

Can Mandated Participatory Planning Promote Collective Learning? Evidence from School Improvement Planning Processes

Jordyn E. Green
Ph.D. Candidate
University of Nevada, Reno
jordyng@unr.edu

Abstract

Mandated participatory planning (MPP) is a policy implementation approach that requires the development of implementation plans at subnational levels through on-going engagement with local stakeholders (Newig & Koontz, 2014). MPP is expected to promote collective policy learning through two interrelated mechanisms: 1) participatory governance that facilitates the flow of information to improve vertical and horizontal coordination; and 2) iterative planning cycles that require participants to regularly monitor, evaluate, and redesign plans as they accumulate information and evidence about the effectiveness of policies and programs. This study examines how MPP fosters collective learning processes through an analysis of the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in two U.S. states. Under ESSA, the lowest performing schools in each state must participate in school improvement processes using an MPP approach. These processes engage state education agencies, school districts, schools, and other local stakeholders in the collaboratively development and implementation of school improvement plans. Drawing on data collected through content analysis of policies and semi-structured interviews with state personnel, preliminary findings indicate that MPP primarily creates vertical linkages that increase information flows up and down levels of governance.

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Introduction

In recent years, policy implementation approaches across domains have moved away from a reliance on regulatory instruments (i.e., technical standards) towards procedural requirements (Knill & Lenschow, 2000). One example of this trend is the growing use of a policy implementation approach known as mandated participatory planning (MPP). MPP integrates theories of multilevel governance, participatory governance, and nested policy cycles, and it requires the collaborative formation of implementation plans at subnational levels (Newig & Koontz, 2014). During MPP processes, administrators at multiple levels of governance are required to engage local stakeholders in policy planning cycles, in which they assess the current conditions using local data, define the policy problem, specify goals and subgoals, develop concrete measures to monitor performance, and formulate explicit implementation plans. In doing so, stakeholders share their perspectives, deliberate on issues, collectively analyze and generate information, and build consensus (Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012; Margerum, 2011). Following the implementation of these plans, administrators conduct systematic evaluation to adapt the problem definition and revise the plan with stakeholders. Importantly, these iterative policy planning cycles give local administrators the authority to make policy design decisions during implementation processes.

When done well, MPP is expected to promote collective policy learning. Policy learning is a process of updating beliefs and altering behavior based on experiences or observation (Hecló, 1974; Radaelli, 2009; Sabatier, 1988). During policy implementation, policy actors may learn by analyzing and responding to feedback from observation, evaluation, and assessment (Heikkilä & Gerlak, 2013; Rose, 1991). This can result in changes that improve the design and delivery of existing policies; the assignment and elaboration of actor roles and responsibilities; the coordination of functions across individuals, organizations, and levels of governance; and the elaboration of effective strategies, tasks, and procedures (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Bennett & Howlett, 1992; Hecló, 1974; May, 1992; Sabatier, 1988). Policy learning is expected to enhance governmental capacity to adapt to feedback and complex environmental conditions, increase system adaptability and resilience, and improve system outcomes (Folke, Hahn, & Olsson, 2005).

While the importance of policy learning has been widely recognized and accepted, scholars encounter critical theoretical challenges when studying learning in different policy contexts. One challenge is that the process of learning within groups – termed *collective* policy learning (Heikkilä & Gerlak, 2013) – has not been clearly defined and operationalized (Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Hager & Johnsson, 2012). Defining the learning process and understanding the mechanisms that drive the emergence of its different phases are critical for theorizing about the outcomes of learning. A second challenge is developing an understanding of the contextual factors that might foster or inhibit learning in different policy settings (Heikkilä & Gerlak, 2013). Identifying these factors and how they interact within different collective settings is essential for understanding learning processes, comparing learning across different settings, and providing practical guidance for developing policy processes that foster learning.

In response to these challenges, Heikkilä and Gerlak (2013) developed a theoretically grounded conceptual framework to help scholars define, measure, and understand policy learning in diverse collective settings. The Collective Learning Framework (CLF) conceptualizes learning as both a collective learning process and the resulting collective learning products and describes contextual factors that may promote or inhibit collective learning (see figure 1). The CLF thus provides a tool for operationalizing the collective learning process, examining the dynamic

interaction of contextual factors that might promote or constrain collective learning, and analyzing how differences in institutional structure impact collective learning. However, there is a need to further define and operationalize the theoretical components of collective learning, to provide evidence of these components in practice, and to understand the factors that affect collective learning in different policy settings (Ernst, 2019; Koebele, 2019; Koontz, 2014; Newig et al., 2019). Specifically, there is a need to understand how learning occurs at multiple levels in collective settings and to understand how these levels interact to create social processes that produce and share knowledge (den Boer, Dieperink, & Mukhtarov, 2019; Hager & Johnsson, 2012).

This article advances scholarship on collective learning by empirically applying the CLF to understand collective learning during school improvement processes in two U.S. states. School improvement processes are required under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which is the primary federal law that governs K-12 education in the United States. During school improvement processes, State Education Agencies (SEAs) are required to engage local stakeholders in the collaborative development and implementation of school improvement plans using research-based evidence and school performance data. Guided by the CLF, this study investigates the following research questions:

1. How does the collective learning process unfold in policy settings characterized by multilevel governance?
2. How does the statewide institutional structure (defined as the degree of centralization of the process) influence the collective learning process?

This paper proceeds as follows. I begin by introducing the CLF and the extant research on learning processes in collective policy settings. Next, I describe the conceptual framework that will be used to measure the institutional structure of multilevel governance systems, which may influence collective learning processes. Then, I describe the research context and the research design, including a description of the case selection methodology and the data collection methods. Finally, the findings are presented, followed by a discussion of collective learning during MPP processes.

Collective Learning Framework

Collective Learning

According to the CLF, collective learning is comprised of two distinct concepts (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013): the collective learning process and collective learning products. The collective learning process, on which this study focuses, consists of three interdependent and potentially overlapping subprocesses: 1) the acquisition of information, 2) the translation of information, and 3) the dissemination of information across the collective.

The information acquisition phase describes the process through which individuals within the collective obtain information. Information can be acquired through several mechanisms and can originate internally from within the collective, externally from outside of the collective, or from related groups (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013). Information can be acquired internally through the experiences of individuals and groups within the collective (Hecllo, 1974). To do this, individuals may monitor and evaluate the outcomes of previous policy decisions through trial and error and self-assessment (Lindblom, 1959; Walters & Holling, 1990). Information can also be acquired internally through dialogue and deliberation among members of the collective (Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999; Weber, 2009), which exposes individual actors to diverse sources of knowledge emerging from individuals' different perspectives, distinct values, and a range of ideas about possible solutions (Levesque, Calhoun, Bell, & Johnson, 2017;

Siddiki, Leach, & Kim, 2017). Information can be obtained from external sources, including epistemic communities of scientists and researchers from the associated technical domain (Dixon, 1999; Haas, 1992). Finally, information can be acquired from related groups through observations of the actions of peers to evaluate the effectiveness of policy alternatives (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Rose, 1991).

The information translation phase describes the process through which individuals within the collective understand, interpret, and apply information. Information can be translated to usable knowledge through several different mechanisms, including collective analysis, evaluation, and reflection (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013). Individuals may also solicit expert sources of knowledge to aid in information interpretation and application. These mechanisms allow individuals to share their own interpretation of information while contemplating alternative interpretations from other individuals within the collective (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999; Lejano & Ingram, 2009). Information is filtered through group dialogue and deliberation where it is translated into collective knowledge that can be used to inform group decision-making (Koontz, 2014).

The information dissemination phase describes the process through which information is transferred and assimilated across the collective to become shared knowledge. Information can be disseminated through a variety of mechanisms, including through shared routines and shared communications (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013). Shared routines are ordered patterns of behavior that are adopted by individuals in groups. Learning at the individual level can be embedded in shared routines, allowing for the relatively rapid adoption of information across the collective (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Feldman, 2000). Shared communications involve both formal and informal venues where individuals discuss information and share their own knowledge, experiences, and perspectives (Ernst, 2019; Muro & Jeffrey, 2012; Newig, Jager, Kochskämper, & Challies, 2019). Shared communication venues include formal meetings, newsletters, and conferences as well as informal conversations, including phone calls, email messages, and “water cooler” conversations.

Collective learning products can emerge from collective learning processes and include cognitive changes shared across individuals of the collective and behavioral changes across the collective group (Gerlak & Heikkila, 2011). Cognitive learning products are new, modified, or reinforced values, beliefs, and ideas about the policy problem, its potential solutions, or contextual conditions (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013; May, 1992; Sabatier, 1988). Behavioral learning products include the adoption of new or altered routines and standard procedures, updated strategies for achieving desired policy outcomes, and new or revised policies, programs, and institutions (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013; Ricco & Schultz, 2019).

In sum, collective learning products are the result of collective learning processes. During these processes, individuals acquire information from internal and external sources, translate that information into usable knowledge, and circulate that knowledge throughout the collective. Importantly, these subprocesses are not necessarily linear, and they may be “triggered or activated” (p. 487) by various mechanisms depending on characteristics of the collective, as will be described below.

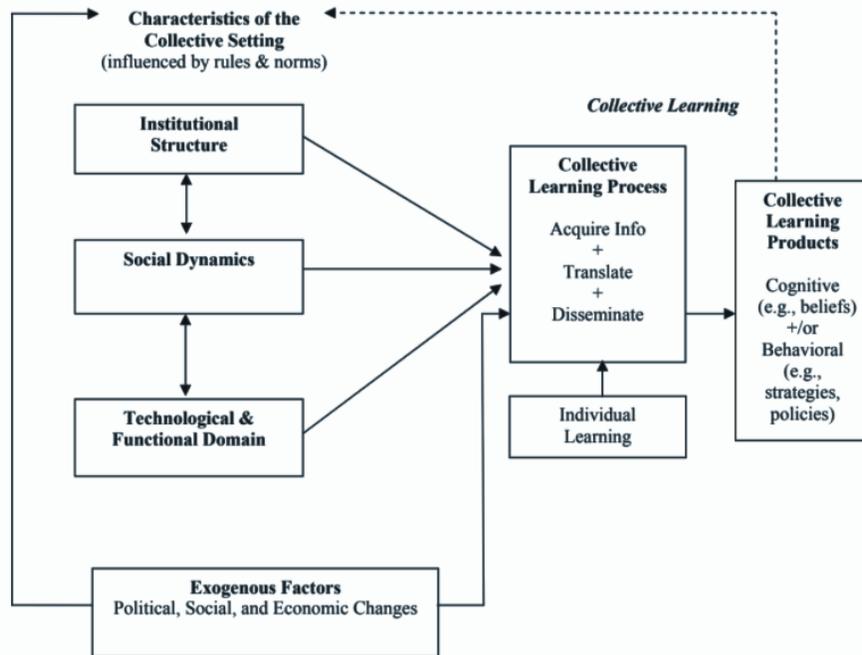


Figure 1: The Collective Learning Framework from Heikkila and Gerlak (2013).

Characteristics of the Collective Setting

The collective learning process is impacted by both external and internal contextual factors (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013). External contextual factors include the political, social, and economic climate, which encompass the media, technological innovations, focusing events, and political pressures (Birkland, 2004; Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013). These factors cannot be controlled but can influence the information available to stakeholders as well as how that information is processed. Internal contextual factors fall into 3 categories – the technological and functional domain, social dynamic, and structural characteristics – which are described in more detail below.

The technological and functional domain describes the information and technical resources and tools available to the collective to support policy design and implementation (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013). To facilitate collective learning, policy actors should have access to diverse sources of information, including scientific information, technical resources, and information feedback from past policy decisions, as well as regular opportunities to collectively discuss, analyze, and apply this information in context (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2017; Ernst, 2019; Fazey, Fazey, & Fazey, 2005; Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013). For example, information processing technologies (e.g., information systems, data dashboards) can promote access to information by increasing transparency, enabling timely access to information, reducing the complexity of information, and facilitating wide scale distribution of information (Lipshitz, Popper, & Friedman, 2002; Moynihan & Landuyt, 2009).

Social dynamics describe the characteristics of the interrelationships and communication patterns among actors in a collective (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013). This can include both positive characteristics, such as high levels of trust, shared communication styles, openness to new ideas, and respect (Berkes, 2009; Levesque et al., 2017), as well as negative characteristics, such as a high degree of conflict, intolerance, and suspicion (Ernst, 2019; Newig et al., 2019). Social dynamics may be influenced by the structural characteristics of the collective and can influence

information acquisition, the nature of the dialogue between participants, and the speed and efficiency of information dissemination (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013).

Institutional structure describes how the roles, responsibilities, and functions of actors within the collective are organized and coordinated (Ernst, 2019; Lipshitz, Popper, & Oz, 1996; Moynihan, 2005; Moynihan & Landuyt, 2009; Ostrom, 2005). Institutional structure can be characterized by the degree of centralization of decision-making authority within the system (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013), including across various levels of governance. Different institutional structures may influence learning in different ways. For example, a more decentralized structure may increase opportunities for collective dialogue and knowledge production, while a centralized structure may inhibit opportunities for information acquisition and translation (Henry, 2009; Mostert et al., 2007). However, a more centralized structure may also enhance information dissemination because information needs to be transmitted to fewer actors within the collective before it is embedded in shared communications and routines (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013).

Of interest to the current study is explaining how institutional structure, specifically the degree of centralization, influences the collective learning process in a policy setting characterized by multilevel governance. In the next section, I will define multilevel governance and describe the conceptual framework created by Liu, Guo, Zhong, and Gui (2021) that will be used to measure the institutional structure of multilevel governance systems.

Multilevel Governance & Institutional Structure

Multilevel governance refers to a system of governance wherein legitimate decision-making authority is shared across nested levels of government spanning multiple territorial jurisdictions (Hooghe & Marks, 2003). The devolution of authority from a single central government to multiple centers of decision-making creates regional and local autonomy that enables more efficient and flexible governance. Within this structure, centralized governments can exploit economies of scale and internalize policy externalities, while decentralized governments can accommodate diversity in local context and citizens' preferences (Benson & Jordan, 2010; Ostrom, Tiebout, & Warren, 1961). An effective multilevel governance system will adjust the level of governance for specific tasks to accommodate the trade-offs of centralization (Alesina & Spolaore, 1997; Marks & Hooghe, 2000). Therefore, multilevel governance systems can be optimally designed to maximize efficiency and flexibility in public service delivery.

Multilevel governance is distinct from federalism in two important ways. First, multilevel governance involves the participation of non-state actors, including actors from the private and nonprofit sectors, research organizations, and civil society, in the policy design and implementation process (Bauer & Steurer, 2014). Second, traditional federalism is conceived of as a hierarchy where authority and influence flow from the highest levels of government down to lower levels of government. In contrast, multilevel governance accounts for a more dynamic flow of information and influence from lower levels of government upwards to impact policy change at higher levels of government (Kay, 2017; Koontz, 2014).

Research examining multilevel governance often emphasizes variations in the structural configuration of multilevel governance systems. For example, Hooghe and Marks (2003) distinguish between two opposite structures of multilevel governance: Type I and Type II. In Type I multilevel governance, authority is formally distributed to stable, general purpose jurisdictions that are non-competitive and non-intersecting (similar to federalism). Type I aligns with centralized, top-down hierarchical forms of government. In contrast, Type II multilevel governance is characterized by competing and overlapping jurisdictions that are fluid and task

specific. Type II is considered to be a more flexible, polycentric system of governance consisting of decentralized networks of government and nongovernment actors.

In contrast to this binary structure model, Liu et al. (2021) conceptualize multilevel governance as both a form and process of governance that consists of different configurations of institutional arrangements that fall on a continuum ranging from Type I to Type II. The purpose of these institutional arrangements is to enable ongoing coordination among government and nongovernment actors across levels of government and territories (Liu et al., 2021). Coordination describes a continuous process of information exchange, knowledge sharing, and joint decision-making between individuals and organizations within a collective (Cejudo & Michel, 2017; Margerum, 2011). Therefore, the framework proposed by Liu et al. (2021) highlights two elements of coordination in multilevel governance systems: the structural configuration of the system (i.e., the form of governance) and the mode of coordination (i.e., the process of governance).

The structural configuration of the multilevel governance system describes how the system is structured to enable ongoing coordination vertically across levels of governance, as well as horizontally among different territorial jurisdictions (Liu et al., 2021; Newig & Koontz, 2014). Vertical coordination involves two-directional interactions among levels of government (Peters & Pierre, 2001). During policy design and implementation processes, centralized governments often establish policy priorities and goals, facilitate collaboration, and monitor policy outcomes (Ansell, Boin, & Keller, 2010; Bauer & Steurer, 2014). However, higher levels of government often utilize lower levels for policy implementation because lower levels can more effectively engage local stakeholders in the policy making process and can design more detailed and targeted policies (Hardy & Koontz, 2008). As lower levels of government implement policy, information is acquired about the efficacy of the policy in achieving desired outcomes, the unintended consequences of design decisions, and any resource deficiencies. Vertical coordination ensures that this information feeds back up to influence decision-making at higher levels of government, which can help create responsive and legitimate governance systems (Hooghe et al., 2020; Koontz & Newig, 2014).

Horizontal coordination involves interactions across sectors and among jurisdictions that share the same degree of decision-making authority and do not have hierarchical control over one another (Newig & Koontz, 2014). Horizontal coordination can eliminate the silos that contribute to government fragmentation and facilitate information sharing and learning across territorial jurisdictions (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Kraak, 2011). Additionally, private and nonprofit organizations can provide resources to enhance capacity during policy implementation (Ansell et al., 2010). Horizontal coordination is similar to, and may be referred to in the literature as, partnerships or networks (Liu et al, 2021).

The second element of coordination in multilevel governance systems is mode of coordination, which describes the nature or tone of the interaction among policy actors (Liu et al., 2021). While vertical coordination is often equated with command and control and horizontal coordination is equated with mutual resource exchange, Liu et al. (2021) argue that vertical and horizontal coordination are the result of different combinations of four modes of coordination:

1. *Command and control* is the conventional mode of coordination in hierarchical governance systems, during which a single or small group of actors makes binding decisions that the entire collective must comply with, implement, and enforce (Börzel, 2011). Examples of coordination mechanisms include orders, mandates, and regulations.

2. *Steering* is a less authoritative means for policy elites to elicit desired behaviors and policy outcomes (Kettl, 2020). Examples of coordination mechanisms include mission statements, formally established goals and priorities, grants, guidelines, and frameworks.
3. *Negotiation* refers to consensus building through dialogue and deliberation among policy actors. It is an ongoing process that engages diverse stakeholders in the co-production of knowledge and policy solutions (Homsy & Warner, 2013). Negotiation is a non-authoritative means of collective decision-making emanating from power interdependence (Daniell & Kay, 2017). Examples of coordination mechanisms include consensus-oriented decision-making procedures, learning forums, and strategic planning committees.
4. *Supporting* refers to resource exchange among policy actors and organizations. Resources include both social and financial capital and consist of information and knowledge, technical and professional assistance, and financial or material assistance.

Critically, any combination of these coordination modes may be used in both vertical and horizontal structural configurations. For example, higher level jurisdictions may vertically coordinate with lower level jurisdictions in a supporting mode by providing them implementation resources. Similarly, horizontal jurisdictions may coordinate in a command-and-control fashion when one jurisdiction makes a change that necessitates change in others to maintain system function.

In alignment with the framework proposed by Liu et al. (2021), institutional structure within multilevel governance systems is operationalized as configurations of institutional arrangements that enable different modes of coordination among individuals and organizations. According to this framework, there are two aspects of coordination in multilevel governance systems: the structural configuration of the system and the mode of coordination. For this project, institutional structure will be measured using a combination of these variables.

Research Context: The Every Student Succeeds Act & School Improvement

This study examines how collective learning processes unfold in the context of education policy and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was reauthorized as the ESSA in December of 2015, replacing the highly controversial No Child Left Behind (NCLB). ESSA is the primary federal law that governs K-12 education in the United States. ESSA was designed to address many of the limitations of NCLB; specifically, ESSA shifts decision-making authority from the federal government to SEAs and school districts, expands accountability systems to include more robust and comprehensive sets of indicators to evaluate school performance, and provides school districts and schools with flexibility in implementing comprehensive school improvement (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016; Duff & Wohlstetter, 2019; Edgerton, 2019; Rentner, Ferguson, & Kober, 2019). Under ESSA, SEAs are required to design accountability systems that are based on challenging academic standards, state defined long-term goals, and local needs (U.S. DOE, 2017). Using data from statewide accountability systems, the bottom five percent of schools in each state are identified to participate in school improvement processes known as “comprehensive support and improvement” (CCSSO, 2017; ESSA, 2015; U.S. DOE, 2017). During these processes, state education agencies (SEAs), school districts, schools, and other local stakeholders are tasked with collaboratively developing and implementing school improvement plans. School improvement plans must be informed by local needs assessments and data from the statewide accountability system and must include evidenced-based interventions that target specific local issues. School districts and SEAs must approve and monitor the implementation of school improvement plans.

The school improvement planning process required by ESSA embodies the three essential components of the MPP approach to policy implementation: multilevel governance, nested policy cycles, and participation. First, ESSA requires policy implementation through *multilevel governance* by mandating the formulation of improvement plans at multiple levels of governance within the education system. Improvement plans at the school district level must describe the districts' role during school improvement processes. This includes a description of how school districts will 1) support schools in developing and implementing improvement plans, 2) monitor schools in improvement, 3) align resources to support improvement efforts, and 4) modify current policies to provide schools with operational flexibility to implement improvement plans (CCSSO, 2017; ESSA, 2015). Similarly, plans at the state level must describe how states will 1) provide technical assistance and support to school districts with schools in improvement, 2) monitor and evaluate school districts with schools in improvement, and 3) reduce administrative barriers to enable local flexibility in school improvement processes (CCSSO, 2017; ESSA, 2015; U.S. DOE, 2017). These planning processes establish clear goals, distribute authority across levels of governance, and formalize state and district roles and responsibilities during the school improvement process (Mostert et al., 2007; Tippett et al., 2005). This ensures that accountability for student and school performance is shared across multiple levels of governance.

ESSA institutionalizes *nested policy cycles* at the school level by requiring the development and implementation of comprehensive support and improvement plans (ESSA, 2015). According to ESSA, school improvement plans should be based on a local needs assessment and informed by accountability system indicators and local data. Based on these sources of information, improvement plans aim to define the problem, establish goals and measurable outcomes, and outline improvement strategies that are based on evidence-based interventions. School improvement plans are time bound and must be revised on a regular frequency (CCSSO, 2017; U.S. DOE, 2016; U.S. DOE, 2017). The school improvement planning process creates an additional step between the established policy goals and local policy implementation processes, creating flexibility in the implementation of the federal top-down policy mandate (Newig & Koontz, 2014). During the planning process, local administrators have the authority to make important collective choice decisions while formulating policy at the local level.

ESSA also mandates local *participation* in school improvement planning by requiring that schools and districts develop and implement school improvement plans in partnership with state and local stakeholders (i.e., teachers, administrators, parents, and representatives from the community; Chism, 2017; King, 2016; U.S. DOE, 2017). Stakeholder participation ensures that the school improvement plan is formulated by the individuals charged with implementing it (Schmitter, 2002), including being informed by local knowledge and customized to suit local conditions. Additionally, fostering such participation in planning processes may improve local stakeholders' perceptions of policy legitimacy because stakeholders can affect decision-making and codetermine policy (Koontz & Johnson 2004; Newig & Fritsch 2009; Newig & Koontz, 2014).

Research Design

In order to investigate collective learning during school improvement planning processes, this study uses a mixed-method, comparative case study approach (Yin, 2018). Case studies are appropriate for examining complex phenomena in situations where it is not possible to distinguish the case from its context.

Case Contexts

To tease out the influence of institutional structure on collective learning processes, this study compares school improvement processes in two U.S. states: Washington and Nevada. Importantly, it compares collective learning in contexts that differ based on the institutional structure of the multilevel governance system. Washington exhibits the characteristics of a typical centralized approach, while Nevada exhibits the characteristics of a typical decentralized approach (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Both approaches exemplify the characteristics of MPP, but the centralized approach utilizes higher level governments to formalize and define the roles and responsibilities of individuals and organizations at different levels of governance, while the decentralized approach allows local stakeholders to structure and control the school improvement process. For example, Nevada created a Consolidated State Plan, in which they did not specify actor roles, require collaboration, or establish specific procedures or intervention strategies. In contrast, Washington formally established stakeholders that must participate and their roles and responsibilities within their equivalent process, required collaboration during planning processes, and described specific procedures and intervention strategies.

Although the two states' institutional structures vary, important similarities exist in other characteristics of the collective setting, including state education governance structures and information processing technologies. For instance, Nevada and Washington have similar education governance arrangements. Both are states in a federal system, meaning that policy making authority is delegated to state and local governments such that power is shared across multiple, nested levels of governance. In both states, responsibility for public education is shared across federal, state, and local government jurisdictions. Nevada and Washington also have similar state education governance structures, which can influence the coordination of formal authority and responsibility to design and implement education policy among institutions and leadership within states, including the governor, boards of education, chief state school officer, and the legislature (Railey, 2017). These contextual similarities have important implications for the distribution of authority and accountability across levels of governance as well as for the identification of educational priorities within each state.

Nevada and Washington also utilize similar information processing technologies. Nevada and Washington both designed accountability systems that incorporate more diverse indicators of school performance, including indicators of student growth, chronic absenteeism, high school readiness, on-track to high school graduation, and college and career readiness (Woods, 2018). In order to meet accountability system reporting requirements, SEAs must collect the necessary data from all schools and school districts in the state, which means that both states will have similarly developed information processing technologies. Overall, Nevada and Washington share similar educational landscapes and have access to similar types of information. However, the implementation of school improvement processes occurs in partnership with different stakeholders within an education system comprised of distinct instructional arrangements characterized by different modes of coordination. The following paragraphs describe each state's implementation strategies in more detail.

Washington

Within Washington's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the school improvement process is facilitated by the Office of System and School Improvement (OSSSI). OSSSI is comprised of four major subdivisions that work in partnership to support continuous school improvement through quality technical assistance, relevant professional learning opportunities, and information about best practices. The subdivisions include Native Education,

Migrant & Bilingual Education, Continuous Improvement, and Data Support & Implementation. The OSSI structure emphasizes collaboration among Migrant, Bilingual, and Native Education in the development of continuous school improvement systems and the implementation of tiered supports provided through state and federal accountability processes. The inclusion of these diverse organizations cultivates a sense of shared responsibility for improving student outcomes by ensuring that actors are motivated by the achievement of shared goals (Dawes, 1996; Margerum, 2011).

The Office of Continuous Improvement supports the development and implementation of school improvement systems at state, regional, and local levels. The Office of Continuous Improvement is responsible for overseeing the provision of support to schools and districts in improvement, including through school improvement grant funding, research-based resources and trainings, and Continuous Improvement Partners (CIPs). CIPs are contractors that extend OSSI's strategy to create the conditions for continuous school improvement by providing direct services, expertise, and facilitation to assigned districts with schools identified for comprehensive support (OSPI, 2020). CIPs facilitate the design and implementation of school improvement systems by supporting schools and districts as they collaboratively design, implement, evaluate, and revise school improvement plans.

The Office of Continuous Improvement is also responsible for facilitating collaboration with external partners, including coordinating regional partnerships with Educational Service District (ESDs). ESDs are legislatively authorized education units that serve the school districts within their region by providing cooperative and informational services. ESDs support OSPI in the implementation of state and federal policy, including school improvement policies. This partnership is established in a Coordinated Service Agreement (CSA) that defines how OSPI and the ESDs will collaborate to support schools in improvement from a regional level. The CSA embodies the shared vision for the partnership and aims to leverage the nine ESDs' regional knowledge, relationships, and experience through funding and capacity building provided by OSPI. The CSA aims to ensure that districts and schools have regional support and the resources necessary to improve student outcomes and reduce opportunity gaps.

Representatives from OSSI, the ESDs, and CIPs are members of the Coordinated Support Teams (CSTs), which are under the direction of OSPI and are strategically deployed across the state to provide support to comprehensive support and improvement schools. CSTs create networks of stakeholders that enable coordinated support through a shared mission, consistent communication, and intentional alignment of intervention strategies to jointly support districts and schools. CSTs coordinate their efforts through a series of meetings, known as the Regional Improvement Networks, which are an opportunity for CSTs to coordinate support for Tier II and Tier III schools through case management, collaboration, professional learning, and discussion of continuous improvement of practices.

During the implementation of ESSA, OSSI has made an intentional effort to create partnerships with local governmental organizations and build regional networks that leverage local knowledge, relationships, and expertise. OSSI capitalizes on regional networks to coordinate information dissemination using a variety of information distribution strategies and networks. The majority of OSSI's work revolves around promoting a coherent vision for school improvement among regional partners, ensuring consistent and aligned communication, and monitoring to verify that the services provided by CSTs align with OSSI's mission and priorities.

Nevada

Within the Nevada Department of Education (NDE), the school improvement process is facilitated by the Office of Student and School Supports (OSSS). OSSS administers programs that enrich and improve learning opportunities for students, including federal and state programming that offers supports specifically for English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and students in foster care. Within OSSS, the Office of School Improvement facilitates the Continuous Improvement Process, which is the process that comprehensive support and improvement schools must complete as they create their School Performance Plans (SPP). The NDE's organizational structure can be described as "tall and skinny", meaning more administrative levels to executive leadership and a high supervisor to subordinate ratio. Additionally, it was widely reported by interview subjects that the NDE is very understaffed and that a lack of capacity is the biggest barrier to ESSA implementation.

Given the lack of capacity, OSSI relies heavily on school district partners as well as other nongovernmental evidence-based intervention providers to support the implementation of ESSA. Within the Nevada education system, school districts are the mechanism for local control and district boundaries coincide with county boundaries. In Nevada, there are 17 school districts and the State Public Charter School Authority. OSSS has intentionally worked to rebuild relationships with school district partners by providing support and assistance rather than enforcing compliance during the school improvement process. One strategy that OSSS has utilized is leveraging local expertise by inviting school district leaders to help redesign school and district performance plans.

Evidenced-Based Intervention (EBI) Providers are nongovernmental organizations that are included in the EBIs for School Transformation List and provide interventions, strategies, or activities that meet ESSA Evidence Levels (1, 2, 3, or 4). The purpose of the EBIs for School Transformation List is to serve as a pre-vetted resource for districts and schools in identifying evidence-based interventions that align with their schools' needs and continuous improvement goals. The list is distributed to districts and schools across the state for consideration when selecting activities or interventions to support their SPP. EBI Providers can provide schools and districts with additional sources of data to use when creating and evaluating SPPs.

OSSS invites school district partners, EBI Providers, and other NDE representatives to hour-long weekly meetings that aim to support school districts develop systems for continuous improvement. The agenda for the meetings is open and there is an intentional effort to treat all participants as thought partners and to provide all participants with an equal opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences. OSSS views this meeting as an opportunity to 1) (re)build relationships with school districts; 2) reframe the school improvement process in a more positive light (i.e., as an opportunity for support rather than compliance); and 3) connect with school districts about issues they are facing. The weekly meetings initially started as a collective opportunity for districts to check-in and highlight local successes and struggles. The meetings have evolved into a working group with diverse participants. For example, the SPP Review Rubric was created at the request of districts by OSSS and school district partners during the weekly District Partners Meeting. Over the course of multiple meetings, time was spent creating a shared document based on the collective's ideas.

Data Collection Methods

This research draws on in-depth interviews and document analysis. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 10 key informants (4 from Nevada and 6 from Washington). Key informants are state-level policy actors that have been involved in the design and implementation of the statewide school improvement process. Key

informants were identified through an analysis of organization charts available on each SEA's website. Additionally, to ensure that a representative sample of state-level stakeholders was included for each case, interviewees were selected using a snowball sampling technique (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Interview questions were designed to elicit responses that provided evidence of implementation structure, decision-making procedures, formal and informal coordination mechanisms, and process improvements and changes over time (e.g., if their roles have become more defined over time, how they have learned to better support and monitor school districts with schools in improvement, etc.). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted by virtual meeting (i.e., Zoom). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim following the interview using Otter.ai transcription software. Interview transcriptions were then systematically coded using NVivo qualitative analysis software (Miles & Huberman, 1994), as described further in the next section.

In addition to in-depth interviews, document analysis was conducted on state-level policy documents. Four main types of documents were collected for each case: 1) formal policy documents required by ESSA; 2) governance process documentation; 3) state provided guidance and technical assistance resources; and 4) publicly published performance data. These documents were analyzed to provide evidence of the institutional structure and collective learning processes. Additionally, these documents provided evidence of the system context and the history of the school improvement processes for each case.

Data Analysis

Systematic content analysis of interview transcripts and documents was conducted using a multistage coding strategy (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). During the first cycle of open coding, all instances of coordination were identified. Instances of coordination are defined broadly as configurations of institutional arrangements that enable coordination among individuals and organizations during policy design and implementation processes. Each instance of coordination can be characterized by its structural configuration and mode of coordination (Liu et al. 2021), as will be discussed below. The aim of this cycle of coding was to identify the individuals and organizations that support the implementation of school improvement processes in each state, as well as to identify the formal and informal institutional arrangements that enable them to organize and coordinate their roles in the process. Through open coding, all of the instances of coordination within each education governance system were identified.

Coded interview data were synthesized with supplemental information to create detailed case summaries for each state. Each detailed case summary includes a thorough description of each instance of coordination. Taken comprehensively, these instances of coordination provide a depiction of the governance structure that has emerged to support the implementation of school improvement processes in each state. Importantly, instances of coordination were only included in the detailed case summaries if they were specifically mentioned in interviews or highlighted on the SEA's website. For example, all states are required to include School Quality and Student Success (SQSS) indicator(s) within their statewide accountability system. However, the SQSS indicator is only included in Washington's detailed case summary because the SQSS indicator was not referenced in interviews with SEA employees or within the documents provided on the SEA's website in Nevada.

During the second cycle of coding, all instances of coordination were coded for the following: interacting actors and/or organizations, initiating actor and/or organization, the structural configuration (i.e., vertical or horizontal), and the mode of coordination (See Table 1 for the coding framework). For instance, Washington utilizes Coordinated Support Teams

(CSTs), which are teams consisting of multiple state and regional actors. CSTs are under the direction of OSPI and are strategically deployed across the state to provide support to schools in improvement. The structure of coordination is vertical (top-down), and the mode of coordination is supporting. In contrast, Nevada’s Design partnership was a group of schools and districts that worked alongside NDE to develop and pilot the Continuous Improvement Process. The structure of coordination is vertical (bottom-up), and the mode of coordination is negotiating. Taken together for each state, these coded data provide insight into the institutional structure of the education governance system in each state, according to the key aspects of the framework proposed by Liu et al. (2021).

Instances of coordination can serve multiple purposes and can, therefore, be coded as multiple structural configurations and modes of coordination. For example, Nevada’s Weekly Meetings with District Partners include school district representatives as well as representatives from other NDE departments. This would be coded as both vertical and horizontal coordination. Instances of coordination were compiled into a spreadsheet, which facilitated frequency counts for each code and comparison of the structural patterns of coordination between each SEA and other actors in Nevada and Washington.

Table 1. Institutional Structure Coding Framework	
Actors/Organization	
Interacting Actors/Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The actors/organizations whose efforts are being coordinated.
Initiating Actor/Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The actor/organization that initiated coordination.
Structure of Coordination	
Vertical Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two-directional interactions among levels of government. Can be bottom-up or top-down.
Horizontal Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interactions across sectors and among jurisdictions that share the same degree of decision-making authority and do not have hierarchical control over one another. Can be internal (across divisions in an organization) or external.
Mode of Coordination	
Command & Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The conventional mode of coordination in hierarchical systems. A single or small group of actors making binding decisions that the entire collective must comply, implement, and enforce. Examples of coordination mechanisms include orders, mandates, and regulations.
Steering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A less authoritative means for policy elites to elicit desired behaviors and policy outcomes. Examples of coordination mechanisms include mission statements, goal and priorities, grants, guidelines, and frameworks.
Negotiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus building through dialogue and deliberation among policy actors.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing processes that engage diverse stakeholders in the co-production of knowledge and policy solutions. • A non-authoritative means of collective decision-making emanating from power interdependence. • Examples of coordination mechanisms include consensus-oriented decision-making procedures, learning forums, and strategic planning committees.
Supporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource exchange among policy actors and organizations to assist in achieving goals. • Can include both social and financial capital and consist of information and knowledge, technical and professional assistance, and financial or material assistance.

During the third and final cycle of coding, the instances of coordination were coded for the presence of learning mechanisms. According to Heikkila and Gerlak (2013), learning mechanisms activate the emergence of different phases of the learning process. Each learning mechanism was identified and coded based on 1) the *phase* of the learning process that was activated (i.e., information acquisition, information translation, and information dissemination), and 2) the specific *type* of mechanism under that phase. The types of learning mechanisms were developed based on the CLF and organizational learning theories (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013; Lipshitz et al., 2002; Moynihan & Landuyt, 2009). For a list of collective learning process mechanisms by phase, see Table 2. For example, Washington’s Communication Logs (C-Logs) are brief surveys that continuous improvement partners (CIPs) are required to submit to OSSI after every interaction with school or district partners. The data derived from the C-Logs serves multiple purposes. First, this information is used by OSSI to understand the process of school improvement (coded as information acquisition through assessment). Second, this data allows OSSI to evaluate whether the services provided by CIPs to schools and districts align with OSSI’s mission and priorities (coded as information translation through evaluation). Third, data from the C-Logs are used to monitor the types of services that CIPs are providing and when these services are typically provided during the school year. This information guides resource development and allows OSSI to intentionally plan trainings for CIPs (coded as information dissemination through shared routines). Learning mechanisms were compiled into a spreadsheet, which facilitated frequency counts for each code and comparison of learning processes in each state education system.

Table 2. Collective Learning Process Mechanisms	
Mechanism	Description
<i>Acquisition: The process through which individuals within the collective acquire information.</i>	
Assessment	A process of collecting, reviewing, and using data for the purpose measuring the current level of performance.
Dialogue	Group dialogue among members of the collective with diverse bases of knowledge.
Experience	Knowledge or practical wisdom gained from personally encountering or undergoing something.

Experimentation/Trial & Error	Determining the best way to achieve a desired outcome by trying out one or more ways or means and by noting and eliminating errors or causes of failure.
Observation/Lesson Drawing	Recognizing and evaluating the actions of others to determine the desirability and feasibility of implementing programs in effect elsewhere internally.
Searching & Seeking	Intentionally searching for and identifying informational resources for knowledge and learning.
<i>Translation:</i> The process through which the collective interprets, understands, and applies information.	
Collective Analysis	A collective process of information interpretation with the aim of combining different perspectives and understandings of information.
Deliberation	Active and critical discussion among members of the collective with diverse bases of knowledge.
Evaluation	A process making a judgment based on set standards to determine the degree to which goals are attained.
Expert Analysis	Utilizing sources of expert knowledge (i.e., technical experts or trusted advisors) to help interpret and apply information to a specific context.
Reflection	The intentional analysis of information with a critical consideration of one's basic assumptions and values.
<i>Dissemination:</i> The process through which information is transferred and assimilated across the collective to become shared knowledge.	
Shared Routines	Ordered patterns of behavior that are adopted by individuals in groups.
Shared Communications	Venues where information is distributed; participating individuals share their own knowledge, experiences, and perspectives.

Preliminary Results & Discussion

Instances of Coordination

Through open coding, all of the instances of coordination within each education governance system were identified. As a reminder, instances of coordination are defined broadly as configurations of institutional arrangements that enable coordination among individuals and organizations during policy design and implementation processes. During the first cycle of coding, 48 instances of coordination were identified in Nevada and 76 instances of coordination were identified in Washington (see Table 3), indicating that Washington's institutional structure is more robust and elaborate. This is unsurprising given Washington's centralized implementation approach, which was characterized by formal implementation requirements established by higher levels of government.

As detailed case summaries were being created for each case, four types of instances coordination emerged:

1. *Coordination Mechanisms* are organizational structures (i.e., procedures, resources, and tools) that support effective policy implementation by enabling interactions across organizations or organizational divisions. Importantly, the origin of coordination mechanisms may or may not be intentional or formal, but there is a tendency to formalize over time. Coordination mechanisms serve different purposes, including sharing

information, expertise, and experiences, defining roles and expectations, outlining procedures, enabling monitoring and accountability, establishing forums for negotiation and decision-making, creating shared theories of action, and sharing financial and social resources.

2. *Partnerships* are a formal exchange of resources and services between two or more organizations. For example, the NDE partners with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas to curate the Evidence-Based Interventions for School Transformation List. Similarly, OSPI partnered with Gonzaga University to pilot Powerless to Powerful, a leadership framework, in several schools and districts throughout the state.
3. *Professional Associations* are organizations with members who work in or share an interest in a specific job, field, or industry. Professional associations aim to provide networking opportunities for professionals, advance a field or profession, and support the interests of people working in that profession. In Nevada, the School Leadership Network is comprised of school leaders from 2 and 3 star schools and aims to strengthen the essential skills and competencies of those leaders. In Washington, the Beginning Educator Support Team supports novice educators in Washington through comprehensive induction.
4. *Interactions* were anecdotal accounts of one-off or informal conversations. Interactions were not formally coded but were used to create detailed case summaries and to understand the informal coordination dynamics present in each case.

Taken comprehensively, these instances of coordination provide a depiction of the governance structure that has emerged to support the implementation of school improvement processes in each state. Partnerships and professional associations connect individuals from organizations representing different jurisdictions, sectors, and levels of governance, creating networks where information and expertise can be shared and leveraged. Coordination mechanisms define and organize their specific roles in the school improvement process.

	Nevada (Decentralized)	Washington (Centralized)
Coordination Mechanisms	25	37
Partnerships	10	17
Professional Associations	2	6
Interactions	11	16
Total Instances:	48	76

Institutional Structure

Structure of Coordination

All instances of coordination were coded for the structural configuration (i.e., vertical or horizontal) and the mode of coordination. The structural configurations of each state's education governance system are shockingly similar (see Table 4). Both SEAs relied heavily on vertical coordination, which accounted for 92.3% and 89.5% of instances of coordination in Nevada and Washington, respectively. Of the vertical instances of coordination, the composition of top-down

coordination (92.3% in Nevada and 86.8% in Washington) and bottom-up coordination (38.5% in Nevada and 39.5%) was nearly identical, with Nevada using slightly more top-down coordination structures. Both SEAs participated in horizontal coordination to a much lesser extent (42.3% in Nevada and 55.3% in Washington). In Nevada, 34.6% of horizontal instances of coordination were internal to NDE and 15.4% were external NDE. In Washington, 34.2% of horizontal instances of coordination were internal to OSPI and 26.3% were external NDE. Washington engaged in slightly more horizontal coordination, which was more often external to OSPI.

	Vertical*	Top-Down**	Bottom-Up**	Horizontal*	Internal[^]	External[^]
Nevada	92.3	92.3	38.5	42.3	34.6	15.4
Washington	89.5	86.8	39.5	55.3	34.2	26.3

* % of instances of coordination

** % of vertical instances of coordination

[^] % of horizontal instances of coordination

Based on the variation in implementation structures employed in each state (centralized vs. decentralized), the similarities in the structures of coordination across the two states is surprising. Traditional assumptions would suggest that centralized governance systems utilize more top-down coordination structures, while decentralized governance systems utilize more external horizontal coordination structures (Hjern, 1982; Hjern & Hull, 1982; Liu et al, 2021; Matland, 1995; Sabatier, 1986). The structural configurations of these cases contradict those assumptions.

The similarities in the structural configurations may be attributed to the fact both states are implementing ESSA using the MPP approach to policy implementation. This finding does support the claim that MPP alters the institutional structure of the multilevel governance system by enabling both vertical and horizontal coordination (Newig & Koontz, 2014). Further analysis is needed to understand if and how these structures actually facilitate the flow of information vertically and horizontally to contribute to collective learning processes.

Mode of Coordination

Interesting similarities and differences are present in the modes of coordination used by each SEA (see Table 5). Both states engage most frequently in supporting modes of coordination (57.7% in Nevada and 71.1% in Washington). Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of Washington's instances of coordination are characterized by supporting modes of coordination, which consists of the exchange of social and financial resources. Washington has made an intentional effort to build regional networks that are used to coordinate resource and information exchange in order to support continuous school improvement through quality technical assistance, relevant professional learning opportunities, and information about best practices.

Both states also engage in negotiation modes of coordination at similar rates (30.8% in Nevada and 36.8% in Washington). Again, these findings are consistent with MPP, which requires the collaborative formation of implementation plans (Newig & Koontz, 2014). Both states created structures that enabled negotiation through ongoing collaborative planning.

In contrast, important differences existed in the rates of command and control and steering modes of coordination. Nevada utilizes command and control modes of coordination more frequently than Washington (30.8% versus 21.1%), while Washington utilizes steering, a

less authoritative means to elicit desired behaviors and policy outcomes, more frequently than Nevada (57.9% versus 46.2%). Again, this contradicts traditional assumptions about the characteristics of centralized/decentralized governance structures, which would suggest that centralized systems utilize more authoritarian, command and control modes of coordination than decentralized systems (Hjern, 1982; Hjern & Hull, 1982; Liu et al, 2021; Matland, 1995; Sabatier, 1986).

	Command & Control	Steering	Negotiation	Supporting
Nevada	30.8	46.2	30.8	57.7
Washington	21.1	57.9	36.8	71.1

% of instances of coordination

However, upon further inspection, these findings are not excessively surprising when you consider the role of a SEA in a decentralized system of governance. By law, the primary role of the SEA is compliance monitoring, and that is the primary role that NDE takes in the school improvement process. They have delegated their authority to lower levels of government, so they are not telling school districts *how* things should be done, just *what* has to be done to remain in compliance with law. In contrast, OSPI steers schools and districts towards best practice. They view this as their role in the process and they assume the authority to do so. For example, compare the school designations in Nevada with the Tiered Supports in Washington. Both of these coordination mechanisms emerge from the ESSA requirement that the SEA identifies comprehensive support and improvement schools and targeted support and improvement schools. In Nevada, school designations are aligned with ESSA requirements and guidance and communications describe exactly what ESSA requires schools with these designations to do. Hence, the school designation process in Nevada was coded as command and control. In Washington, Tiered Supports are derived from school scores on the statewide accountability system. Based on those scores, schools are divided into one of three tiers and state supports are provided based on the designated tier (i.e., grants, continuous improvement partners, and other resources). Importantly, these supports are optional, and schools can (and do) choose to reject them. While they are still required to adhere to ESSA requirements, this can be done in the manner that they choose. Hence, tiered supports in Washington was coded as both steering and support.

In multilevel governance systems, higher levels of government are often responsible for monitoring and ensuring the compliance of lower levels of government. In decentralized systems, the higher level of government may assume compliance monitoring as their primary role during the implementation process. This could have important implications for understanding the interaction between institutional structure and social dynamics during collective learning processes.

Collective Learning Process

The formal analysis of the collective learning process data has not been conducted; however, the following patterns have emerged from preliminary analyses.

Complete Learning Process Cycles

In Washington, there are often learning mechanisms representing each phase of the learning process (i.e., information acquisition, information translation, and information dissemination) embedded in individual coordination mechanisms and across multiple related coordination mechanisms. For example, consider the C-Logs described above (see Figure 2 below). In addition to serving a coordination purpose by connecting lower levels of governance to OSSI, information from the coded C-Logs is used by OSSI in 3 ways. First, this information is used by OSSI to better understand the process of school improvement. Members of the collective at the highest level of governance have *acquired* information about the school improvement process from the lowest level of governance using C-Log data. Second, this data allows OSSI to evaluate whether the services provided by CIPs to schools and districts align with OSSI’s mission and priorities. Members of the collective are *translating* C-Log data to evaluate CIPs performance. Third, data from the C-Logs are used to monitor the types of services that CIPs are providing and when these services are typically provided during the school year. This information guides resource development and allows OSSI to intentionally plan trainings for CIPs. Members of the collective are *disseminating* C-Log data through the timely development and distribution of new shared communications from OSSI to lower levels of governance. The three intended outputs of the data collected through C-Logs align with a complete collective learning process cycle.

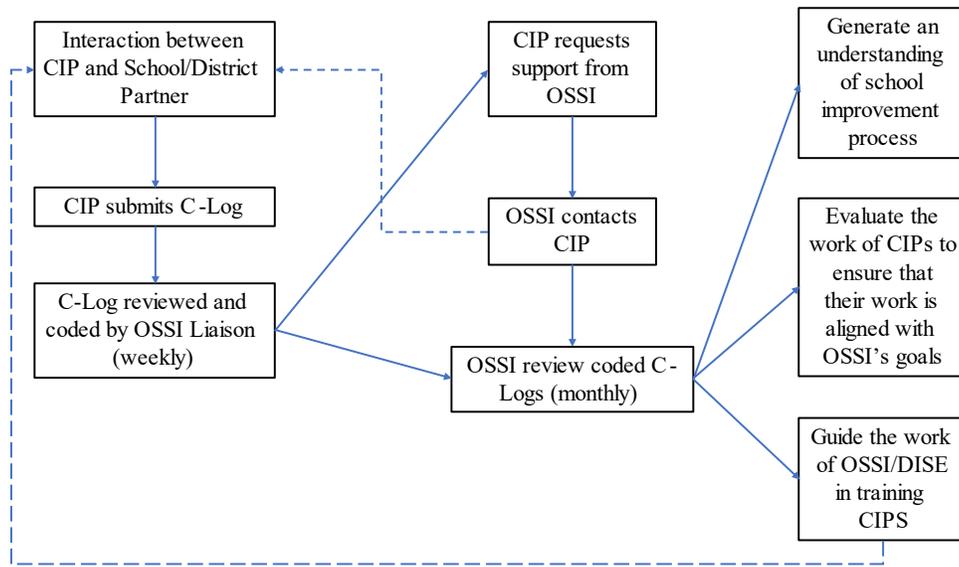


Figure 2: Communication-Logs Process.

A similar pattern occurs across multiple meeting structures established within the Coordinated Service Agreement between OSSI and the ESDs. (See Figure 3 below for more detailed information on each meeting structure). During the OSSI All Call, curated resources and information are distributed from OSSI to the statewide network of coordinated support teams, serving as an information acquisition mechanism for coordinated support teams. Next, during the Pre-RIN meeting, this same statewide network meets to translate the information acquired at OSSI All Call. The Pre-RIN is an opportunity to learn from different regions about planned

activities and approaches to sharing previously acquired information at their local RIN. The Pre-RIN Calls ensure consistency in messaging in the content being shared at RINs. Finally, in each region through shared communications, the coordinated support team distributes the translated information at the RIN. Again, information progresses through a complete learning process. In Washington, formal coordination mechanisms create a means of acquiring and applying information and establish pathways to move information up and down levels of government.

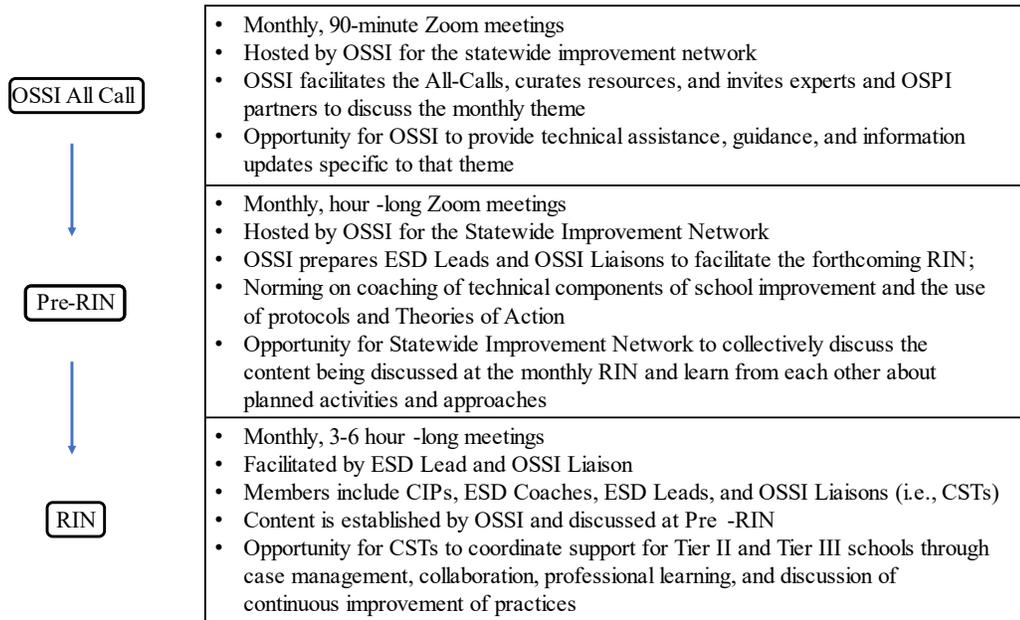


Figure 3: Washington Teams and Meetings Structures.

Compare this to Nevada, where there is a clear emphasis on supporting districts to acquire information. OSSS has prioritized the development of the Evidence-Based Interventions for School Transformation List and the CSI Padlet, which both act as resource repositories to support district leaders. NDE would appear to entrust districts to internally translate that information and disseminate it to schools.

One-and-Done Collaborative Efforts

In Nevada, collaborative groups tend to emerge to address locally identified issues or other implementation requirements and dissolve upon issue resolution with no future opportunities for reassessment or evaluation established. For example, the School Performance Plan (SPP) Review Process is a cross agency collaborative process where NDE evaluates SPPs. This is typically a two month long process that culminates with the School Improvement team meeting with each district to review plans and provide feedback. Within this process, there are no formally established opportunities for the cross agency collaborative to reflect on the review process and embed those reflections in future iterations of the process. Further, the more formal collaboratives are often facilitated by external consulting organizations (e.g., the Design Partnership), so the final output is unlikely to be altered or adjusted after the consulting contract ends. Overall, there seems to be fewer opportunities for collective learning from information feedback, which limits the system’s capacity to adapt and evolve over time.

In contrast, in Washington, team and meeting structures are established in the Coordinated Service Agreement, which provides a framework for ongoing collaborative work between OSPI and the Education Service Districts. These structures create an interorganizational network of state and regional stakeholders that frequently interact to coordinate the school improvement processes. These networks transcend school years and often work to address multiple, ongoing issues. These groups rely on information feedback and evaluation to guide their priorities and work, which evolve over time.

Conclusion

- The framework proposed by Liu et al. (2021) was used to measure the institutional structure of multilevel governance systems. This framework captured important nuances in institutional structure that contradict traditional assumptions about centralized and decentralized governance systems.
- Centralized governance systems appear to formalize different phases of the collective learning process by embedding diverse learning mechanisms in coordination structures. Additionally, centralized governance systems formalize information acquisition and translation from information feedback.
- MPP appears to contribute to collective learning in two ways:
 - MPP may increase both vertical and horizontal coordination, which may enable information acquisition from diverse sources.
 - MPP may create opportunities for collective information translation by requiring the collaborative formation of implementation plans.
- This research provides important insight into the design of institutions that foster learning. For example, designing coordination mechanisms that include diverse learning mechanisms that activate all phases of the learning process ensures that stakeholders have an opportunity to complete learning cycles. Similarly, providing opportunity to assess and evaluate information feedback ensures that institutional structure is ever evolving and adapting to changing demands.

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