

CORE IMPROVEMENT COMMUNITY

Learning by doing to improve together

The CORE Improvement Community is the largest education network in the nation using improvement science to close achievement gaps. This approach is helping us consider issues of race and equity, use data and a rigorous methodology, and take collective action to change education systems in Fresno, Garden Grove, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco, and Santa Ana. What we learn in the CORE Districts will benefit education systems across the state.



Because the CORE Districts are nimble, we can leverage our Improvement Community's innovations more quickly to advance learning that benefits everyone. We are learning by doing, using our flexibility to adapt our efforts as we gain knowledge.

The CORE Networked Improvement Community

Our CORE Networked Improvement Community is an intentional learning community that provides structure for our collective improvement work. By coming together in this way, we can create and sustain common ground, working collectively to transform student learning. NICs offer the most effective and efficient way to organize improvement efforts.

A specific problem of practice anchors all activity of the NIC and motivates and galvanizes the collective action of our schools and districts toward our common goal. Our CORE NIC is working to close the gaps in math for African-American and Hispanic/Latino students, while improving performance for all of our students.

Improvement science lets us view our systems as a whole, identify the disparities that need to be resolved, and determine the root causes of those failures. Working with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, our network connects thousands of educators and provides tools for looking at entire systems to understand the biggest challenges and the most promising solutions.

Improvement Science: Creating Change

- Improvement science focuses directly on the perspective of the students, teachers, principals and families in your schools who best understand the problems we're trying to address. This allows all stakeholders to be agents in creating change.
- Improvement science is problem-specific and user-centered, rather than beginning with a solution in mind. It's not a top-down theoretical approach imposed by someone who doesn't understand your local conditions.
- Improvement science helps schools generate ideas for change and implement them quickly. Schools in the network can then fine-tune the improvements along the way, using small tests of change, to ensure that they're advancing toward their goals. Improvements can easily be scaled and spread to other schools and districts.



Focusing on shared problem solving, our NIC has created a collegueship of expertise that is building on the hard work and creativity of thousands of educators. The range of experiences and know-how within our NIC provides

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us with an abundance of ideas for testing possible interventions in areas such as solving inequities, building teacher capacity, making instructional time more productive, and enhancing students' social-emotional skills.

NICs provide a safe environment in which to make comparative analyses, and allow us to identify patterns that would otherwise look particular to each school site or

district. Conducting analyses across the schools in our eight member districts helps us identify patterns as they emerge, and then refine our interventions.

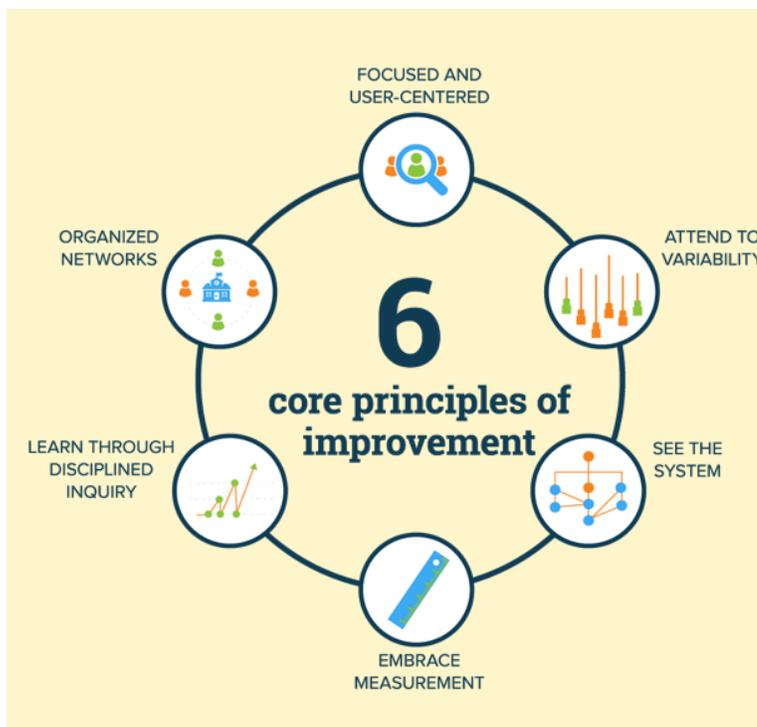
Because your classrooms, schools and districts each have their own identity, culture and climate, the CORE NIC provides diverse contexts within which to test our improvement ideas. This diversity of contexts helps us ensure our improvements will be effective, and can be implemented reliably and at scale.

At the same time, our improvement efforts are disciplined by a rigorous methodology. This ensures that the information we learn will equip educators in our NIC with the solutions and support they need to advance toward our common aim.

Improvement Community Problem Statement

- While math performance has improved across the CORE districts for African-American, Hispanic/Latino and white students, white students outperform other student groups at rates that continue to increase. In other words, the gaps are widening.
- The aim of our improvement community is to close the gaps in math performance between African-American, Hispanic/Latino and white students in grades 4 - 8, while improving performance for all of these students. Our challenge and opportunity is to move all schools to high achieving and high growth, especially with respect to our historically underperforming students.

What makes improvement science different from other reforms? Reforms are often ineffective because they focus on a solution, rather than a practitioner-driven problem, and they're imposed from above. This tendency toward "solutionitis" produces programs without a deep understanding of the problem or context that defines it. Improvement science is a structured way of looking at an entire system to identify problems and rapidly test solutions, focusing on the people (teachers, students, administrators, families) who face the problem every day and understand it best.



Core Principles of Improvement

1. Make the work of improvement problem-specific and user-centered, rather than beginning with a solution in mind.
2. Focus on variation in the effectiveness of interventions.
3. See the system that produces the current outcomes, and how local conditions shape work processes.
4. Embed measures of key outcomes and processes to track whether a change is an improvement.
5. Use disciplined inquiry to drive improvement, engaging in rapid cycles of Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA).
6. Use networked communities, united by a shared problem, to accelerate improvements.