

# Community Engagement Initiative Field Guide

## Part 1 - Orientation



**MAY 2026**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Section 1: Welcome and Purpose</b>	<b>3</b>
Welcome to the CEI Field Guide	
CEI Statutes	
CEI's Mission and Values	<b>6</b>
<b>Section 2: Why Community Engagement Matters</b>	
The Engagement Gap in California	
CEI's Role	<b>8</b>
<b>Section 3: CEI's Evolution and Statewide Role</b>	
What CEI 1.0 Made Possible	
Introduction to CEI 2.0	
Leadership and Statewide Alignment	<b>11</b>
<b>Section 4: How CEI Defines Community Engagement</b>	
CEI's Definition of Community Engagement	
The Essential Conditions for Authentic Partnership	<b>13</b>
<b>Section 5: The CEI Framework</b>	
Overview of the CEI Framework	
How to Use the Framework	<b>19</b>
<b>Section 6: The CEI Learning Journey</b>	
Overview of the Two-Year Learning Journey	
Year 1: Building the Foundation	
Year 2: Strengthening and Sustaining Change	
Student Leadership Pathway	<b>24</b>
<b>Section 7: Moving Forward Together</b>	
Definition of Terms	



# SECTION 1

## Welcome and Purpose

### Welcome to the CEI Field Guide

**A**cross California, there's growing agreement on something that's easy to say and hard to do: students do better when schools and communities work as true partners. Yet for many years, community engagement in education has been treated as a requirement rather than a practice. The result is a familiar pattern: meetings are held, input is collected, and plans are written. However, many students, families, caregivers/guardians, and community members (especially those most impacted by inequity) still feel unheard, unseen, or invited too late to shape real decisions.

That gap is exactly what the Community Engagement Initiative (CEI) was created to address. CEI is a statewide initiative unlike any other in California that brings together students, families/caregivers/guardians, educators, district and county leaders, and community partners to learn and lead together. CEI supports communities and Local Education Agencies (LEAs)—a school district, charter school, or county office of education responsible for providing educational services—in building the relationships, skills, and structures needed to engage differently: more relationally, more inclusively, and more connected to student learning and well-being.

CEI is also unique to California. It is not a one-off program or a short-term campaign. Over time, CEI has grown into a statewide learning



community that has helped teams across the state practice shared leadership, strengthen trust, and develop more sustainable approaches to partnering with communities to improve student outcomes. In many places, CEI has made possible what traditional approaches struggle to deliver: difficult conversations that lead to shared understanding and action.

## Why This Field Guide Exists

As CEI has grown, so has the diversity of people, places, and contexts in which this work is done. For some readers, this may be your first time hearing about CEI. For others, you may be actively participating in CEI or trying to improve engagement in your local context without a clear roadmap. Either way, the need is the same: a practical, accessible guide that helps people build authentic partnerships, no matter where they start.

**This Field Guide captures what CEI teams across California have been learning and translates those lessons into a resource that LEAs and communities can use. It is designed to:**

- Provide a clear story of CEI and why it matters
- Offer shared language and definitions (including a glossary of acronyms and key terms)
- Explain CEI's framework and learning journey in plain language
- Support teams in adapting the work to their local community context while keeping student, family/caregiver/guardian, and community voices at the center

## About CEI

California's education policies—especially the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)—have elevated the importance of educational partners' voices in planning and decision-making. But across the state, implementation revealed a persistent challenge: many LEAs lacked the systems, practices, or trust needed to engage families and communities meaningfully. Engagement might be episodic or one-directional, shaped by timelines and compliance expectations rather than relationships and shared decision-making.



CEI was designed as a statewide response. It is an investment in capacity-building to enable community engagement to become an authentic partnership, not just consultation.

## CEI Statutes

### CEI 1.0






In 2018, Assembly Bill 1808 appropriated \$13,274,000 to establish the Community Engagement Initiative (CEI) to convene professional learning networks for purposes of improving local pupil outcomes and community engagement. The initiative developed and conducted a statewide training on community engagement. The initiative was co-administered by the CCEE and San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools, which serve as the Lead Agency.

### CEI 2.0

In 2022, Assembly Bill 114 appropriated \$100,000,000 to expand the work, deliverables, and scope of the Community Engagement Initiative, as well as extend its operational timeline until the end of the 26-27 school year. The initiative is co-administered by the CCEE and the San Diego County Office of Education, which serve as the Lead Agency.

## CEI's Mission and Values

CEI's mission is to build the conditions for meaningful, inclusive, and effective community engagement across California's education systems. CEI exists to:

- 
**Build capacity** in communities and LEAs to facilitate difficult but necessary conversations that focus on improving outcomes for students
- 
**Identify effective models** of community engagement and the metrics that help evaluate what's working
- 
**Develop a peer-to-peer partnership** between school districts, county offices of education (COEs), and other CEI practitioners to deepen community and family engagement
- 
**Expand successful practices statewide**, so strong engagement is not limited to a few places or personalities
- 
**Serve as a facilitator, resource connector, capacity builder**, and relationship builder in support of community engagement efforts

CEI is grounded in the belief that communities bring valuable racial, cultural, linguistic, and lived experience assets to education. These assets are not “extra.” They are essential to designing schools and systems that truly serve students. As CEI has expanded and grown, it continues to reflect state priorities, including increasing emphasis on student, family/caregiver/guardian, and community engagement; strengthening shared definitions and standards for meaningful engagement; expanding training to build knowledge and skills; and increasing statewide capacity to scale and align the work.

# SECTION 2

## Why Community Engagement Matters

### The Engagement Gap in California

**A**cross the state, there has been a long-standing commitment to involving students, families/caregivers/guardians, and communities in educational decision-making. Policies such as the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) were designed to elevate the voice of educational partners and ensure that decisions about resources and priorities reflect local needs.

Yet as these policies were implemented statewide, a persistent gap became clear.

Many LEAs were expected to engage communities meaningfully, but lacked the structures, shared language, and trust-based relationships needed to do so effectively. Engagement often became compliance-driven, shaped by timelines and reporting requirements rather than authentic partnership.

Meetings were held and feedback was collected but decisions were often already made, or community impact had little tangible impact.

For students and families— particularly from historically marginalized communities— this pattern reinforced a sense of exclusion. Participation felt transactional, not relational. Voice was invited, but power was rarely shared.

### Why Engagement Alone is Not Enough

CEI starts from a critical insight: engagement is a practice that must be learned, supported, and sustained. Meaningful community engagement requires:

- Skills to facilitate and host necessary conversations
- Systems that value lived experience alongside professional expertise
- Time and structures to build trust before decisions are made
- Shared understanding of what “engagement” actually means in practice

Without these conditions, even well-intentioned efforts can unintentionally cause harm and reinforce mistrust, increase frustration, or silence voices that already struggle to be heard.

This is especially true when engagement is treated as something schools do to communities, rather than something schools and communities *do together*.

## Why Capacity-Building Matters

CEI was created in response to this reality. CEI recognizes that schools and communities alike need support, learning spaces, and shared tools to move from surface-level engagement toward authentic partnership.

Rather than prescribing a single model, CEI focuses on building capacity so LEAs and communities can:

- Learn how to engage across differences in power, language, culture, and experience
- Practice shared leadership and collaborative decision-making
- Develop shared definitions and standards for meaningful engagement
- Strengthen alignment between engagement efforts and student outcomes

This approach recognizes that sustainable improvement depends on relationships, trust, and shared responsibility, not just technical solutions.

### CEI's Role

Today, CEI serves as both a learning community and an infrastructure for engagement across the state. It brings together students, families/caregivers/guardians, educators, district and county leaders, and community partners to learn from one another, test new approaches, and apply those lessons locally.

CEI's work demonstrates what is possible when engagement is treated as a core condition for student success. Across diverse contexts, CEI teams have shown that when communities are meaningfully involved early, consistently, and with real influence, schools are better equipped to respond to student needs and sustain change over time.



This Field Guide builds on those lessons. It exists to translate what CEI has learned across California into clear, adaptable guidance grounded in lived experience, so that more communities can move from intention to practice together.

# SECTION 3

## CEI's Evolution and Statewide Role

**C**EI did not emerge fully formed. Its current structure and focus reflect years of learning about what meaningful engagement actually requires, what communities need to participate fully, and what systems must change for partnership to last. This section traces CEI's evolution from its original phase to CEI 2.0, and clarifies how the initiative is organized and supported statewide today.

### What CEI 1.0 Made Possible

The original Community Engagement Initiative (CEI), established through California's 2018 Budget Act, was prompted by an assessment of how effectively Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) engaged education partners in the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) process. While the LCAP requirement prompted this closer examination, CEI 1.0 was not limited to LCAP compliance alone. The findings surfaced broader challenges in community engagement, identifying root causes of ineffective engagement. CEI 1.0 served as a springboard to bring LEAs together to both learn and lead on strengthening authentic, inclusive community engagement practices more broadly, not solely those tied to LCAP development.

Through CEI 1.0, participating LEAs began to:

- Build foundational skills for facilitating inclusive, trust-based conversations
- Move beyond one-way communication toward dialogue and relationship-building
- Center lived experience as a critical form of expertise in decision-making
- Learn alongside peers facing similar challenges across the state



CEI 1.0 created space for experimentation and shared learning. It helped surface key insights that would shape the future of the work: meaningful community engagement is not intuitive or automatic, but a practice that must be intentionally learned, supported, and resourced.

## Introduction to CEI 2.0

As CEI 1.0 progressed, it became clear that deeper investment was needed to sustain and scale what communities were learning. While early efforts strengthened awareness and foundational capacity, teams across the state identified ongoing needs: clearer definitions of meaningful engagement, more consistent learning structures, and stronger alignment across systems.

In response, California expanded and extended the initiative in 2022, launching CEI 2.0 through the 2028-29 school year.

CEI 2.0 builds on the foundation of CEI 1.0 while advancing the work. This phase:

- Maintained and grew an emphasis on student, family/caregiver/guardian, and community leadership, not just participation
- Established shared definitions and clearer standards for meaningful engagement
- Expands training, coaching, and peer learning to build durable skills and confidence
- Strengthened alignment with California's broader Statewide System of Support

Rather than introducing a new model, CEI 2.0 reflects what communities asked for: time, structure, and shared learning to turn engagement into an authentic partnership and sustained practice.



## Leadership and Statewide Alignment

CEI 2.0 is co-led by a statewide partnership that brings complementary expertise in education improvement, research, and community-centered design:

- California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
- San Diego County Office of Education
- Eskolta School Research and Design
- University of San Diego



Together, these partners support CEI’s learning infrastructure and ensure alignment with California’s Statewide System of Support.

A defining feature of CEI is its peer-led learning model. Experienced CEI participants—often referred to as CEI alumni facilitators or Professional Leading and Learning Exchange (PLLX)—play a key role in supporting learning spaces, sharing lessons from practice, and helping teams apply what they are learning in their local contexts. This approach reinforces

a central belief of CEI: capacity is best built through relationships and shared learning, not top-down mandates.

Today, CEI’s statewide role is clear. CEI does not prescribe engagement strategies or enforce compliance. Instead, it strengthens local capacity by convening learning communities and sharing evidence-based strategies and practices that enable schools and communities across California to partner, adapt, and sustain meaningful engagement over time.



# SECTION 4

## How CEI Defines Community Engagement

**C**ommunity engagement is a widely used term, and one that can mean very different things depending on context. For some, it refers to communication or outreach. For others, it means consultation, collaboration, or shared decision-making. Without a shared definition, engagement efforts can feel confusing, inconsistent, or even performative.

CEI began by naming what it means by community engagement, and what it does not. This shared understanding is essential for building trust, aligning expectations, and supporting meaningful collaboration across diverse communities and systems.

### CEI's Definition of Community Engagement

**CEI defines community engagement as:**

*Authentic partnerships between students, families/caregivers/guardians, schools, and communities grounded in equity, built on trust, and nurturing relationships that lead to positive student outcomes.*

This definition reflects a deliberate shift away from engagement as a one-time activity or compliance requirement. Instead, CEI understands engagement as an ongoing practice that evolves over time and requires shared responsibility.

**Several ideas are central to this definition:**

- ✓ Authentic partnerships mean that engagement goes beyond listening sessions or feedback collection. Community members have real opportunities to influence priorities, decisions, and solutions.
- ✓ Grounded in equity means recognizing that not all communities start from the same place, and that engagement must address power, access, language, and historical exclusion.
- ✓ Built on trust and relationships means that engagement happens early, consistently, and with transparency— not only when decisions are underway.
- ✓ A focus on student outcomes means engagement is directly connected to learning, well-being, and long-term success, and not treated as a separate effort.

## How This Definition Was Developed

CEI's current definition of community engagement was not created in isolation. It was shaped through a collaborative, iterative process that built on earlier CEI work and incorporated learning from across the state. Participants in this process included:

- CEI 2.0 lead agencies
- Peer learning partners and alumni facilitators
- LEA teams from multiple cohorts, including students, families/caregivers/guardians, educators, district leaders, and community partners



Through shared learning sessions, reflection, and feedback, partners refined the language to ensure the definition was both aspirational and practical and something teams could recognize themselves in and work toward over time.

## The Essential Conditions for Authentic Partnership

CEI's learning has shown that meaningful community engagement depends on a small set of essential conditions. When these conditions are present, partnerships are more likely to be inclusive, productive, and sustained. These essential conditions include:

### A direct connection to student learning and wellbeing

Engagement is most meaningful when participants can clearly see how their involvement affects students' experiences and outcomes.

### Trust-based relationships

Trust is built through consistency, transparency, and follow-through, especially with communities that have experienced exclusion or harm.

### Collaborative problem-solving

Students, families/caregivers/guardians, educators, and community partners work together to identify challenges, test ideas, and learn from results.

### Interactive and participatory engagement

Engagement is active and hands-on, creating space for dialogue, reflection, and shared leadership rather than passive input.

These conditions help distinguish an authentic partnership from engagement efforts limited to information sharing or consultation.

# SECTION 5

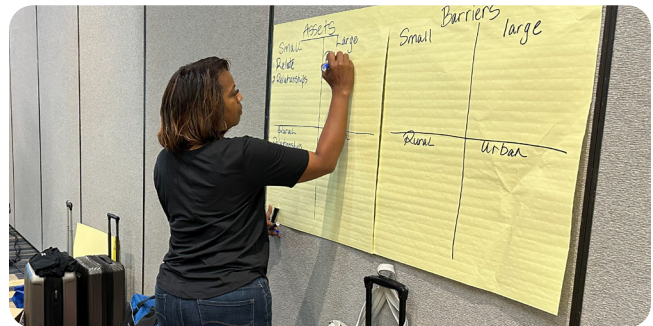
## The CEI Framework

**T**o support teams in putting this definition into practice, CEI uses a framework that brings together multiple research-informed approaches to community partnership and systems change.

The CEI Framework is best understood as layers that work together:

- At the center, the framework emphasizes the core purpose of the work: authentic partnership in service of student outcomes
- The inner layer highlights the conditions within systems that must change, such as policies, practices, and norms, to support partnership

The outer layer focuses on strategies and practices that teams use to build relationships, understand community experiences, and co-create solutions



This framework reflects CEI’s belief that lasting engagement requires both relational work and systems change. Strong relationships alone are not enough if policies and practices remain misaligned. Likewise, technical changes will not stick without trust and shared ownership.

### Why a Shared Definition and Framework Matter

For students, families/guardians/caregivers, and community members, a shared definition clarifies what meaningful engagement should look and feel like and what accountability means when engagement falls short.

For education and systems leaders, it provides a common language and structure to align practice across schools, districts, and counties.

Most importantly, a shared definition and framework help ensure that engagement is not left to chance. They create the conditions for consistency without rigidity, supporting local adaptation while staying grounded in CEI’s values and purpose.

## Overview of the CEI Framework

The CEI Framework is designed to help teams move from intention to practice. It offers a clear way to understand what authentic community partnership requires, how systems must change to support it, and what strategies help bring that change to life.

Rather than presenting engagement as a linear checklist, the CEI framework shows that community engagement is relational, iterative, and deeply connected to systems and structures. The framework is meant to be revisited over time, as relationships deepen and understanding grows.



## The Center: CEI's Core Purpose

At the center of the CE Framework is a clear goal based on CEI's definition of community engagement:

***Authentic partnerships among students, families, educators, and communities.***

This core reminds teams why the work matters. Community engagement is not the end goal in itself. It is a means of improving student learning, well-being, and long-term success. Every strategy, conversation, and decision within CEI is intended to stay connected with this purpose.

## The Inner Layer: What Must Change Within the System

Surrounding the center is the inner layer, which represents the parts of the education system that must evolve for an authentic partnership to be possible. These are not individual behaviors, but system-level conditions that shape how decisions are made and whose voices carry weight.

### The Inner Layer

- The Challenge
- Essential Conditions
- Policy & Program Goals
- Capacity Outcomes

In the CEI Framework, this inner layer highlights conditions such as:

- How engagement is connected to student learning and outcomes
- Whether relationships are trust-based and reciprocal
- How power and decision-making are shared
- Whether engagement is treated as central or peripheral to the work of schools and districts

This focus reflects CEI's understanding that strong relationships cannot be sustained if systems remain misaligned. Even the most committed individuals will struggle to partner authentically if policies, timelines, or expectations undermine trust or exclude community voice.

## The Outer Layer: Strategies for Building Partnership and Change

The outer layer of the CEI framework represents the strategies and practices teams use to address system conditions and strengthen relationships. These strategies are how the work shows up in real life. They include practices such as:

- Connecting in community by building relationships and trust
- Seeing the system and centering community experiences, including lived experience and community-driven data
- Dreaming a shared vision grounded in equity and community priorities
- Developing policies and program goals that reflect shared ownership
- Deciding priorities and goals together, using clear metrics
- Generating and testing change approaches through collaboration and learning
- Aligning policies, practices, and resources so engagement is sustained over time

### The Outer Layer



**CONNECT IN  
COMMUNITY**



**SEE THE SYSTEM**



**DREAM A VISION**



**DECIDE GOALS &  
PRIORITIES**



**GENERATE CHANGE  
APPROACHES**



**ALIGN THE SYSTEM**



**LEARN TOGETHER &  
SCALE CHANGE**

These strategies are not meant to be followed in a strict sequence. Teams may enter the framework at different points depending on their context, relationships, and readiness. What matters is that strategies remain connected to the core purpose and address the system conditions that shape engagement.

## Research Foundations of the CEI Framework

The CEI Framework is a synthesis, not a standalone invention. It draws from established research and adapts it to the specific role CEI plays within California’s education system. Two primary research foundations inform the framework.

### Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

This framework, developed by Dr. Karen Mapp, emphasizes that effective family-school partnerships require capacity-building on both sides—educators and families—supported by relational trust, shared responsibility, and systemic supports. CEI draws from this work in its focus on building skills, confidence, and shared understanding; valuing lived experience alongside professional expertise; and treating partnership as an ongoing practice.<sup>1</sup>



### Participatory Systems Change for Equity

This work, developed by WestED and the California Center for School Climate, informs CEI’s emphasis on centering community experiences in understanding systems; addressing root causes rather than surface symptoms; and engaging those most impacted by inequity as co-designers of solutions.<sup>2</sup>

CEI integrates these approaches to fit the realities of LEAs, county offices of education, and community partners working together across diverse local contexts.

<sup>1</sup> Mapp, K. L., & Bergman, E. (2019). *Dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships (Version 2)*. Retrieved from [www.dualcapacity.org](http://www.dualcapacity.org)

<sup>2</sup> Valdez, A., Cerna, R., & Hashmi, S. (2023). *Participatory systems change for equity: An inquiry guide for child-, youth-, and family-serving agencies*. WestEd, California Center for School Climate & Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety.

## How to Use the CEI Framework

The CEI Framework is not a diagnostic tool or a scorecard. It is a shared reference point. Teams can use the framework to:

- Reflect on where trust and alignment are strong, and where they are fragile
- Identify which system conditions may be limiting authentic partnership
- Choose strategies that respond to community priorities and readiness
- Stay grounded in purpose during moments of tension or uncertainty

For students, families/caregivers/guardians, and community members, the framework clarifies what authentic partnership should look like, and what accountability means when engagement falls short.

For education and system leaders, it offers a way to align efforts across roles, initiatives, and timelines without relying on one-size-fits-all solutions.

With a shared understanding of the CEI Framework, we now turn to how this work unfolds over time. The next section introduces the CEI Learning Journey.



# SECTION 6

## The CEI Learning Journey

The CEI Learning Journey is how communities put the CEI Framework into practice over time. It provides a shared structure for learning, reflection, and action, while remaining flexible enough to adapt to local context, relationships, and priorities.













The journey is designed as a two-year process because meaningful community engagement does not happen overnight. Trust takes time. Shared understanding develops through shared experience. Systems change requires testing, reflection, and adjustment.

Throughout the CEI Learning Journey, students, families/guardians/caregivers, educators, and community partners are at the table together. While roles may differ, all participants are engaged as learners and leaders in the work.

### A ROADMAP TO CHANGE CEI LEARNING JOURNEY



## Overview of the Two-Year Learning Journey

Year 1: Welcome to CEI	Year 2: Continue Journey
 <p><b>Session 1:</b> Connect and Build a Foundation for the Work</p>	 <p><b>Session 1:</b> Revisit Aim Statement &amp; Action Plan</p>
 <p><b>Session 2 &amp; 3:</b> Identify a Problem of Practice and Shared Vision</p>	 <p><b>Session 2 &amp; 3:</b> Test Change Ideas &amp; Align Vision</p>
 <p><b>Session 4:</b> Identify Priorities &amp; Goals Through Root Cause Analysis</p>	 <p><b>Session 4:</b> Co-design Plan to Sustain and Scale</p>
 <p><b>Session 5 &amp; 6:</b> Co-Design a Driver Diagram &amp; Identify Alignment Opportunities</p>	 <p><b>Session 5 &amp; 6:</b> Adapt, Adopt, or Abandon Change Ideas &amp; Continue Planning</p>
 <p><b>Session 7 &amp; 8:</b> Reflect on Year 1 &amp; Plan Change Ideas for Year 2</p>	 <p><b>Session 7 &amp; 8:</b> Finalize Plan for Sustainability</p>
 <p><b>Celebrate Year 1:</b> By the end of Year 1, LEA teams will have an aim statement and driver diagram with a plan to test change ideas in Year 2.</p>	 <p><b>Celebrate Year 2:</b> By the end of Year 2, LEA teams will have a sustainability plan outlining their CEI learning and how that work can spread and scale.</p>

The two-year CEI journey supports LEA teams in strengthening community engagement through continuous learning and improvement. Rather than focusing on quick fixes, the journey helps teams build the skills, relationships, and structures needed for sustained partnership. Across both years, teams:

- Learn and apply the CEI Framework in their local context
- Use community voice and lived experience to guide decisions
- Test ideas, reflect on results, and adapt their approach
- Strengthen alignment between engagement efforts and student outcomes

The two years are intentionally different in focus. Year 1 emphasizes building trust and shared understanding. Year 2 emphasizes strengthening, scaling, and sustaining the work.



## Year 1: Building the Foundation

Year 1 focuses on creating the conditions for authentic partnership. Teams slow down to build relationships, listen deeply, and develop a shared understanding of the challenges they face.

During Year 1, LEA teams typically focus on:

- Building trust with students, families/guardians/caregivers, and community partners
- Clarifying roles, expectations, and shared purpose
- Identifying a Problem of Practice informed by community experiences
- Exploring root causes rather than jumping to solutions
- Developing a shared aim and early ideas for change
- Testing small changes and reflecting on what is learned

This foundational year is especially important for surfacing assumptions, addressing power dynamics, and ensuring engagement is relational and inclusive, not rushed or performative.



## Year 2: Strengthening and Sustaining Change

In Year 2, teams build on the trust and learning established in Year 1. The focus shifts from exploration to application, refinement, and sustainability. During Year 2, teams often:

- Refine their shared goals and measures of success
- Continue testing, adapting, and adopting change ideas
- Use cycles of learning to understand what is working and why
- Strengthen collaboration across roles and departments
- Align engagement practices with district systems, policies, and resources
- Develop a plan for sustaining the work beyond the CEI Learning Journey

By the end of Year 2, teams are better positioned to integrate community engagement into everyday practice, rather than treating it as a separate initiative.

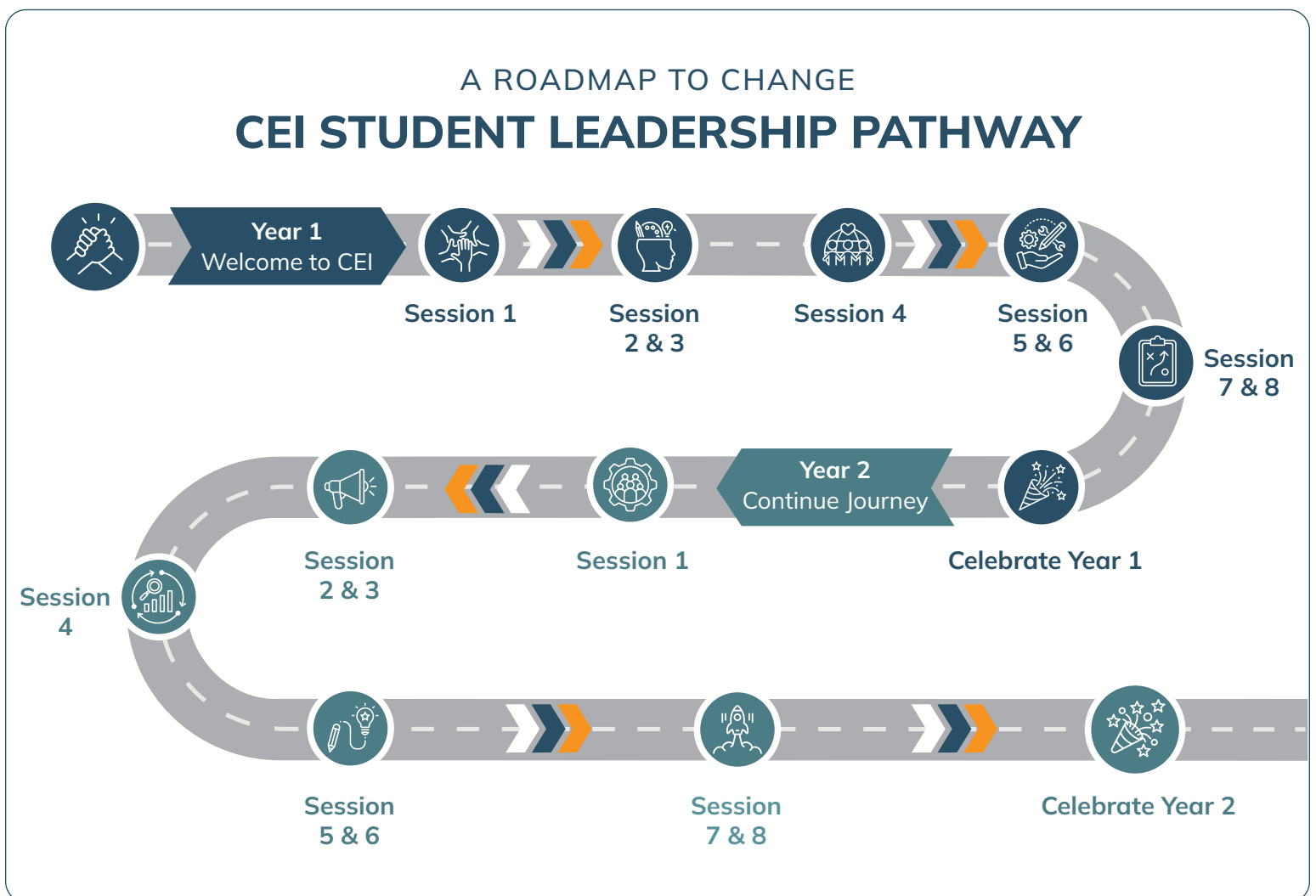
## Student Leadership Pathway

Students are not an add-on to the CEI Learning Journey. They are partners in the work.

Throughout the two-year journey, students participate alongside adults by contributing their perspectives, shaping priorities, and helping guide decisions. At the same time, CEI recognizes that students benefit from additional, dedicated leadership development to support their growth as partners and change-makers.

The Student Leadership Pathway runs alongside the broader Learning Journey and is designed to:

- Support students in developing their leadership identity
- Build skills in collaboration, communication, and analysis
- Help students understand how systems impact their communities
- Prepare students to lead and participate confidently in shared decision-making



### Year 1: Welcome to CEI

-  **Session 1:** Welcome & Connection
-  **Session 2 & 3:** Leading with Purpose
-  **Session 4:** Understanding My Community
-  **Session 5 & 6:** Tools for Change
-  **Session 7 & 8:** Our Path Forward
-  **Celebrate Year 1:** Celebrate your CEI journey so far

### Year 2: Continue Journey

-  **Session 1:** Reconnect & Reflect
-  **Session 2 & 3:** Building a Campaign Rooted in Community
-  **Session 4:** Turning Data into Direction
-  **Session 5 & 6:** Designing for Real Impact
-  **Session 7 & 8:** Youth Voice in Action
-  **Celebrate Year 2:** Celebrate your CEI journey

Across the two years, students deepen their capacity by:

- Exploring community experiences and lived realities
- Learning tools such as root cause analysis and improvement cycles
- Designing and leading community-based campaigns— student-led efforts that raise awareness, build relationships, or drive action on issues that matter locally
- Applying what they learn directly within their CEI teams

By pairing embedded participation with a dedicated leadership pathway, CEI ensures that student voice is not symbolic. Students are supported to lead with confidence, contribute meaningfully, and help shape changes that impact their school and communities.

With a shared framework and a clear learning journey, CEI creates the conditions for an authentic and lasting partnership. The next section brings this work together by highlighting how CEI supports teams in moving from connection to transformation, and how communities can continue the work beyond the CEI Learning Journey.

# SECTION 7

## Moving Forward Together

**T**he Community Engagement Initiative is grounded in a simple belief: when students, families/caregivers/guardians, educators, and communities partner authentically, better outcomes for students are possible. Throughout this Field Guide, we have explored how CEI supports that partnership— by building trust, strengthening capacity, and creating shared structures for learning and leading change.

CEI is not a single program or solution. It is an approach to working differently and prioritizes relationships, shared responsibility, and community wisdom alongside professional expertise. The work is not always easy. It asks participants to navigate differences in power, experience, and perspective. But it is also work that brings people together in a meaningful way and creates the conditions for lasting improvement.

Across California, CEI has demonstrated that community engagement can move beyond

compliance toward authentic partnership. When engagement is rooted in trust, aligned with systems, and connected to student outcomes, it becomes a source of strength.

This Field Guide exists to support that work. This guide is not a checklist, a technical manual, or a prescription for how engagement must happen. Instead, it offers a common language and shared grounding, enabling communities to engage in the work with greater clarity, alignment, and accountability.

### An Invitation

Meaningful community engagement does not happen once. It is built over time through listening, learning, and shared action, and the ongoing use of data to promote continued learning and improvement.

Whether you are encountering CEI for the first time or returning to this work with experience, this Field Guide is intended as a companion. It can support reflection, conversation, and alignment, especially when the work feels complex or uncertain.

The responsibility for engagement does not rest with any single role or group. It is collective. And it begins with a willingness to partner.



### Coming Soon

**This is only the beginning.** The first phase of this field guide serves to introduce the main concepts of CEI and share our work so far. Be on the lookout for Part 2 and Part 3 of the field guide for a deeper dive into existing and future projects to expand community engagement in California.

## Definition of Terms

This glossary is provided to support shared understanding. Terms are defined in plain language and used consistently throughout the guide.

### CEI (Community Engagement Initiative)

A statewide California initiative that supports authentic partnerships between schools and communities to improve student outcomes.

### CEI 1.0 / CEI 2.0

CEI 1.0 refers to the initiative's original phase, established in 2018, focused on strengthening engagement in the LCAP process. CEI 2.0 refers to the expanded phase that began in 2022, with a deeper emphasis on leadership, capacity-building, and statewide alignment.

### COE (County Office of Education)

A regional education agency that supports school districts and provides services aligned with state priorities.

### Community-Based Campaigns

Student- or community-led efforts to raise awareness, build relationships, or drive action on issues identified through community engagement.

### Community Engagement

Authentic partnerships between students, families/caregivers/guardians, schools, and communities—grounded in equity, built on trust and nurturing relationships—that lead to positive student outcomes.

### LEA (Local Educational Agency)

A school district, charter school, or county office of education responsible for providing educational services.

### LCFF (Local Control Funding Formula)

California's school funding system, designed to provide greater flexibility and equity by directing resources based on student need.

### LCAP (Local Control and Accountability Plan)

A planning tool required of LEAs that outlines goals, actions, and expenditures, with input from educational partners.

### Peer Leading and Learning Exchange (PLLX)

A group of experienced team members from previous cohorts of the CEI that shares stories of successes, strategies to overcome barriers, and mentor districts/LEAs in the CEI.

### Student Leadership Pathway

A component of the CEI Learning Journey that supports students in developing leadership skills and participating meaningfully in shared decision-making.

### Statewide System of Support

California's coordinated system of assistance designed to help LEAs improve outcomes through capacity-building and collaboration.