Tier 2 or 3 technical assistance efforts.

CISELSS’s second, or Targeted, tier brought together groups of SEA or LEA representatives, sometimes with counterparts from partner agencies (such as Health and Human Services or Public Safety), to learn in a group setting and actively work on shared problems of practice. A key element of Tier 2 collaboratives was the activation of peer learning and support among participants, allowing technical assistance recipients to share their knowledge and help one another solve problems. In Table 2, we provide a summary of the four peer-learning collaboratives conducted by CISELSS during its first five years.

The third, or Intensive, tier of technical assistance was originally conceptualized as working in extended partnerships with individual SEA or LEA teams to design and implement strategies and initiatives related to CISELSS’s priorities, akin to one-on-one coaching and consulting engagements aimed at building capacity for the recipient agency on specific problems, issues, or practices. One example of this work is CISELSS’s engagement and support of a SEA in the effort to update its SEL benchmarks for equity. More information about the center’s approach to technical assistance is available in Wrabel, Bush-Mecenas, and Woo (2021).

Describing this initial design for planned technical assistance, one CISELSS leader said,

I think that we have always talked about our technical assistance in these three tiers where
Tier 1 is universal technical assistance available to everyone, Tier 2 is small-group learning, Tier 3 is individual learning. And we’ve always tried to be really collaborative with other agencies and organizations. I think we have gotten a lot smarter about what makes a difference.

As this leader described, CISELSS became more adept in Years 4 and 5 at broadening access, communications, and supports around a single tier of support and weaving multiple tiers of support around common topic areas (described next).

**Technical Assistance Implementation: CISELSS Differentiated Supports Within a Support Tier**

Dunst and colleagues (2019b) identified key aspects of technical assistance implementation, including the use of varied forms of capacity building, such as professional development, coaching, and consultation, as well as technical assistance provider credibility and perceived quality of support. Over time, CISELSS made substantive shifts in how it implemented tiered supports to provide differentiated opportunities for capacity building.

CISELSS, which created and disseminated standalone Tier 1 toolkits in its early years, evolved its approach toward surrounding the release of a toolkit with an accompanying audio cast, webinar, and suite of related resources. Instead of focusing on creating a single deliverable, one CISELSS leader said,

"We do a much better job now of saying, “What is the concept that we’re trying to move forward into the world and what’s the portfolio of artifacts that will help us get to that?”"
Essentially, this shift demonstrated how CISELSS sought to create multiple “avenues into understanding the concept” or, in other words, forms of Tier 1 support on a given topic.

This approach was also applied to Tier 2 technical assistance in some of the collaboratives. For example, in the Transforming Kindergarten collaborative, CISELSS staff sought to gather feedback from participants to attend to their local problems of practice while having commonalities among all participants. A CISELSS staff member described this as a “choose your own adventure” approach, which provided common structure and scaffolding with opportunities for participants to select relevant focuses for their work. This approach was commonly referred to by CISELSS staff as co-design or co-creation. In the words of one leader,

We have been thinking about, particularly for Tier 2 and Tier 3 technical assistance, it’s really important to show up as technical assistance providers honoring the expertise of the people that we are working with, and knowing that they know best what they need . . . So at the very beginning, we spend a lot of time with the participants in our collaboratives, really listening to them about where their strengths are, what assets they have at their disposal, what specific thing they’re trying to achieve, and how the collaborative can support them with that.

CISELSS also varied the structure of its technical assistance across the collaboratives. Each Tier 2 collaborative looked different based on the target audience, topic, and aim. On one hand, the Restorative Practices collaborative engaged LEAs, regional education agencies, and school administrators in structured meetings to provide training on implementing CISELSS’s Tier 1 resource *The Toolkit Before the Toolkit: Centering Adaptive and Relational Elements of Restorative Practices for Implementation Success* (Trout, 2021). This collaborative took a structured approach and had a clear, focused, and predetermined objective as it led practitioners through each of the implementation considerations described in the toolkit over the course of four weeks; despite this structured approach, the collaborative remained flexible and responsive to participants’ feedback. On the other hand, a small number of SEAs participated in the Data for Truth and Action collaborative, which embraced a co-design approach rather than a structured approach. SEAs defined their organization’s goals for the Data for Truth and Action collaborative and partnered with CISELSS staff to shape the ongoing work over 21 months. One CISELSS staff member described this overall approach to technical assistance as follows:

The shift that I have noticed a lot, that I am appreciating, has been really to lean into this idea of mutual expertise through people’s experience and positionality . . . or the role they’re in within the education system, like leaning into that and more so like facilitating conversation as a way of learning from each other . . . It is a different pedagogical approach that I think, in my opinion, has a lot more value.

As this CISELSS staff member described, this approach engaged technical assistance recipients as mutually involved in shaping learning and providing expertise. The Transforming Kindergarten collaborative similarly encouraged sharing knowledge and expertise across SEAs. Given its larger size, the Transforming Kindergarten collaborative also had some structure (e.g., activities to be completed between monthly meetings) to support learning.

**CISELSS Wove Together Multiple Tiers of Support Around a Common Topic**

CISELSS also adapted the ways it provided and wove together multiple tiers of support on a specific topic (e.g., school safety). For example, learning from Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports informed the development of general Tier 1 resources; previously developed Tier 1 resources were the foundation on which some Tier 2 or Tier 3 support was built; and, in a few instances, organizations participating in the collaboratives (Tier 2) were identified for more-intensive Tier 3 support. For example, the Tier 2 Alignment, Coherence, and Strategic Communication collaborative led to the creation of Tier 1 resources: *Serving the Whole Person: An Alignment and Coherence Guide for State Education Agencies* (Walrond and Romer, 2021) and *Serving the Whole Person: An Alignment and Coher-
Tier 3 support emerged from this same collaborative and the development of the guide as SEAs sought to pilot the guides in their agencies.

Similar connections emerged with the Tier 1 resource on restorative practices, The Toolkit Before the Toolkit: Centering Adaptive and Relational Elements of Restorative Practices for Implementation Success (Trout, 2021), which served as the foundational document for the Restorative Practices collaborative. One CISELSS leader described the multiple, related technical assistance opportunities stemming from this toolkit as follows:

We have been thinking about how that informs our own understanding of systems change and how we support that . . . One example is a toolkit that we created around restorative practices . . . it’s not enough to say, “Well, I’m going to read a thing and then my practice is going to change.” People need to practice changes from understanding concepts in multiple different ways. So then the lead author offered a small community of practice, like a small practitioner collaborative so that people could test those things out. And then there were public speaking opportunities and workshops that could be offered . . . And so . . . we found opportunities to say, “Okay, we’ve got this guide. How do we create small group opportunities? How do we create direct technical assistance opportunities?”

Members of the Transforming Kindergarten collaborative, too, were invited to apply for additional tailored Tier 3 support to aid them in their efforts to enhance SEL for the early grades.

CISELSS also sought opportunities to provide experiences for individuals and organizations that spanned support tiers.

CISELSS also sought opportunities to provide experiences for individuals and organizations that spanned support tiers.

A copy of the book, were able to gain a more generalized benefit.

The variation of structure and articulation across tiers of support demonstrates how CISELSS differentiated its support according to the needs of participating SEAs and LEAs while drawing on the center’s deep expertise and strengthening the continuity of its technical assistance efforts. CISELSS’s efforts to generate connection between its tiers of support allowed it to further solidify its key thematic strands of work around alignment and coherence, data for equity, and comprehensive school safety. A benefit of this approach is that CISELSS can use these themes to clearly articulate the center’s niche and key contributions to the broader SEL and school safety technical assistance environment. Finally, this approach to technical assistance demonstrates how CISELSS is meeting one of its initial goals: using Tier 2 and Tier 3 opportunities to generate information for the benefit of all educators through more-generalized resources.

Evaluation and Sustainability: CISELSS Gathered Formal and Informal Feedback on Technical Assistance

Dunst and colleagues (2019b) identify (1) evaluation of technical assistance activities, such as process or outcomes evaluation and lessons learned analyses, and (2) attention to the sustainability of technical assistance–facilitated change, including capacity-sustaining activities and ongoing support to recipients, as key aspects of technical assistance provision.
The formal dimension of evaluation was integrated into CISELSS’s work from the outset of the center’s operations. CISELSS’s formal process evaluation was conducted by researchers from its independent evaluator, the RAND Corporation. RAND researchers iteratively gathered data from technical assistance recipients and provided analyzed insights to CISELSS leaders each year. In addition, these analyses are encapsulated in two public reports: Wrabel, Bush-Mecenas, and Woo (2021) on how this center balanced competing pressures and defined its role in the technical assistance ecosystem in its first three years and this report.

CISELSS also engaged in activities to collect rapid-response feedback. RAND researchers administered short feedback forms after Tier 1 and Tier 2 technical assistance events, aggregating and quickly providing summaries to CISELSS to inform planning for future events. CISELSS also periodically gathered feedback from participants in Tier 2 and Tier 3 activities. For example, during its Transforming Kindergarten collaborative, CISELSS built in multiple opportunities to gather feedback directly from participants through discussions. As one CISELSS staff member said,

Then we also include milestone conversations with the team leads and that might be depending on the length of the collaborative, like every quarter or maybe this last collaborative was a year. So we did a midpoint and an end point to just check in and say, “How’s it going? What’s missing? What do you need from us?”—that kind of thing.

Across Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports, CISELSS staff sought to gather ongoing feedback and to support future extensions of their work.

CISELSS’s co-design approach relied on these one-on-one, tailored discussions with recipients about their needs and interests. CISELSS also leveraged these discussions to adjust its technical assistance support accordingly. As mentioned previously, CISELSS staff offered additional Tier 3 support on distinct problems of practice to organizations in the Transforming Kindergarten collaborative, but just three of the 15 state teams took up the offer of Tier 3 assistance. Nevertheless, some participating states desired more-tailored, smaller group supports, even if they did not desire individualized support. As a result, CISELSS responded to feedback from its technical assistance recipients with midstream adjustments to technical assistance provision to meet their needs. As one CISELSS staff member explained,

We realized that there were some people [in the collaborative] who didn’t want dedicated [Tier 3] technical assistance on a specific problem, but they needed something more tailored than just the monthly meetings . . . Where we were defining the scope and sequence, we did one-on-one conversations, there may have been some surveying. We came up with five topics where multiple states had an interest . . . we did a little matchmaking. So, for example, kindergarten entry assessments, four states raised their hand. We introduced them, and they self-facilitated and started doing some peer consulting around that for each other.

As for the latter dimension of sustainability, CISELSS’s sustainability activities at this phase of the center’s development primarily focused on continued engagement on emergent technical assistance needs (e.g., offering Tier 3 assistance for new needs identified during collaborative participation) and some continued outreach to past participants to understand their ongoing activities related to the support they received. In its first five years, CISELSS sought to continue its technical assistance with collaborative-participating states, where requested. Specifically, a few states participated in multiple collaboratives and/or Tier 3 assistance over the four years of CISELSS’s support implementation. These states also provided feedback on areas of ongoing need or ways to extend their work with the assistance of CISELSS. For instance, at the end of one collaborative, CISELSS leadership sought feedback from states on how to support the sustainability of the work accomplished during the collaborative. According to a CISELSS leader,

At the end . . . we had a culminating event where we sort of got feedback from that event and then did a final offer of a call for the state teams to say, “Thank you so much for doing this. We’re offering you a consultation call to make sure that there’s a connection between
the work you did with us in this collaborative and whatever it is you’re planning on doing next.” So that the work doesn’t get lost or stay silent.

In its fifth year of operation, CISELSS began to seek feedback from its past participants to understand how their capacity-building efforts had been sustained since the conclusion of the center’s formal support. CISELSS received limited participation and feedback on sustainability, however, from members of the inaugural collaborative (i.e., Alignment, Coherence, and Strategic Communication). This may be explained, in part, by significant turnover of staff at SEA offices over the past three to five years.

How and to What Extent Did CISELSS’s Support Build the Organizational and Individual Capacities of SEA and LEA Technical Assistance Recipients?

In the previous section, we described CISELSS’s technical assistance practice, including preparation, planning, implementation, and evaluation and sustainability. Next, we examine how technical assistance recipients who participated in one or more of the collaboratives understood and described their existing capacities and the capacities built through their engagement with CISELSS. We also analyze the factors that enable and constrain capacity building for SEAs and LEAs. We use responses from a total of 28 interviews with 19 technical assistance recipients (for eight recipients, we conducted pre– and post–technical assistance interviews; for 11 recipients, we conducted post–technical assistance interviews only). These interviews included collaborative participants because these technical assistance recipients experienced deeper and more long-term engagement with CISELSS, which also provided them access to and understanding of Tier 1 and Tier 3 resources.

We identified common capacities that the collaborative participants we interviewed said were existing strengths, desired areas of growth in their work with CISELSS, and developed capacities attributed to CISELSS (see Table 3). Notably, we categorized the information provided in interviews into the corresponding capacity (see Table 1 for definitions). Next, we discuss the patterns in capacities and capacity building over time.

What Are the Existing Capacities of Technical Assistance Recipients?

Technical assistance recipients who participated in the collaboratives reported drawing on existing organizational and individual capacities in their work with CISELSS. About half of the participants reported that their team possessed existing capacities in access to expertise \((n = 10/19)\) and individual skills and knowledge \((n = 9/19)\). In terms of individual skills and

| TABLE 3 | Existing, Desired, and Built Capacities Reported by Technical Assistance Recipients |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Element         | Number of Technical Assistance Recipients (out of 19 total) | Existing Capacity | Desired Capacity | Built Capacity |
| Individual capacity | 9                      | 5                | 14              |
| Shared goals and vision | 7                      | 5                | 12              |
| Organizational alignment | 5                      | 5                | 10              |
| Organizational skills | 3                      | 11               | 14              |
| Organizational culture and politics | 5                      | 8                | 10              |
| Broader access to knowledge or expertise | 10                     | 5                | 16              |
| Strong leadership | 5                      | 4                | 7               |
knowledge, participants described strengths in having an SEA team with varied expertise (e.g., nurses, social workers, counselors) or that spanned several departments. A few participants also highlighted the importance of diversity of both knowledge and skill sets within their team, noting, for example, the strength of having a team with both “planners” and “folks willing to speak up and voice their opinion and thoughts” or, according to another respondent, “great depth of research and understanding for the way the work has been done within the department.”

Participants who described access to external expertise discussed existing connections with other prominent technical assistance content centers or providers, such as the Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support and CASEL (the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), as well as relevant agencies (e.g., state departments of health and human services and nonprofit organizations, such as Headstart and Education Commission of the States).

About one-third of participants reported existing capacity in terms of shared goals and vision ($n = 7/19$); about one-quarter reported existing capacity in terms of leadership ($n = 5/19$), organizational alignment ($n = 5/19$), and organizational culture ($n = 5/19$); and just a few noted organizational skills as an existing strength ($n = 3/19$). These findings suggest that individual knowledge and skills and access to expertise, which traditionally constituted the bulk of technical assistance offerings (see Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; and Stein, Smith, and Silver, 1999), were identified as existing areas of strengths for collaborative participants. Organizational capacities (such as organizational alignment, organizational skills, organizational culture, shared goals and vision, and leadership), on the other hand, remained in need of development.

### What Capacities Did Participants Wish to Develop to Push Forward Their Policy and Practice Goals?

When asked about the capacities they hoped to develop through their engagement with CISELSS, around half of the participants wished to further develop their capacity in terms of organizational skills ($n = 11/19$) and organizational culture ($n = 8/19$). Participants varied in how they conceptualized these needed organizational skills. For participants in the Restorative Practices collaborative, for example, discussion centered on organizational skills related to implementation and scaling. In contrast, participants in the Data for Truth and Action collaborative discussed the need for greater data analysis capabilities, while participants in the Transforming Kindergarten collaborative discussed needing a greater focus on communications. In terms of organizational culture, participants commonly described inconsistent understanding of and commitment to equity, as well as challenges in collaboration across their organizations.

Less than one-third of participants wished to develop their capacity in terms of organizational alignment ($n = 5/19$), access to expertise ($n = 5/19$), shared goals and vision ($n = 5/19$), individual knowledge and skills ($n = 5/19$), and leadership ($n = 4/19$). These participants described the importance of alignment of work across departments or teams to avoid replicating work or preventing contradictory work. For example, a Transforming Kindergarten participant shared that each department involved with early childhood and early grades education and support had its own family engagement teams, which undermined efforts to provide common information and led to duplication of outreach efforts. A participant from the Alignment, Coherence, and Strategic Communication collaborative similarly described this challenge, noting,

> We found . . . that many people were working individually on the same thing, and you’re working against each other.

In these cases, participants sought CISELSS’s assistance to help identify and mitigate these alignment challenges.

As these findings demonstrate, the majority of collaborative recipients described looking to develop broad capacities in organizational skills, culture, and alignment rather than simply gathering new information or resources. Indeed, CISELSS’s plan for technical assistance emphasized designing collaborative activities to support building these complex capacities. One respondent described how changes in these organizational capacities helped to address a “sense of hopelessness” by helping to facilitate the
implementation of existing policies. As this respondent described,

People question whether or not we are able to make the changes that we need to make. We feel like we have policy drivers, and currently those policies are not enforced. There are no repercussions if you don’t follow the policy . . . so we’re trying . . . [to] build the systems within the department to prioritize the work and make sure that these policies are not just something that sits on the shelf and nobody does anything with it.

As this example demonstrates, developing organizational skills, culture, and alignment may be particularly important in such agencies as SEAs and LEAs, which occupy complex roles in facilitating the implementation of policy.

Organizational Capacities Built Through Engagement with CISELSS

Participants reported that CISELSS helped develop capacities in terms of broader access to knowledge and expertise \( n = 16/19 \), organizational skills \( n = 14/19 \), individual capacity \( n = 14/19 \), a shared vision and goals \( n = 12/19 \), organizational alignment \( n = 10/19 \), and organizational culture \( n = 10/19 \). The types of capacities that were built varied across collaboratives as well. For example, most Data for Truth and Action participants found that they developed organizational skills, whereas all Transforming Kindergarten participants said they gained ways to create a shared vision and goals and access to expertise. This variation across collaboratives may be expected, given differences in their design and purposes (see Table 2).

Fourteen participants stated that CISELSS helped build capacity around organizational skills, such as communication and ways of navigating and making sense of data, in alignment with the planned objectives of the collaboratives. For instance, participants in the Alignment, Coherence, and Strategic Communication collaborative explained how the center helped them create alignment between whole-person initiatives in their state, such as supports for mental health and multi-tiered systems of support, and helped them strategically communicate, internally and externally, and tailor their message to specific audiences. Participants in the Data for Truth and Action collaborative described the development of such organizational skills as collecting and using data to inform equity issues (e.g., disciplinary decisions) and diving deeper into “street data.” Street data was a term used in the collaborative, drawn from Safir and Dugan (2021), to describe data derived from the experiences of those who are often the targets of the policies (such as students and families) but whose voices are often left out of the policymaking process. Four participants from the Restorative Practices collaborative highlighted how the quality of coaching provided a better understanding about the adaptive, relational, and structural elements of restorative practices and how they felt more equipped to use the guiding toolkit (see Trout, 2021) in their local work.

Fourteen participants reported that they observed changes in their individual capacity in terms of their mindset, knowledge, and gained skills, with variation in the content of these changes across the different collaboratives. For those in the Data for Truth and Action collaborative, these changes cen-
The center helped develop greater alignment through breaking down silos and improving collaboration between departments and agencies.

tered on their understanding of equity. For example, one Data for Truth and Action respondent described how the center pushed their thinking forward beyond deficit thinking into an asset-based mindset. Another believed that the liberatory design training (see Table 2) encouraged their team to “humanize people through liberation,” representing shifts in individual mindsets among their team members to consider the experiences of young people harmed by exclusionary disciplinary policies. For other collaborative participants, CISELSS’s support equipped them with the knowledge and skills to train others in using the resources and the toolkit(s) that the center provided. For example, the Restorative Practices collaborative helped participants understand the guiding toolkit and use the toolkit to implement restorative practices in their contexts. Meanwhile, the Transforming Kindergarten collaborative helped individuals understand developmentally appropriate practices.

Twelve participants mentioned how CISELSS helped their teams build capacity around creating and refining shared goals and vision, often through setting priorities, providing protected time, and uniting members to think through their objectives, theory of change, and processes. A participant from the Alignment, Coherence, and Strategic Communication collaborative stated that the collaborative “really gave us the time as a small team to think about what needed to happen, and one of the things we’ve known for some time and just sort of formalized as we’re doing that is that it’s really important that we do some kind of strategic planning process.”

Another Data for Truth and Action collaborative participant mentioned that the collaborative allowed the team to coalesce around a vision for supporting students with interventions rather than consequences and exposed “roadblocks in places as a team” so that they “could work on [themselves]” to “become better people and better educators.”

Of the ten participants who reported building organizational alignment capacity through the collaborative, five participants from across the collaboratives mentioned that the center helped develop greater alignment through breaking down silos and improving collaboration between departments and agencies. One participant mentioned that their team now connects and communicates internally through a living document that lists projects related to whole-child development as a result of the collaborative efforts. Another participant from the Data for Truth and Action collaborative added that the center helped their state gain access to expertise that helped drive whole-child development. Other participants mentioned that the center brought together individuals who had been working in isolation toward the same goal to “corral the voices in this area.”

Ten participants mentioned how the collaborative helped build relationships and develop a more collaborative culture across different departments. One mentioned how their team, which spanned sister state agencies, felt more united and better equipped to work together to pivot around initiatives whenever necessary, stating,

It just brings the team . . . closer together . . . it’s like [we] can come back and like quickly work together because those relationships exist to be able to pivot and to think quickly when it comes to initiatives we need to put through.

Another felt that the liberatory design methodologies leveraged for the Data for Truth and Action collaborative “has given us a starting point for building that trust” between SEAs and LEAs.

Seven participants reported that CISELSS helped them build their capacity to better lead their organizations. Echoing the center’s emphasis on the adap-
tive aspect of systems change, one state leader highlighted how the center helped them develop skills related to adaptive leadership, noting, “It’s easier to work that way when you have to take on complexity.” Other respondents included those from the Restorative Practices collaborative, who specified how the center equipped them with the knowledge and tools to build the capacity of the teams they support, including district and school leaders and staff.

Group Instruction, Modeling, Coaching, Resources, and Peer Learning Helped to Build the Capacity of Collaborative Participants

CISELSS provided technical assistance in the collaboratives through group professional development, team coaching, social learning through peer interactions, and brokering of resources and expertise. Collaborative members who were interviewed were strongly supportive of the benefits of these supports.

The majority of participants \((n = 15/19)\) reported that the professional development provided was high quality. Members of the Restorative Practices collaborative, in particular, noted that the facilitation of group sessions, including the modeling of restorative practice techniques during the group sessions, was valuable. Two members from the Restorative Practices collaborative expressed their appreciation for the facilitators, who “made themselves so available, and the fact that they had followed up” and met the participants at their comfort level. Participants from other collaboratives also mentioned that CISELSS was very responsive to their needs and helped their teams develop frameworks, facilitate meetings, keep the work on track, and model various practices and equity-centered conversations. Collaborative facilitators also helped the participants to “be reminded of things that we might not have realized” and stay “focused and organized with so many competing priorities.”

Eight of the 19 participants also received tailored coaching directly to their team (a standard feature of the Alignment, Coherence, and Strategic Communication and Data for Truth and Action collaboratives and an optional element of the Transforming Kindergarten collaborative). The majority of these participants considered coaching, from their CISELSS-provided technical assistance liaison, to be one of the most helpful elements of the collaborative experience.

Over half of the participants \((n = 11/19)\) noted their access to CISELSS resources as a benefit of their participation in the collaboratives. Five Restorative Practices participants found the aligned toolkit useful as an “anchoring artifact” and applicable to their work with school leaders and administrators. Two Data for Truth and Action participants found the center’s briefs, publications, and newsletter to be helpful. As part of the Data for Truth and Action collaborative, CISELSS hosted a webinar on asset-based framing, and collaborative members found this webinar particularly transformative. In this webinar, participants reported that the presenter encouraged the SEAs, in the words of one respondent, “to use our power and not continue to oppress and retraumatize with the way we talk about our data.” Other participants noted the guides and toolkits related to school safety, strategic communication, and restorative practices to be practical and applicable to their work.

About half of the participants \((n = 9/19)\) reported that peer interactions and collaboration, defining characteristics of all collaboratives, were highly beneficial to their work. Participants reported that they gained insight from talking to and learning from other SEAs and LEAs about their work. They found that being “in community with other people who are navigating similar challenges” helped them feel validated and even comforted. For example, collaborative participants stated how helpful it was to discuss real situations and the application of tools, such as the Restorative Practice guiding toolkit. In the words of one Restorative Practices respondent, “the dialogue in those breakout [rooms] and then being able to come back together and share that with everybody was really meaningful.” About one-third of the participants noted more-limited benefits from peer interactions and collaboration, in part because the work in other SEAs and LEAs was too different to offer much assistance in facing their own challenges.
Capacity Building Appeared to Precede Moderate Changes to Policy and Practice

Our annual formative feedback form data show that the majority of responding participants said that CISELSS’s technical assistance helped them modify policy, programs, or practice. Among respondents, 95 percent agreed or strongly agreed that SEL assistance and support increased their organization’s capacity to provide high-quality supports for students’ social and emotional development. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (out of 20) agreed or strongly agreed that CISELSS supports improved their organization’s capacity to provide technical assistance to others inside their organization (90 percent) and outside their organization (85 percent). Overall, 77 percent of respondents (out of 22) agreed or strongly agreed that the technical assistance provided led to a change in SEL practices, programs, or policies.

In our interviews, however, just a few participants reported making substantial changes to policy and practice at the state, district, or school level. As part of the Alignment, Coherence, and Strategic Communication collaborative, one participant indicated that their team used CISELSS’s Alignment and Coherence SEA guide (see Walrond and Romer, 2021) to develop guidelines on differentiating between SEL competency assessments, social emotional behavior screenings, and behavioral assessments. Another mentioned how their state developed its comprehensive school safety framework through the work of the collaborative.

Across the collaboratives, a few participants mentioned how they sought to revise policy, integrating their learning into the revision of guidance documents or informing professional development offerings. For example, a participant in the Restorative Practices collaborative drew on their learning to better incorporate more restorative practices into district and school staff professional development, while acknowledging that their ability to change district- or school-level policy was limited. Another added that the collaborative helped them to revise the language in their student code of conduct to better incorporate elements of restorative practice. In the Transforming Kindergarten collaborative, one participant shared that the collaborative helped them to create a developmentally appropriate practices policy statement, and another mentioned how the collaborative helped their team develop trainings for prekindergarten teachers to improve students’ transition to kindergarten. Still, this participant noted that their progress unfortunately fell short of expectations in terms of changing policy and practice. Finally, another participant added that the collaborative helped them develop a toolkit on the transition from prekindergarten to elementary school. These examples highlight the kinds of changes and products that resulted from the engagements, while demonstrating that larger-scale policy and practice changes likely require substantial capacity shifts in the organization and more time to accomplish within these complex agencies and systems.

Adequate and Stable Staffing, Limited Peer-Learning Opportunities, Misalignment of Initiatives and Communications, Political Resistance, and Lack of Accountability Presented Ongoing Challenges to SEAs and LEAs

Despite the growth that collaborative participants identified, several participants noted substantial constraints to their ability to build sufficient capacity to make changes to policy and practice. Collaborative participants most commonly raised concerns about staff shortages and overworked personnel (n = 9/19), which constrained efforts to improve policy, programs, and practice. In the words of one collaborative respondent,

I think we really do have the expertise, what I think we could use more of is just more people. I mean, we’re trying to do a lot in this space, and we hate saying no to anything and lots of grant opportunities come around and it’s like, can we do it? Do we have the human capital and capacity to do it?

Collaborative participants reported that turnover of SEA staff was a persistent challenge to making changes to the organization and sustaining progress. They reported other constraints, including the need for sustained networking and support with peers in
Similar roles \((n = 4/19)\), misalignment of initiatives or poor interdepartmental communication \((n = 3/19)\), political obstacles and resistance \((n = 2/19)\), and lack of accountability and monitoring of existing policies \((n = 2/19)\). These reported constraints confirm the complexities of the work of SEAs and LEAs and the need for individual and organizational capacity building to mitigate the effects of these challenges.

**Discussion**

Our findings describe how CISELSS designed and implemented its technical assistance supports for SEAs and LEAs, as well as the varied existing, desired, and developed capacities of technical assistance participants as part of their engagement with the center. First, we find that CISELSS made purposeful efforts to define and organize supports around a set of five focal areas. The technical assistance that CISELSS provided varied across three tiers, defined by increasing intensity of support. The center adjusted its technical assistance provision over time to provide varied supports across tiers, woven within focal areas. Across the technical assistance elements (as identified by Dunst et al., 2019a), assessing readiness for change among prospective technical assistance recipients and support for sustainability of capacity-building efforts remained the areas most underdeveloped for CISELSS.

We also analyzed the capacities of Tier 2 collaborative recipients, according to a conceptual framework of organizational and individual capacities drawn from the literature. We found that recipients commonly identified individual capacity, access to knowledge or expertise, and shared goals and vision as their existing strengths and desired additional support in developing organizational skills and organizational culture. In practice, collaborative participants believed that CISELSS helped them develop multiple capacities, most commonly reporting organizational skills, individual capacity, access to knowledge or expertise, shared goals, organizational culture, and organizational alignment. Adequate and stable staffing remained a major constraint to capacity building and to policy and practice change for SEA and LEA technical assistance recipients.

**Implications**

Research provides limited evidence on which capacities SEAs and LEAs identify as critical to expanding their work and how federally funded technical assistance centers contribute to the development of those capacities. However, individual and organizational capacities are considered critical to the effective implementation of federal and local education reforms (Darling-Hammond and Ball, 1998; Elmore, 2002; Honig, 2003; McDonnell and Elmore, 1987; Mintrop, 2003; O’Day, 2002). Numerous educational reforms and investments have been announced in light of the COVID-19 pandemic–induced educational challenges faced by students, schools, and communities related to school safety, whole-child initiatives, educational enrichment, and enhanced academic and mental well-being supports (see ED, 2022). As the education landscape continues to adapt to new demands, policies, and reforms—and existing or new technical assistance centers are tasked with building the capacities needed to address these changes—understanding which capacities are identified as critical to SEAs and LEAs and how technical assistance centers build those capacities becomes increasingly important. That said, the conceptual framework and analysis presented in this report provide four implications for future technical assistance preparation and provision for technical assistance providers.
Clearly Identify Focal Areas and the Differentiated Methods of Capacity Building Within Those Focal Areas

CISELSS made purposeful efforts to define and organize supports around a set of five focal areas. Understanding the topics and methods of technical assistance allows for tailoring support to recipient interests and preferred learning modalities. Transparently and explicitly describing these elements and their interactions may help provide clarity to recipients as they select appropriate technical assistance offerings as well. Conducting an analysis of the field’s needs and identifying focal areas to be integrated across technical assistance was a beneficial strategy that improved the coherence across CISELSS’s technical assistance offerings.

Pre-Identify Capacities Being Built Through Specific Support Streams, and Ensure Recipients Have the Prerequisite Capacities to Fully Engage with the Planned Support

Assessing needed capacities and the readiness for change of prospective technical assistance recipients remained underdeveloped for CISELSS. Our analyses suggest that a technical assistance provider should consider the particular capacities it aims to develop through its support provision and the existing capacities needed by recipients to fully engage in the work. Specifying the capacities that will be built provides SEAs and LEAs the opportunity to ensure the prospective support aligns with their organization’s needs. Furthermore, technical assistance recipients may come to the work in very different places as organizations. Some may bring strong individual knowledge and skills, some may have supportive leadership, and some may boast access to experts. The success of some technical assistance efforts may rely on specific existing capacities to move the work forward.

Identifying existing and target capacities may also help support meaningful peer-learning opportunities. While collaborative participants said that CISELSS helped them develop multiple capacities, concerns arose over the mixed success of peer learning, due to mismatched work among participating SEAs and LEAs. Participants appreciated the opportunity to engage with role-alikes at other agencies and in other states but sometimes experienced challenges with sharing ideas, experiences, and knowledge when there were substantial differences between the organizations, their aims in the work, and their progress. We suggest that assessing existing capacities and readiness for capacity building may help to ensure that technical assistance offerings are accessible and appropriate to meeting the distinct needs of SEAs and LEAs and that peer-learning networks are suitably matched in interests, experiences, or context to facilitate knowledge-sharing.

Technical Assistance Co-Design, When Used, May Be Best Suited as a Component of the Planning Phase, Rather Than the Implementation Phase, of Support

CISELSS was responsive to the needs of its technical assistance recipients and sought to integrate elements of co-design in its work. In addition to providing varied intensity of support across three tiers, the center adjusted its technical assistance topics and methods to meet emergent needs in the field. This responsiveness in design resulted in the center’s weaving of focal areas and expertise across tiers of support, which offered valuable opportunities for differentiation of technical assistance on common topics. While responsiveness and planning-stage co-design helped CISELSS design relevant technical assistance opportunities, this approach to technical assistance led to limited clarity about the direction
and purpose of its work among recipients. It may be valuable to find balance in embracing co-design methodologies during the planning stage with providing adequate structure and clearly communicating goals and outcomes during implementation.

**Focusing on Organizational Rather Than Just Individual Capacity May Allow for More-Sustainable Improvements Within Organizations**

In this study, collaborative participants commonly identified existing strengths in individual capacities and access to expertise. They also desired additional support in developing organizational capacities, such as organizational skills, alignment, and organizational culture. Similarly, these participants identified staff turnover as a persistent and intractable challenge. Given the balance of these needs and challenges, SEAs and LEAs may experience the most-sustained benefits through building the organizational capacities needed to support ongoing policy and practice adoption and implementation rather than only receiving information or expertise that builds individual capacities. While individual capacity development is important and likely a necessary condition for implementing key education reforms within the field, technical assistance for the purposes of building organizational capacity—like that of most federally funded technical assistance centers—may not generate long-term benefits for organizations when only developing the capacities of individuals who subsequently change roles or leave the organization. Emphasizing the development of organizational capacities, in comparison, may provide opportunities to make more-sustainable changes in SEAs and LEAs as organizations. In particular, focusing on shared goals and vision, organizational alignment, and organizational culture may help focus priorities in work streams within SEAs and LEAs and help avoid duplication or contradiction across departments or teams. These efforts, in our study, provided valuable opportunities for SEA and LEA staff to focus on strategic planning and bigger picture work, which was often less prioritized in their day-to-day work.
APPENDIX

Data and Methods

Interview and Document Data and Analysis

We used an embedded, illustrative case study design that draws on several levels of analysis (Yin, 2013). Specifically, we followed the development and technical assistance activities of CISELSS over the course of its first five years to understand how CISELSS developed the organizational and individual capacities of SEAs and LEAs to implement SEL and school safety–related policies, programs, and practices. We interviewed CISELSS leadership and staff, leaders of organizations partnered with CISELSS, and recipients of Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports. Table A.1 provides the number of interviews conducted by group.

We engaged in purposive sampling to identify interview participants who would likely have in-depth knowledge of the center’s capacity-building efforts and diverse perspectives on the center’s activities (Rapley, 2014). For instance, we interviewed members of CISELSS’s leadership with the broadest historical overview of CISELSS’s body of work and who were well positioned to articulate CISELSS’s capacity-building model. We also interviewed key staff members who were deeply involved in leading and providing technical assistance to CISELSS’s collaborative members.

To identify technical assistance recipient interviewees, we obtained a list of collaborative members from CISELSS and considered various factors in the sampling process, including participants’ role, level of involvement, and geographic location. For instance, we sought to include members from each of CISELSS’s four peer-learning collaboratives (see Table 2). Within each collaborative, we sought to include participants from a variety of states, as well as state teams who were also involved in CISELSS’s Tier 3 activities. Because state collaborative teams were often made up of many individuals, we also sought to interview participants who were identified as the leaders of those teams.

Ultimately, our interviews included members from each collaborative and participants from a diverse array of states and organizations. For example, CISELSS ran the Restorative Practices collaboratives twice, and we interviewed participants from both groups, covering four states and county, district, and school levels. For the Data for Truth and Action collaborative, we interviewed participants from each of the three state teams; for the Transforming Kindergarten collaborative, we interviewed participants from five of the 15 state teams, including teams that did and did not participate in Tier 3 technical assistance activities.

Our timing of data collection also facilitated our analysis of how CISELSS built the capacity of technical assistance recipients. Although the Alignment, Coherence, and Strategic Communication collaborative concluded in August 2021, we interviewed participants of that collaborative a year and a half later to understand whether and how the capacities built through their engagement with CISELSS had been sustained. For the Data for Truth and Action and Transforming Kindergarten collaboratives, which each spanned a year or more, we interviewed recipients both at the beginning and after, or toward the conclusion of, the collaborative to understand recipients’ needs and expectations at the start and whether collaborative activities met their needs by the end. Finally, given the relative brevity of the Restorative Practices collaborative, we only interviewed participants a few months after they participated.

Over the course of this study, we conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews ($n = 41$) and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE A.1</th>
<th>Interview Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewees</td>
<td>2021–2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CISELSS leadership and staff, including leadership at external partner organizations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 2 and 3 technical assistance recipients</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
transcribed audio recordings prior to coding and analysis. Our interview protocol asked participants about CISELSS’s mission, expertise, technical assistance activities, and capacities built during technical assistance recipients’ engagement with CISELSS. Using Dedoose research software to analyze our data, we began by coding interview data across different levels of abstraction, including codes that were descriptive (e.g., respondent characteristics, organizational membership), thematic (e.g., tiers of support, topics of support, perceived quality of support), and analytic (existing capacities, desired capacities, and developed capacities). We then completed structured case narratives (i.e., structured outlines used to aggregate coding across all participants) to understand key themes and their prevalence across participants, as well as matrices to illuminate patterns across participants (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2020; Bush-Mecenas and Marsh, 2018). To enhance the internal validity and accuracy of our findings, we triangulated data across multiple sources, comparing interviews between various participants and using document data where available to confirm key findings. In Table A.2, we provide examples of interview questions for each type of respondent.

### Feedback Form Data and Analysis

Each year, RAND (on behalf of CISELSS) asks individuals who received support from CISELSS to provide brief, anonymous feedback via a web-based form. We use CISELSS-collected registration and participation lists to identify invitees. The feedback form focuses on which CISELSS supports and resources individuals engaged with and the extent to which those supports and resources helped build local capacity to enhance SEL and school safety efforts within their organization. In FY 2023, the feedback form was administered in April–May 2023 and only to individuals who engaged in Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports.

The response rate for the FY 2023 survey was 17 percent, with 24 respondents answering at least one question. Where we use these feedback form data in the report, we indicate the number of individuals who answered the question being referenced: e.g., \(n = 22\). The majority of respondents indicated working in an SEA (75 percent). The remaining respondents indicated working in agencies that partner with and support SEAs and LEAs to advance their efforts (e.g., safety, kindergarten transitions).

### Interview Data Limitations

There are some limitations to our sampling approach and interview data. While we sought to interview the technical assistance recipients most engaged in the work, it is possible they held different perspectives than collaborative members who were less involved. Moreover, 12 individuals invited to participate in interviews did not respond to our requests, had outdated email addresses, or declined to be interviewed; these technical assistance participants may have held different perspectives than the participants who agreed to be interviewed.

### TABLE A.2

Sample Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Group</th>
<th>Sample Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Center staff</td>
<td>• How has the model for providing technical assistance changed this year?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What were some of the key capacities or strengths that SEAs/LEAs brought into the collaborative work? Have you witnessed any change in technical assistance recipients’ capacities over the course of your work together?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical assistance recipient</td>
<td>• What did you think about the quality of the training you received through the collaborative?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What was your team’s original goal in participating in the collaborative? How did you determine this goal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Did the center and its partners offer expertise that you did not already have access to within your organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What challenges have you experienced in making changes in your institution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How has your team changed as a result of your participation in the collaborative? What, if anything, have you learned?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What elements of the collaborative support were most helpful?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feedback Form Data Limitations

We use these feedback form data because the invited individuals represent the widest array of technical assistance recipients that we can access; the anonymous response approach may enable individuals to respond in ways that are not socially desirable, if such opinions or perspectives are held; and these data allow for some triangulation with the interview data. That said, the feedback form data are not without limitations. These data are anonymous; we cannot link the provided information to specific individuals or organizations. Thus, we cannot assess change over time within people or organizations and can only examine the broad trends using the responses available. We also do not assume that the individuals who provided feedback are representative of the full set of individuals and organizations that engage with CISELSS for technical assistance. Given the anonymous nature of the feedback, we are unable to weight responses in ways that might better reflect the full set of CISELSS’s technical assistance recipients. Moreover, a single organization that received support might be represented in our feedback form data by multiple individual respondents, which could over-emphasize the experience of a single organization’s engagement with CISELSS. Given these concerns, we limit our use of these data to providing background information or contextual insights rather than to draw conclusions or make recommendations.
Notes

1 Human capital refers to the collective education, training, knowledge, skills, and other intangibles possessed by individuals within an organization that the individual and organization leverage in the work process.

2 Dunst and colleagues (2019b) separate “readiness for change” and “organizational capacity” into two dimensions of preparation for technical assistance. Given that we use organizational capacity in a way that differs from Dunst et al.’s definition, we combined these two dimensions under the umbrella term of readiness for change.

3 CISELSS partner organizations are the Council of Chief State School Officers (2018–2020) and Transforming Education (2018–2021), with the RAND Corporation (2018–2023) serving as the evaluation partner.

4 Although we do not focus on these aspects in this report, technical assistance recipients reported that CISELSS offered high-quality support and expertise (see Wrabel, Bush-Mecenas, and Woo, 2021). Collaborative participants who responded to the feedback form in 2023 (n = 23) unanimously agreed or strongly agreed that the CISELSS staff member they worked with had expertise and knowledge that aligned with their organization’s SEL-related needs. Almost all collaborative participants who responded to the feedback form (91 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that the collaborative effectively supported their organization’s SEL-related needs and that participation in the collaboratives was a good use of their organization’s time. Similarly, 100 percent and 92 percent of Tier 3 recipients who responded to the feedback form in 2023 unanimously agreed or strongly agreed that the CISELSS staff member they worked with had expertise and knowledge that aligned with their organization’s goals.

5 For the purpose of this analysis, we consider organizations, rather than individuals, to be technical assistance recipients.

References


Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope, 2019.


Blase, Karen A., Technical Assistance to Promote Service and System Change: Roadmap to Effective Intervention Practices #4, University of South Florida, Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children, November 2009.


Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety, homepage, undated-a. As of June 15, 2023: https://selcenter.wested.org/


CISELSS—See Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety.

Clausen, Caroline, Capacity Building for Organizational Effectiveness: Literature Review: The Journey of High Performance, United Way of Calgary and Area, 2011.


ED—See U.S. Department of Education.


Rogers, Patrick J., "Organizational Capacity Building: The Four Core Capacity Model," slides, presented at the AIRS Annual Conference and National Aging and Disability Symposium, Atlanta, June 1–4, 2014.


About This Report

This report examines five years of operation for the Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety (CISELSS). Building on prior RAND research on CISELSS, we explore how CISELSS designed and implemented its technical assistance supports and how these supports contributed to organizational and individual capacity building among technical assistance recipients. This report concludes with implications for technical assistance providers in the development and provision of capacity-building support.

RAND Education and Labor

This study was undertaken by RAND Education and Labor, a division of the RAND Corporation that conducts research on early childhood through post-secondary education programs, workforce development, and programs and policies affecting workers, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy and decision-making. This report was sponsored by WestEd on a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education under grant S424B180004. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the funder, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

More information about RAND can be found at www.rand.org. Questions about this report should be directed to sbushme@rand.org, and questions about RAND Education and Labor should be directed to educationandlabor@rand.org.

Acknowledgments

This report was made possible through partnership with the leaders, staff, and collaborators of the Center for Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety. We deeply appreciate the individuals and organizations that provided feedback or participated in interviews.

We are grateful to Elizabeth Steiner of RAND and Laura Hernández of the Learning Policy Institute for providing thoughtful guidance to improve this report, and we thank our publications and editing team, including Monette Velasco, Elise Ricotta, and Brian Dau. Any flaws that remain in the report are solely the authors’ responsibility.