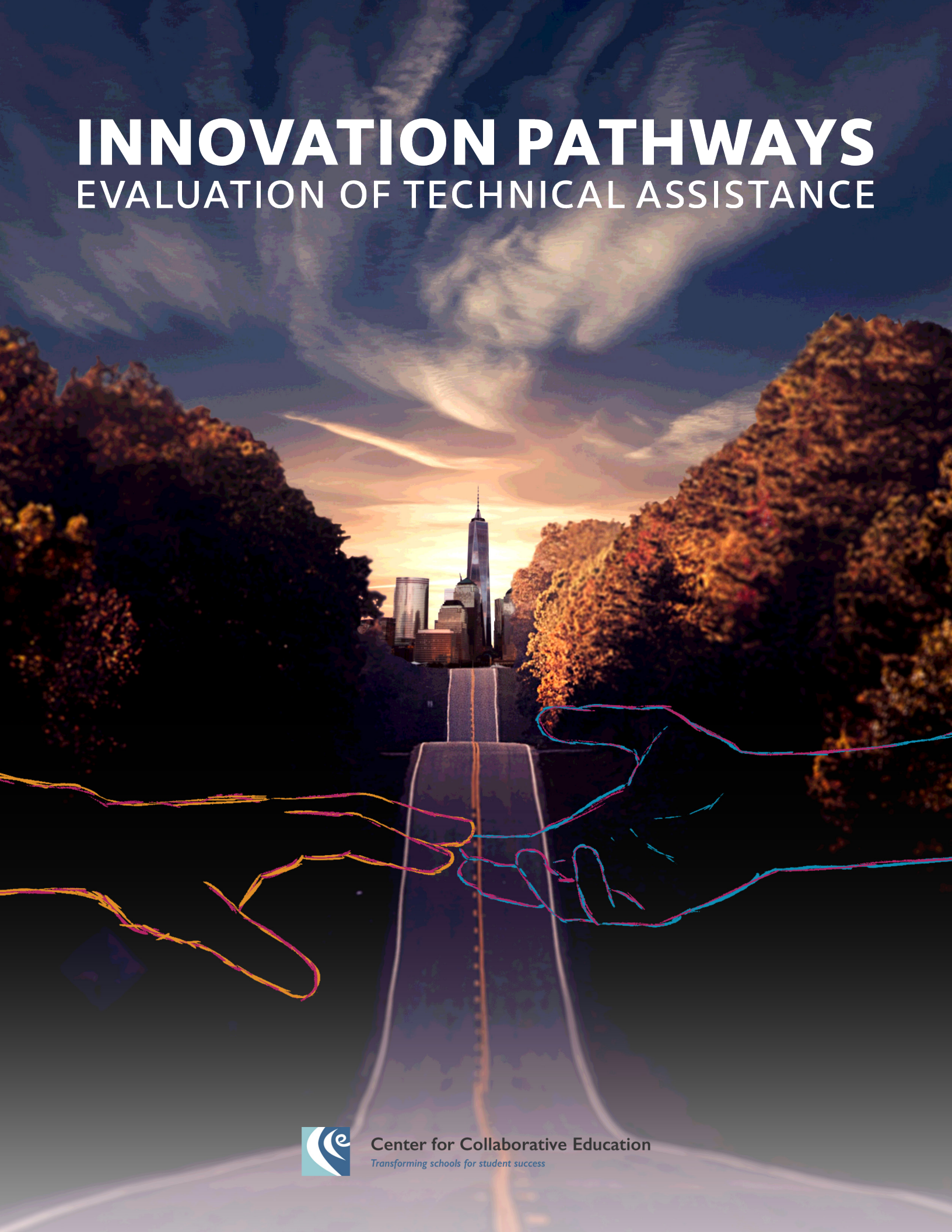


INNOVATION PATHWAYS

EVALUATION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



Center for Collaborative Education
Transforming schools for student success



Center for Collaborative Education

Transforming schools for student success

INNOVATION PATHWAYS

EVALUATION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, 2019 – 2022 **JANUARY 2023**

Over the past three years, the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) has had the privilege to support the Massachusetts Innovation Pathways initiative by providing technical assistance to educators and working closely with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) as thought partners. Over this time, CCE has supported the development of the Innovation Pathways Community of Practice, forging relationships with school and district leaders who are designing and implementing pathway programs, while facilitating structures for educators and industry partners to collaborate and learn from one another. Through the provided technical assistance, CCE has developed an acute awareness of the assets and challenges of Innovation Pathways program design and implementation, as well as a deep understanding of the robust pathway options and opportunities across the Commonwealth. As a result, over the past three years, CCE has successfully supported the implementation of pathways at over 40 schools, each responsive to their unique context.

This report provides an overview of the technical assistance provided by CCE, shares how CCE adapted the technical assistance to a shifting context, responded to emergent needs, and ultimately how educators across the state were extremely satisfied with the quality of the technical assistance and professional learning provided over the past three years.

CCE looks forward to a continued collaborative and productive working relationship with DESE as more schools join the Innovation Pathways network.



INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE INNOVATION PATHWAYS?

Massachusetts Innovation Pathways is a program of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) created through the High Quality College and Career Pathways initiative. Innovation Pathways are structures within Massachusetts high schools that are designed to connect students to learning in in-demand regional and statewide industry sectors, including Advanced Manufacturing, Business and Finance, Environmental and Life Sciences, Healthcare and Social Assistance, and Information.

Innovation Pathways programs are rooted in five guiding principles: Equitable Access, Guided Academic Pathways, Enhanced Student Support, Connection to Career, and Effective Partnerships. To achieve these principles, schools leverage strong partnerships with employers to provide students with career awareness and work-based learning experiences. In a designated Innovation Pathway, students participate in a defined series of courses and experiences which connect student learning to a broadly defined industry sector and guide students to relevant postsecondary education and training that lead to opportunities for meaningful careers in an industry sector. To ensure that pathway programs are providing students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences relevant to current needs in a defined sector, Innovation Pathways designees are required to partner with their local MassHire Workforce Board. Innovation Pathways designation is available to all local education agencies in Massachusetts, including public charter schools. Secondary schools from all regions in the Commonwealth have received Innovation Pathways designation.

To ensure that secondary schools have strong and sustainable pathways, DESE created a two-part application process which occurs over the course of a school year. In Part A, due in the fall, schools submit a formal application, which consists of responses and plans for addressing the five guiding principles. Successful Part A applicants move on to the Part B submission, due in late winter, where they provide details to demonstrate

evidence of effective planning and implementation. DESE reviews applications and confers designation in early spring. All designees are part of the Innovation Pathways Community of Practice, participating in professional learning and technical assistance events, providing guidance and support to new applicants, and learning about ways to continually improve the implementation of their pathway program(s).

Beginning in December 2019, CCE supported Innovation Pathways by providing technical assistance for the entire Innovation Pathways Community of Practice, supporting high schools as they prepare for application as well as assisting existing designees with program implementation. This report provides an overview of the technical assistance provided by CCE, shares how the technical assistance evolved in response to emergent needs, and discusses the efficacy of the technical assistance provided according to the members of the Innovation Pathways Community of Practice. The report concludes with recommendations for future technical assistance for the Innovation Pathways initiative. The findings are based on summative end-of-year surveys, exit surveys from Innovation Pathways events, administrative data, and web analytics.



There has been an impressive amount of support and education provided for Innovation Pathways. Major strengths include knowledge/resources as well as the bringing together of various schools/districts at different points in the process. It has made for engaging conversations and takeaways.

– Survey Respondent

This evaluation found that through a strong working partnership with DESE, CCE was able to provide high-quality and responsive technical assistance and professional learning opportunities for both potential applicants and designees. CCE led and facilitated a variety of events tailored to support the ongoing needs, challenges, and evolution of application and program implementation across the Innovation Pathways network. In response to shifting needs stemming from the pandemic and other needs of the network, CCE adapted the technical assistance and added new aspects (e.g., professional learning communities and peer ambassadors) while still imparting critical information for applicants and designees. Through a multitude of modalities, CCE has offered growth, expertise, and differentiated support to the Community of Practice, including both fully virtual and in-person technical assistance. Throughout the three years, members overwhelmingly found the technical assistance to be high quality, responsive, and relevant. Through this support, 42 schools were successfully awarded Innovation Pathways designation for a total of 83 pathways. Additionally, CCE assisted over 50 designees with the implementation of their programs. In 2022, DESE awarded CCE a contract to continue technical assistance for the next three years, 2022 – 2025.

FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES
EQUITABLE ACCESS
GUIDED ACADEMIC PATHWAYS
ENHANCED STUDENT SUPPORT
CONNECTION TO CAREER
EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

A black and white photograph of a road sign. The sign is rectangular with rounded corners and a white background with black text. It is mounted on two metal posts. The background of the photo shows a road stretching into the distance with trees and hills in the background.



OVERVIEW OF CCE'S TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

WHAT DID CCE DO OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS?

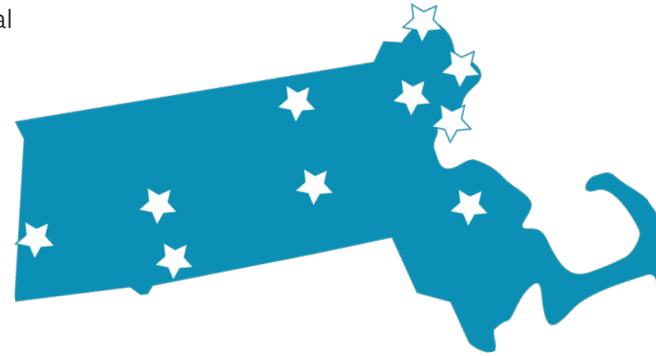
Beginning in December 2019, CCE became the technical assistance provider for DESE's Innovation Pathways initiative. CCE codesigned and implemented the technical assistance with DESE, primarily working with Jennifer Gwatkin, Innovation Pathways Lead in the Office for College, Career and Technical Education. The overarching goals of the technical assistance were to support schools as they apply for Innovation Pathways designation and to improve pathways implementation for existing designees. Additionally, CCE sought to use the technical assistance as a way to build connections and strengthen the Innovation Pathways Community of Practice, which includes educators from schools seeking information about Innovation Pathways, educators from schools applying for designation, and designees. CCE also worked with the larger Innovation Pathways network, which comprises the Community of Practice as well as industry and state partners including the MassHire Workforce Board, regional workforce development organizations, workforce employers, DESE and other state agency staff, and other partners interested in the success of Innovation Pathways. To serve this large and interconnected network, CCE and DESE provided a wide range of technical assistance activities, described below.

MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Design Institute Workshops: CCE staff members led nine half-day institutes for design teams for both applicants and designees. CCE and DESE lead mutually agreed upon workshop topics including preparing for Part A and Part B submissions (applicants only), designing for equity, creating student-centered pathways, student advising, recruitment, marketing, and family engagement.

Design Webinars: CCE held twelve interactive webinars focused on identified areas of common need among designees. Webinars were also open to applicants seeking to learn more about the implementation of programs. Topics included supporting mentor and student relationships, the Innovation Pathways Toolkit (see below), supporting successful remote work-based learning, ensuring pathway access for students with disabilities and English learners, pathway program evaluation and self-assessment, and developing and sustaining employer partnerships.

Network Site Visits and Program Spotlights: To provide potential applicants and designees with examples of successful pathways and pathway elements, CCE organized seven site visits / virtual program spotlights. The site visits / virtual program spotlights featured a variety of school types, perspectives, and focus areas. These highlighted programs in Berkshire Hills, Brockton, Burlington, Danvers, Everett, Fitchburg, Haverhill, Northampton, West Springfield, and Worcester with a focus on numerous aspects including MassHire partnerships, approaches to staffing, student experiences, co-designing programs with students, and data use for program improvement.



Prospective Applicant Open Workshop: In June of each year, CCE held a workshop that was open to any prospective applicants for the following year's cohort.

Category	Number of Events	Average Attendance
Design Institute Workshop	9	34
Design Webinar	12	47
Site Visit / Program Spotlight	7	32
Applicant Open Workshop	3	49
Total	32	40

SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): Starting in the 2020 – 2021 school year, CCE created and facilitated PLCs to support schools with their applications and designees with early implementation of pathway programs. Overall, 58 network members participated in the PLCs. In 2020 – 2021, 42 educators participated in 15 PLC meetings with participation ranging from 1 to 8 PLC meetings. In 2021 – 2022, 24 educators participated in 5 PLC meetings with participation ranging from 1 to 5 PLC meetings. (See below for more discussion of the evolution of the Innovation Pathways PLCs).

Innovation Pathways Toolkit: DESE and CCE developed an [Innovation Pathways Toolkit](#), a compilation of resources, curated to support Massachusetts schools, MassHire Workforce Boards, and employers in the development and implementation of Innovation Pathways.¹ The toolkit was designed to be iterative and adaptive, and CCE has continually updated and refined it. According to end-of-year surveys, the use of the toolkit increased each year of CCE's involvement. In 2020, 14 percent of participants said they used at least one tool from the toolkit, compared with 31 percent in 2021 and 46 percent in 2022. Additionally, the Toolkit was the most frequently visited page on the technical assistance website.

Innovation Pathways Technical Assistance Website: CCE maintained and continually updated a technical assistance website which provided key resources for applicants and designees. From May 2020 to July 2022, over 1,300 users accessed the technical assistance site. Within the site, the Innovation Pathways Toolkit was the most visited page on the website.

Tier 2 Support: In all three years of the partnership, CCE's support for Innovation Pathways included a multitiered approach: Tier 1 activities are for the general pool of potential applicants and designees, and Tier 2 support is for high-needs districts. High-needs districts were determined in partnership with DESE. Tier 2 activities included shorter small-group workshops to supplement Design Institute Workshops, virtual application support, office hours, and one-on-one intake meetings as needed.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Thought Partnership and Leadership Support Meetings with DESE: CCE met bimonthly with DESE to schedule events, determine content, address emerging challenges or needs from applicants and designees, and review exit surveys and other forms of feedback.

End-of-Year Survey: At the end of each school year, CCE administered a summative survey to all school partners pursuing Innovation Pathways designation and current designees. The information from the end-of-year survey was used to evaluate the efficacy of the technical assistance, help refine the Innovation Pathways model, and determine content for the upcoming school year. Over 100 educators completed the surveys.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE QUICK FACTS

CCE ORGANIZED AND FACILITATED

32

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EVENTS
FROM DECEMBER 2019
THROUGH JUNE 2022

THERE WAS AN AVERAGE OF

40

SCHOOL- OR DISTRICT-BASED
EDUCATORS PER EVENT

IN THREE YEARS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

462
EDUCATORS

FROM

108
DISTRICTS

AND

124
SCHOOLS

ATTENDED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EVENTS

IN THE LAST TWO YEARS CCE ORGANIZED

20
PROFESSIONAL
LEARNING COMMUNITIES

ATTENDED BY

58
TOTAL
EDUCATORS

WHEN INCLUDING
NETWORK PARTNERS*

640

PEOPLE ATTENDED
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EVENTS

* E.G., MASSHIRE, BOSTON PIC, DESE,
AND OTHER STATE AGENCY STAFF

>1,300

PEOPLE VISITED THE
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WEBSITE

THE INNOVATION PATHWAYS
TOOLKIT WAS THE MOST
FREQUENTLY VISITED PAGE

WITH SUPPORT FROM CCE

42
SCHOOLS RECEIVED
INNOVATION PATHWAYS
DESIGNATION

FOR A TOTAL OF

83
TOTAL
PATHWAY PROGRAMS



EVOLUTION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Built into CCE's planning for technical assistance was the assumption that the needs, interests, and challenges of Innovation Pathways designees would change over time, particularly given the shifting context in which schools were working throughout the pandemic. To this end, CCE worked closely with DESE to determine technical assistance dates during the summer prior to each school year. Additionally, CCE intentionally planned webinar and workshop topics for the first half of each school year only, while content for the latter half of the year was determined based on feedback from participants, emerging questions and challenges of the network, and interest in or attendance of events during the first half of the school year. CCE administered an exit survey after every technical assistance and professional learning event, reviewed the survey results with the DESE lead, and modified content or facilitation approaches as necessary.

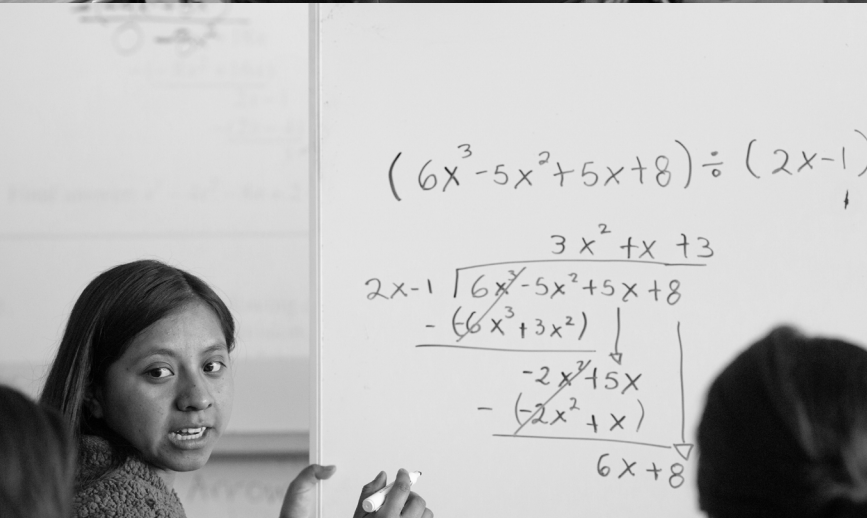
While CCE's technical assistance was designed to be responsive and adaptive from the outset of the partnership, the COVID-19 pandemic required large-scale modification of the technical assistance approach and the creation of new structures to support schools. Starting in March 2020, all events shifted from in person to virtual. While the virtual events allowed applicants and designees to participate fully in the technical assistance events throughout the pandemic, members shared that the virtual settings made it challenging to network and authentically connect with leaders from other districts and from partner organizations. In response to this feedback, CCE and DESE made a conscious effort to modify technical event structures and timing to allow time and space for participants to connect with one another. Specifically, the planning team played with the "formula" in the virtual environment, including

- breakout rooms with guiding questions;
- use of breakout rooms for more informal discussions;
- use of breakout room groupings across roles, school type, pathway sector and length of time in the network;

- offering “coffee shop breaks”; and
- open social time immediately following events.

In addition to modifying and adapting the existing events, CCE also created new structures to support schools. Beginning in the 2020 – 2021 school year, CCE introduced a PLC structure to foster a collaborative and reflective space for the Innovation Pathways Community of Practice. During the 2020 – 2021 school year, CCE organized two PLCs each meeting on a monthly basis: one for implementing schools and one for new applicants. In response to feedback from PLC participants at the end of the 2020 – 2021 school year, CCE offered one combined PLC that included both implementing schools and new applicants so that all could learn from one another in the 2021–2022 school year. In the combined PLC, CCE implemented a variety of ways to break up into smaller discussion groups, depending on the PLC topic. As shared previously, 58 network members participated in the PLCs: 42 educators in 2020 – 2021 and 24 in 2021 – 2022.

In their feedback to CCE in the first two years of the technical assistance, educators often expressed their desire for one-on-one conversations with members from other schools. But, they said, they often did not know how to find the “right” peers to talk with. In response, CCE (1) developed a network-wide contact list to make connection easier, and (2) created the [Peer Ambassador program](#) for a more formal connection.² Six individuals across the Innovation Pathways network were awarded stipends for the Peer Ambassador role using funds repurposed after the full shift to virtual events (i.e., there were no longer venue rental or food costs associated with the meetings). In addition to their support of other educators within the network, Peer Ambassadors are also well poised to share their experiences as a peer point of contact with prospective Innovation Pathways members.



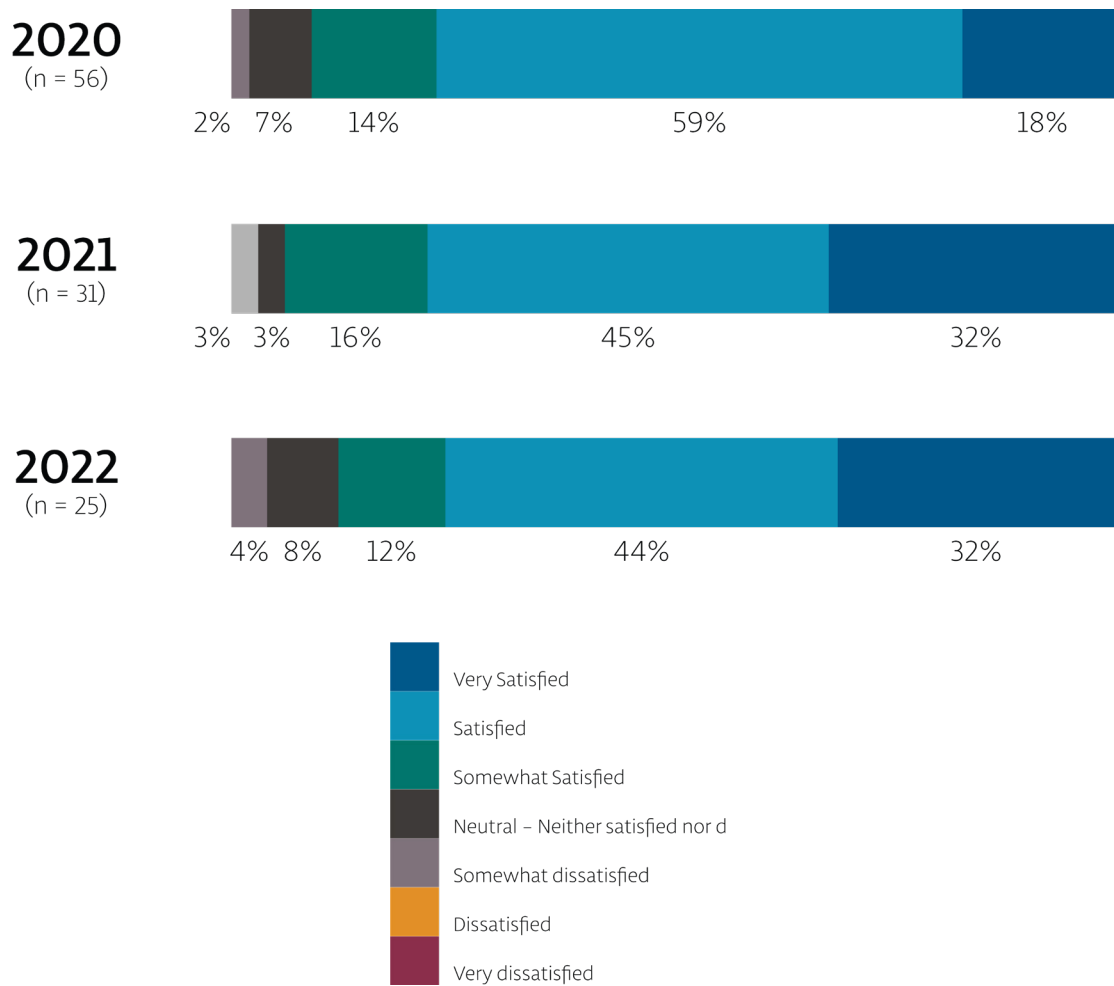


TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE— THE PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

SATISFACTION WITH CCE'S TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

According to both the summative end-of-year surveys and event exit surveys, members of the Innovation Pathways network were extremely satisfied with the technical assistance and professional learning provided by CCE. According to exit surveys from all 32 events over three years, on average respondents “strongly agreed” that they were satisfied with the quality of the sessions and rated every session as “very good.” Similarly, in the end-of-year surveys, participants on average said they were satisfied with the professional learning and technical assistance activities, with over three-quarters each year saying they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” (see Figure 1 below). Finally, when asked if the professional learning/ technical assistance had met their goals, 76 percent said yes, 19 percent said “somewhat,” and only 4 percent said “no.”

Figure 1. Please indicate your overall level of satisfaction with the state-sponsored professional learning / technical assistance activities you participated in this past school year?



STRENGTHS OF THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Well-organized and relevant events: According to survey results, across events and years, participants found the technical assistance and professional learning events to be engaging, relevant and useful to their needs, appropriate in length, and, importantly, a valuable use of time. Further, participants found the facilitators to be well organized, warm, and responsive to their needs, and indicated that the presenters at all events were knowledgeable about the subject matter (see Figure 2). Network members were particularly appreciative of the events where they were able to hear directly from students about their experiences in Innovation Pathways programs.

Figure 2. Thinking about ALL of the professional learning / technical assistance activities you participated in this school year, please indicate the extent to which you either agree or disagree with the following statements:



Learning from other schools: According to educators, one of the most common goals for participating in technical assistance and professional learning activities was to learn from other applicants and designees. Overwhelmingly, respondents shared that the technical assistance events and other structures were successful in enabling shared learning among educators. For instance, in the 2022 end-of-year survey, respondents “strongly agreed” that the activities exposed them to ideas and practices from other schools, districts, and designees. Members shared that this learning happened in multiple ways, most notably in the PLCs (e.g., “Learning from other districts within the PLC was a huge asset during this [implementation] process.”) and in small break-out rooms during workshops and webinars. Furthermore, survey respondents felt as though the use of breakout rooms improved greatly over the course of the three years, demonstrating the success of modifying the “formula” of the virtual events.

Networking: Another strength of the technical assistance was facilitating connections to educators in similar roles, as well as people at DESE, CCE, MassHire, and employers. To this end, the technical assistance was successful in helping strengthen a community of practice where schools are supporting one another, offering direct help, and facilitating connections to critical partners. Networking was particularly beneficial for schools seeking information about whether to apply for designation and for applicants, especially helping schools connect with regional MassHire staff.



Networking with other schools involved in IP was hugely helpful to see what is working and not working with them to try to reshape any issues we are having – partnership with MassHire, and training on capstone development.

– Survey Respondent

Relevant and helpful information and resources: Participants found the resources and information to be extremely relevant and helpful to the application and implementation stages. Network members especially found the Innovation Pathways Toolkit to be a helpful tool.



The toolkit has been a great point of reference in developing a highly functioning IP.”

– Survey Respondent

Responsive and personalized support: Educators shared how the CCE team and the DESE lead were very responsive to their needs, responding to questions and concerns at events and in other formats. A prime example of the adaptive and responsive support provided by CCE were the office hours.



The office hours were great where we could come with direct questions to get direction and insight. This can be a confusing process with a lot of moving parts so having support of this nature took a lot of the guesswork out of it.

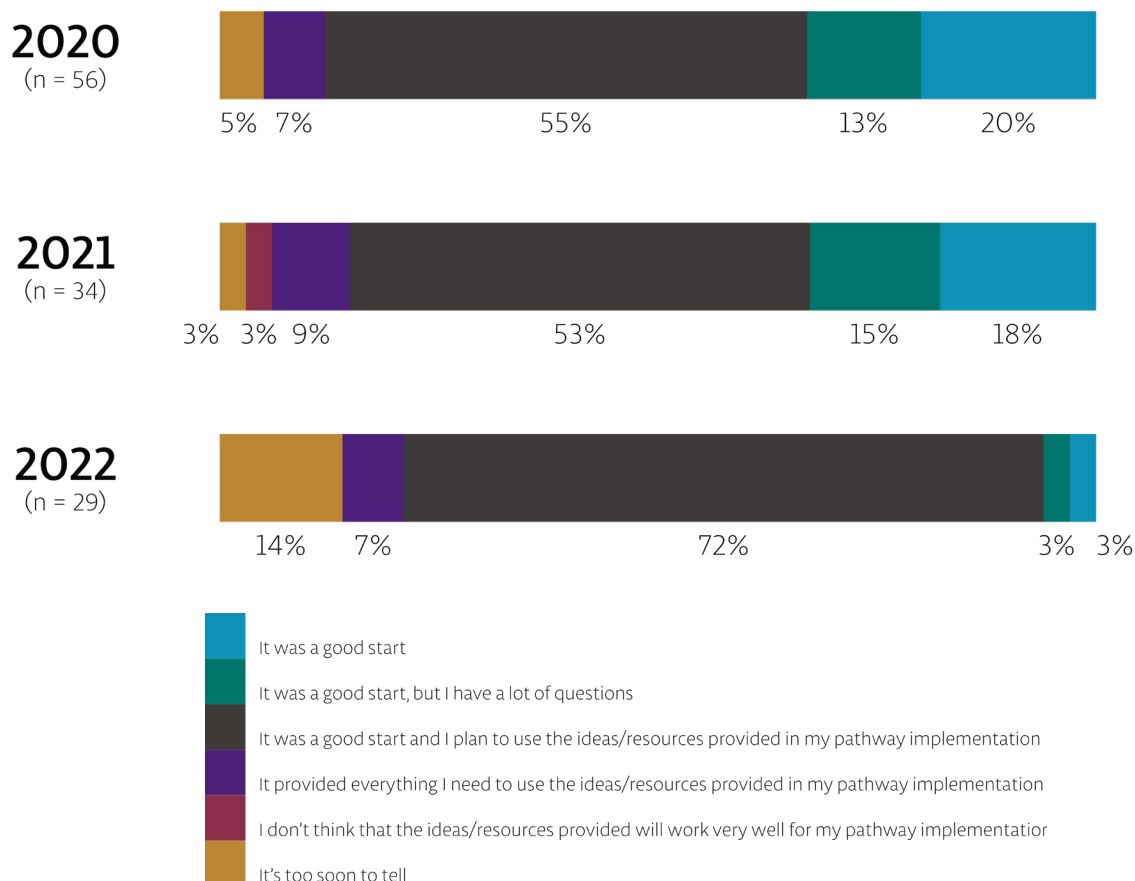
– Survey Respondent

PARTICIPANTS PREPAREDNESS FOR APPLICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

A primary goal of the technical assistance and professional learning was getting schools to successfully apply for Innovation Pathways designation and to help designees with their early implementation. To this end, CCE was highly successful. From 2020 to 2022, CCE supported over 40 schools as they successfully submitted Part A and Part B applications. Further, all schools that had their Part A application approved in the 2021 – 2022 school year went on to successfully submit a Part B application. Over the three years, 42 schools received designation for a total of 83 pathways programs. According to one school leader, the technical assistance was integral to their success: “I would not have been able to write the proposal without the two years of PLC and technical assistance.”

Similarly, designees felt that participating in the technical assistance and professional learning provided vital information about many aspects of program implementation including virtual work-based learning, student internships, improving equitable access to pathways especially for students with disabilities and English learners, and many other topics. According to the end-of-year surveys, the majority of respondents felt that the technical assistance was a good start and provided information that they plan to use in their programs, while a small group (almost 10 percent) found that the technical assistance provided everything they needed for their program implementation (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Thinking about this school year, which of the following statements best describes the usefulness of the professional learning / technical assistance provided in supporting your work with Innovation Pathways?





RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Making information actionable: CCE’s technical assistance was highly successful at both helping applicants receive Innovation Pathways designation and providing designees with critical information and tools for implementation. The one aspect of the technical assistance that had slightly lower mean responses was participants leaving activities with a clear understanding of how to apply what was learned to their work. Therefore, technical assistance should ensure that programs that are beyond early implementation stages have resources and structures to support their ongoing implementation and program improvement.

Continued differentiated support: Participants shared that they find the events that are for the entire Community of Practice very helpful especially for networking, but they also would like further differentiated support. For instance, one educator suggested: “[I] would like to see a few opportunities for PLCs/workshops to be around Year 3+, Year 2 – 3, Year 0 – 1 planning, design, implementation, adjustment topics.” This type of differentiated support and events could help with the unique needs at each stage of implementation.

Virtual versus in-person events: Participants would like a mixture of in-person and virtual events. The virtual events enable greater participation, but many educators would like a mixture of modalities.

This report was written by Cali Cornell and Michael Berardino of the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) with support from Allison Plesz and Eve Goldberg at CCE and Jennifer Gwatkin from DESE. Data for the report was collected over three years with the additional help of former staff at CCE including Andresse St. Rose, Diana Lebeaux, Laura Tota. We are grateful to the all of the educators within the Innovation Pathways network who so graciously provided thoughtful feedback on all of the evaluation surveys over the past three years. Without their insights, this report would not be possible.

Photo Acknowledgments

Page 1: Toa Heftiba, Matt Duncan, Nirzar Pangarkar

Page 4: Allison Shelley / The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

Page 10: Allison Shelley / The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

Page 11: Allison Shelley / The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages + Allison Shelley for EDUimages

Page 12: Allison Shelley for EDUimages

Page 17: Allison Shelley / The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

Pages 18 – 19: Allison Shelley / The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

Endnotes

1. Innovation Pathway Toolkit: <https://sites.google.com/ccebos.org/innovationpathways/toolkit>

2. Peer Ambassador Program: <https://sites.google.com/ccebos.org/innovationpathways/peer-ambassadors>







Center for Collaborative Education

Transforming schools for student success