

Strengthening Sex Ed through Comprehensive Sex Ed Networks:

A case study from WISE California

Prepared for: **The Grove Foundation**

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Prepared by:



LEARNING *for* ACTION

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Introduction



The WISE Initiative

Established in 2008, WISE is a national initiative dedicated to Working to Institutionalize Sex Education – so that sex education is part of schools' ongoing curricula. The goals of the WISE initiative are to 1) advance school-based sex education programs by supporting targeted implementation efforts and 2) expand the field's body of knowledge related to best practices for institutionalizing sex education.

What are Comprehensive Sex Ed (CSE) Networks

WISE California has scaled its district reach in the state by implementing a county-based collaborative approach. CSE networks are professional learning communities established by Cardea (WISE's California partner) that bring together key district administrators, school staff, and community partners under the coordination of the local County Office of Education (COE). The networks support school districts to implement comprehensive sex education that is in compliance with state policy by providing a forum for sharing information and best practices, strategies, capacity building, and peer and technical assistance.

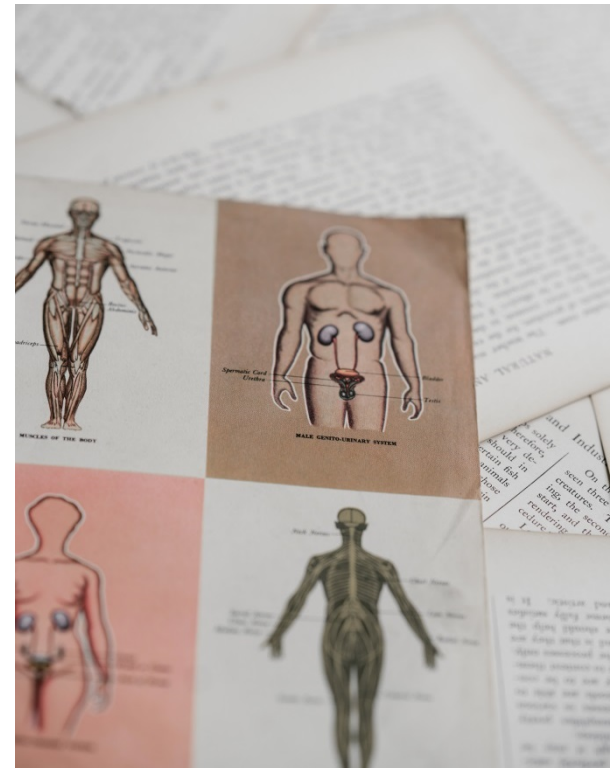
The CSE networks have allowed WISE CA to engage districts and provide a broad range of support to districts across the geographically large and diverse state. The CSE network approach has also contributed to WISE CA's pipeline of districts that receive direct technical assistance and training by helping Cardea identify districts that are interested in their partnership to advance sex education.

Purpose of This Case Study and Methods

The purpose of this case study is to highlight the CSE network approach and how it has contributed to advancing sex ed among participating districts. It also explores the essential components of the networks, what the networks look like in different counties, and what the key resources are that are needed to start a new CSE network and to maintain a network. This case study is designed to highlight the successes of the WISE CA CSE networks and to elevate a potential model for other counties across the country that are seeking to enhance sex ed in their school.

LFA conducted 15 interviews with Cardea staff and network stakeholders from a sample of CSE networks across the state: Contra Costa, Santa Clara, Los Angeles, and Orange Counties.¹ These counties were chosen for this targeted case study because of their diversity in terms of geographic location, length of time in operation, and level of support they receive from Cardea. Interviewees from each network included the network lead (typically a County Office of Education representative or Cardea staff) and district stakeholders who participate in the networks.

¹ One network participant from San Mateo County also participated in an interview



History of the Networks



How the Networks Started

ETR initiated WISE California, in partnership with the Contra Costa Health Services TeenAge Program (TAP). The coordinating staff member transitioned with WISE from TAP to ETR and later to Cardea Services, carrying WISE coordination through each of those organizational transitions. The continuity of program coordination was a key element in the evolution of WISE California, and of the CSE networks in particular.

WISE CA launched the first CSE Network in Contra Costa County in 2009 to address a lack of county-level leadership for supporting districts with sex ed implementation. The WISE California lead drew on his prior working relationship with a County Office of Education (COE) administrator to discuss the possibility of a cross-district collaborative modeled on the existing county-wide tobacco prevention meetings. While Contra Costa did not have funds earmarked for a sex ed network, county administrators saw the importance of the work and supported the network's creation. The COE administrator became a champion for the network and through ongoing relationship building, district representatives and community partners came on board.

In subsequent years, Cardea reached out to COE's in different counties to pitch the idea of a CSE network. Upon finding a COE champion, Cardea launched networks in several additional counties. Word of mouth has grown across counties and contributed to building interest in new networks. As of Summer 2018, eight CSE networks were up and running and Cardea was in the process of kicking off one more.

The Role of the California Healthy Youth Act

A new comprehensive sex ed mandate passed in California in January 2016, which brought increased attention to CSE and further fueled interest in the CSE networks among COE and district administrators. The California Healthy Youth Act (CHYA) prompted districts state-wide to examine their sex ed policies and curricula to ensure compliance with the law. This was a daunting task for many districts; many did not have an existing place to find the expertise and assistance they needed, and district-level leaders were hungry for support. CSE Networks would meet that demand, providing district leaders with information about the new requirements and resources to help them navigate the process of achieving compliance. While some of the networks existed in some form before CHYA, others formed as a result of the new law and school districts' acute need to align their curriculum with new requirements.

[WISE] brought up idea of providing support around CSE. I asked my supervisor, 'Is there somebody designated at our office?' and they said no. I ... reached out to districts [to ask] what they were looking for additional support in. This was before CHYA. Even before that, most [districts] were interested and were doing comprehensive [sex ed] anyway but with very little support. **[We built the network] district by district.**

- Network lead

It's really **relationships, relationships, relationships, relationships...** If it's meeting with someone for a year to plant the seed, it's worth meeting for a year to plant the seed. Unless this is a funded piece of work or someone has the funds for this to happen, people have got to see the importance of it and you've got to present in such a way that's not a ton of work for them.

- Cardea staff

It took quite a while to plan to strategize and bring in different stakeholders. It was probably almost a year later when we finally had our first meeting, and it was a collaborative between student support services, and **just happened to be right after CHYA just went into law, so we invited all the districts** – we had a good turnout.

- Network lead

Map of the Networks

There are currently eight CSE networks across California, primarily located in and around the San Francisco Bay Area in Northern California. In 2016, Cardea expanded the networks into Southern California.

Cardea continues its work supporting existing networks and exploring the development of new networks and bringing additional counties into existing networks (combined networks). They are exploring these possibilities with COEs in Fresno, San Bernardino, Ventura, and Santa Barbara counties.

CSE Network Snapshot			
County	Year CSE Network Established	Number of Participating Districts (approx.)	Total Districts in County
Contra Costa	2009	7-8	18
Alameda	2010	6-7	18
San Mateo	2014	5	23
Santa Clara	2016	15	32
Los Angeles	2016	20-25	80
Orange	2017	15	28
Santa Cruz	2017	4	10
Riverside	2018		23



“ A lot of [school and district staff] are overwhelmed with CSE. Even if someone has experience, having this hot button issue and **navigating through parents, administrators, the school board is a pretty daunting task for people...** Cardea/WISE is available as a resource. ”

- Cardea staff

A close-up photograph of a study desk. In the foreground, a black pencil lies horizontally, surrounded by numerous orange-brown pencil shavings. To the right, a grey cloth-bound book is partially visible, with a yellow ribbon bookmark tucked into its pages. The background is a plain, light-colored surface, possibly white paper or a desk, with more shavings scattered across it.

CSE Networks: The Basics

Core Components

All CSE networks share some common operational components:

1

County Office of Education support: CSE networks convene at the county-level, which provides legitimacy and contributes to network sustainability. In particular, it is crucial that there is a CSE champion in the COE who can advocate for the network. With the COE's backing, networks are able to reach all districts in the county (though not all participate), as well as take advantage of useful COE resources, including meeting space, listservs, and existing relationships.

2

Regular meetings: All networks hold regular in-person meetings. Most of the networks come together on a quarterly basis for 90 minute or two hour meetings, though a handful have moved to three meetings a year. Regularly scheduled meetings help network members stay connected and abreast of best practices and any policy changes.

3

Lead organizer: Each CSE network requires a lead organizer who coordinates meeting logistics, handles communication, sets the agenda, brings in additional resources as necessitated by meeting content, and facilitates the meeting itself. This role is most often held by a Cardea staff member who works closely with the COE champion. Two networks – Los Angeles and Orange County – were supported by Cardea at the onset but have developed their internal capacity to run the networks. For those networks, Cardea continues to act as a resource and thought partner.

4

District and school representation: The aim of the networks is to support local district sex education implementation and therefore district representation is paramount. Ideally, district representatives in attendance are administrators who can set or influence policy (e.g. assistant superintendents of instruction or directors of curriculum), though nurses, teachers, and other health educators at the school-level involved in direct implementation are also participants in some networks.

5

Community partners: In addition to district and school partners, each CSE network has a robust group of community partners who lend their expertise and share their resources at the regular meetings. These partners might include the local Departments of Public health, Planned Parenthood, LGBTQ resource centers, and other public health and rights experts.

We take care of the space. For content, **we rely heavily on Cardea.**

- Network lead

We initially got a lot of support from [Cardea]. **Cardea** doesn't currently have an active role in planning or facilitation of meetings, but they are **a resource that [the network] calls on if needed.**

- Network lead

[Participants are] usually district-level administrators who are responsible for the coordination and administration of sex ed programs, but it looks different for each district. [It could be the] Assistant Superintendent of Instruction and Curriculum, Student Service Coordinator, teacher on assignment or a few teachers responsible for program implementation.

- Network lead

The format we use [is]: [there's] always a grounding activity, **'How are you? What's working? What do you need support with?'** and time for attendees to probe and go deeper on items of interest.

- Network lead

Network Structure

Finding a home for a CSE network is a critical first step for starting a new network. Some counties have drawn on existing collaborative networks and leveraged staff time for network coordination. Other counties have started networks from scratch. Each network's operating structure and management is largely influenced by existing COE-specific structures and resources.

From the Ground Up

The Contra Costa and Los Angeles County CSE networks were built largely from the ground up as stand-alone networks (though they were modeled after existing networks in the COE's). The work of setting up new CSE networks required many conversations, relationship-building, and identifying the appropriate champion at the COE. While both counties were receptive to the idea of a CSE network, neither had a designated role to provide district support around CSE. In Contra Costa, Cardea continues to organize and facilitate the meetings, with the administrative support of the COE. Los Angeles, on the other hand, created a collaborative body that leads and organizes the quarterly CSE network meetings independently.



Networks Formed From Existing Structures

Santa Clara and Orange Counties drew on existing collaborative networks to support new CSE networks. This allowed them to capitalize on staff time that was already dedicated to similar roles, leverage existing relationships and partnerships, and in some cases, house the network meetings in an existing meeting structure. For example, in Santa Clara County, the Department of Public Health introduced Cardea staff to the Safe and Healthy Schools network at the County Office of Education. The network focuses on creating positive school climates and improving student wellness through providing resources for issues such as bullying prevention, tobacco prevention, and nutrition services. The COE and Cardea agreed that the Safe and Healthy Schools network would be a good home for the CSE network. Orange County already had a strong prevention community, including COE staff and community partners, and drew on those assets to develop the CSE network. The COE already had staff funded as coordinators for the HIV and AIDS Mandate, Teen Pregnancy Prevention, and Tobacco Prevention funds and had a Health and Physical Education Leadership Network Meeting. When CHYA passed and Orange County decided to begin a network, they split that meeting into two and prioritized CHYA in the Health Education network meetings.

Network Structure

CSE Network Spotlight: Los Angeles County Collaborative Leadership

Members of the Los Angeles CSE Network came together to form a collaborative leadership committee, which contributes to the network's sustainability and allows Cardea to step back into an advisory and support role.

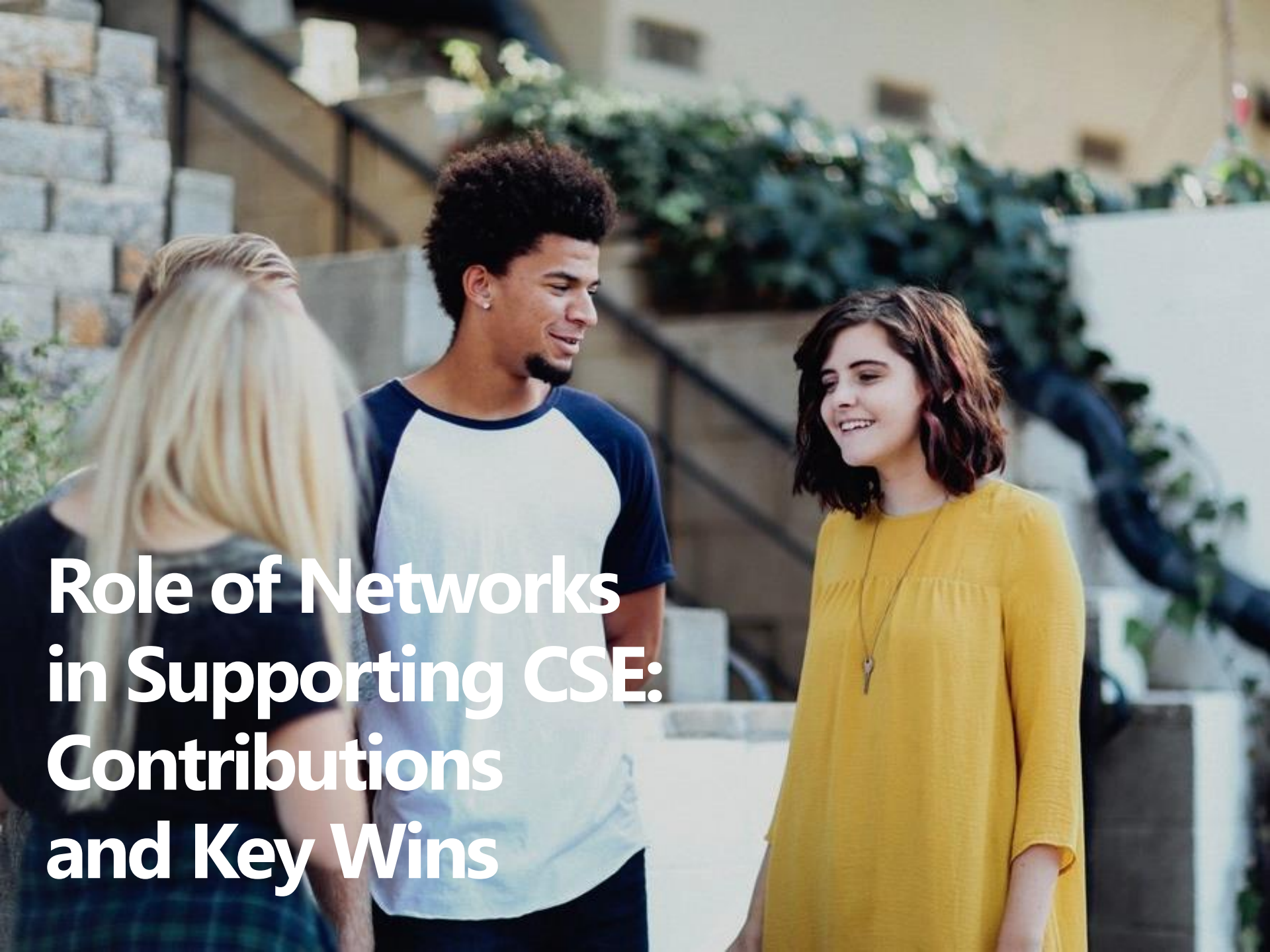
It took nearly a year of planning to get the LA network off the ground, as Cardea and COE staff worked out the structure and identified the key partners who would be involved. With its expertise in building other networks, Cardea took the lead in guiding this process. Throughout the planning process, a motivated group of participants took the initiative to form a leadership task force. This committee consists of representatives from the County Office of Education, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Los Angeles Unified School District, and stakeholders from a few partner agencies.

Since the launch event, all of the CSE network planning has been done by committee. The committee communicates regularly by email and occasionally by conference call. They work together to set the agenda, select meeting topics, and identify speakers. They even held a strategic planning retreat in which they mapped out a strategy for the next year to better meet local district needs. The committee structure allows responsibility to be shared while holding members to a level of accountability.

This collaborative committee model allows Cardea to focus its energy on providing guidance where needed (e.g. special trainings and state-wide issues) and builds the capacity of network participants to run the CSE network largely on their own.

"The biggest success has been creating this collaborative body of people that have come together to focus on CSE county-wide. That for me is a real sustainable issue. ... We're seeing more and more districts wanting curricula training, more students getting sex ed out there, [and] more districts feeling supported and able to offer it."





Role of Networks in Supporting CSE: Contributions and Key Wins

How do CSE Networks Support Districts?

While each network sets its own network priorities and agendas and tailors meetings to the specific needs of the participating districts, the types of supports each network provides for districts is common across networks.



Policy updates: CSE networks keep participants up to date about any changes in policies and then provide support for helping districts understand the implications of those policies and how to make any necessary changes to their sex ed curriculum and implementation. In addition to CHYA compliance, networks have helped districts understand policy requirements for confidential services and minor consent.



Curriculum review: Networks share sample curricula that are compliant with CHYA so that districts can identify options that are a good fit for their schools. Networks also provide participants with guidance on how to lead a curriculum review and selection process in their district, including parent and board engagement processes.



Resource sharing: Networks share vetted resources with districts, such as sample district CSE policies, parent communications, talking points to bring into board and parent meetings, videos and other classroom tools, and materials to facilitate incorporating topics such as LGBTQ-inclusiveness, violence prevention, and trafficking into CSE curriculum.



Training: Many districts seek support with training teachers and other district staff to deliver high quality sex ed. The networks provide teacher curricula training and workshops ranging from overviews of sex ed policies and the education code to in-depth curriculum training to special topics, such as healthy relationships and social emotional learning.



[I joined the network] to find out more current updates on sexuality [education] in the county and in California with the new laws and **the network has been very beneficial to that for my professional development...** It has been pivotal in helping my district improve policies and be able and to communicate back with the district about state laws. They've been **a source of information that I would not usually get from other local organizations.**

- Network participant



[We've done] training for teachers and administrators. For example, **an overview of policy, education code, curriculum.** ... [In the] last meeting we presented health standards for fifth grade and K-12 requirements around sex ed. And then we had a discussion on curriculum. **We gave an overview of six different curricula for elementary schools that are available.** I had some follow up with districts who want to get teachers trained, or administrator colleagues on ed code – it's new territory for all of them.

- Network lead



They're **readily available for trainings** – teacher trainings and workshops. We usually get a menu of things that are available that we can send out teachers too. And presentations – being available to speak to superintendent, principals, board around specific topics. **...having an outside expert has helped move things along.**

- Network participant



How do CSE Networks Support Districts?



Peer learning and relationship building: District participants unanimously spoke to the value of connecting with people working on sex ed in other school districts. They have learned from each other, drawn on each other's successes, challenges, and lessons learned, and built relationships with people who they can contact outside of network meetings for partnership. Networks give participants a sense of community and make them feel less alone in their efforts to meet sex ed needs in their districts and schools and help them navigate the challenges that they experience.



Guest speakers on topics of interest: Community partner organizations regularly participate in CSE network meetings, and network leads will also bring in organizations and speakers for specific topics of interest. Network members have particularly appreciated learning about LGBTQ inclusivity, trauma informed sex ed, social emotional learning, healthy relationships, human trafficking, and minor consent.



Connections to technical assistance: While the networks provide information and resources to support districts to adopt and enhance sex ed policies and curricula on their own, many districts also seek additional hands-on support. Cardea has provided more than 40 districts in Northern California with technical assistance (TA). The type of TA varies by district need and often includes support with curriculum review and selection, parent information sessions, and teacher training. The CSE networks in Southern California are among the newest, and Cardea is still working to identify how they can effectively meet district-level TA needs in that part of the state. Cardea offers districts guidance and resources at no cost and has a fee-for-service model for more intensive support. See the box on the next page for more information about the fee-for-service model.



I became really aware of issues that I might not have been in the know about. **That was invaluable in furthering my knowledge of all things CSE.** I had a good sense for the sex ed portion but for a lot of the [related topics] – LGBTQ issues, the issues around how to teach inclusiveness and healthy and unhealthy relationships – I wasn't aware of lot of those intricacies of those issues that might not be going on...

- Network participant



I think that [the network has] been able to **provide the platform to get the information out there, also it's been able to provide links to support pieces that we need.** ... We've been able to have a unifying voice and support system. It's been nice to have those pieces together because there's backup. Things that you need the most, support, exist.

- Network participant



As a district person, the first thing you say is 'what are other districts doing around this?' Being around other [districts in the network meetings], **you get to strategize and brainstorm with them.**

- Network participant



How do CSE Networks Support Districts?

CSE Network Spotlight: Cardea's Fee-for-Service Model

In order to meet the high level of demand for TA, Cardea offers a first tier of support at no cost to districts and has a fee-for-service model for more intensive support. For no cost, Cardea will meet with a district and give an initial presentation to the school district board, conduct a district sex ed assessment and help districts develop a work plan, and share resources that a district can use to select and implement curricula (e.g. agendas for task force meetings, talking points and slides for parent information nights and board meetings). If a district does not have the capacity to implement the work plan or prefers that Cardea lead the work directly, Cardea offers the fee-for-service model. This approach provides the resources necessary for Cardea to be able to deliver more intensive support to districts that need it and also allows Cardea to provide free or reduced cost TA to districts that do not have the financial resources to access those services.

How have CSE Networks Advanced Sex Ed in California?

CSE networks have facilitated meaningful improvements in the quantity and quality of sex ed that students receive. Districts have implemented curricula that are aligned with the California Healthy Youth Act, and many have gone beyond the goal of simply complying with the law to striving for excellence. The networks have provided districts with information and tools and built the capacity of leaders within districts to champion sex ed efforts and support their schools. These successes are described in more depth in this section.

CHYA Compliance

Many districts' first and foremost need when they joined a CSE network was to understand what was required under the California Healthy Youth Act and access information and resources so they could comply with it. Support from the networks has helped districts achieve compliance and provide high quality sex ed. COE and district leaders are now versed in the law and its requirements, and districts have updated their sex ed policy, implemented curricula, and built teacher knowledge and comfort to teach sex ed.



They gave us a whole presentation on CHYA. They also created talking points to take back to school sites. Now [the district is] talking about ... how we can implement and make sure schools are up to date. I couldn't have done this by myself. I wouldn't have even known where to start. **They make the difficult really easy for us.**

- Network participant



CSE Network Spotlight: Networks and the California Healthy Youth Act

The California Healthy Youth Act requires school districts to ensure that students in grades seven to twelve receive comprehensive sexual health education and HIV prevention education. CHYA stipulates that comprehensive sex education and HIV prevention education **must** be taught at least once in middle school and once in high school; districts **may** teach comprehensive sex education and HIV prevention education before middle school.

To be CHYA compliant, all instruction and materials must:

- Be presented in an age-appropriate fashion
- Contain medically accurate and objective information
- Be appropriate for use with students of all races, sexual orientations, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds, students with disabilities and English learners
- Recognize different sexual orientations and be inclusive of same-sex couples when discussing or providing examples or relationships and couples
- Teach students about gender, gender expression, identity, and harm or gender stereotypes
- Teach the value of and prepare students to have committed relationships such as marriage
- Teach knowledge and skills to form healthy relationships
- Provide students with skills to make healthy decisions about sexuality
- Not teach or promote religious doctrine
- Provide skills for and encourage student communication with parents/guardians and other trusted adults about sexuality

How have CSE Networks Advanced Sex Ed in California?

Aspiring for Excellence

Many districts did not stop their work on sex ed after simply ensuring compliance with CHYA. They have increased their commitment to providing sex ed that meets the needs of all students and draw connections with social and emotional wellness. District stakeholders explained that they have learned about a broader scope of topics related to sex ed through their work in the networks and broadened their definitions of what good sex ed looks like. In particular, stakeholders have focused on ensuring that sex ed is gender inclusive and includes information about identity, healthy relationships, and is tied to social-emotional learning principles. Districts have increasingly expanded sex ed into elementary grades and have built the capacity of special education teachers so that special ed students not only receive sex ed, but that they receive it in a way that is tailored to their needs.



It's like night and day what's different in the mindset. ... **We've gone from compliance – doing what we have to do to [this being a] moral imperative – [it's] what we get to do.** It's opened up other doors – how do we provide gender inclusive education for students.

- Network participant

... We teach in elementary and have character education, but we weren't getting at inclusiveness or what it means to be bullied or what it means to be an upstander. **For the first time we're talking about all kids** and that's a big change.

- Network participant

...**there's been more discussion and more special ed teachers [trained] to deliver sex ed.** The focus tends to be on middle school and high school general ed students, but **through the ed code, it applies to all students.** I feel the number of teachers being trained has increased and districts know they had to deliver to that population of students.

- Cardea staff

How have CSE Networks Advanced Sex Ed in California?

Local capacity built to advance sex ed

CSE networks have contributed to meaningful growth in capacity within the counties to manage sex ed. The information and resources shared through the networks have built participants' understanding of not only the legal requirements, but also the process for working with districts to identify and/or update curricula, train teachers, and communicate with parents and community stakeholders. While many districts still seek out technical assistance and hands-on support from Cardea or other local partners, network leads and partners within the CSE network counties have built their own expertise and confidence and often lead the coordination and support functions that Cardea initially filled. One local CSE network lead emphasized that working with the Cardea staff member who facilitates the network has been an incredible source of professional development for her. She noted that observing how the staff member approaches challenging conversations with parents and board members, and learning from the trainings the staff member led has helped her cultivate the skills and confidence to take the lead and play those roles.

Creating community and support among districts

Network stakeholders unanimously spoke to the value of the support network that they have developed through their CSE networks. They learn from the experiences – both successes and challenges – of other districts and feel connected with and supported by leaders in other districts who are working toward common goals of ensuring that all students receive high quality sex ed. In addition to connecting with other districts leads during network meetings, many participants also communicate with each other outside of meetings when they are looking for thought partnership or resources. For example, two districts in one county were experiencing common challenges with community backlash over new sex ed curricula and shared their experiences to inform and support each other. Network leads regularly make connections among participants when they know that districts are working on similar processes, experiencing similar challenges, or have experiences and resources that can support others.

I learn so much from Heidi (Cardea staff lead). It is professional growth for me when I'm around her. **I channel her with parents and board members** – her level of knowledge and eloquence speaking about this topic. **It's transformed me as a professional.**

- Network participant

A lot of our trainings and workshops are to give the tools and resources schools need to be sustainable and maintain the work with fidelity. **Our approach at the County Office of Education is system building;** the alignment of systems and building the capacity of our school districts.

- Network lead

[The network has] given me a sense that I'm not alone. Through the network I've met other coordinators and Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) who have been able to gather and understand that we're not all alone –**[we are] in same place and learning together.**

- Network participant

The **network [gave] me a cheerleader** to keep going.

- Network participant

How have CSE Networks Advanced Sex Ed in California?

Managing and responding to controversy

Counties across California have experienced community concerns or pushback about sex ed since CHYA passed, largely related to parents, board, and other community members feeling concerned about whether the comprehensive sex ed content would be appropriate for their children. Communities are culturally and politically diverse, and parents have varying degrees of comfort with the content their children receive in the classroom. CSE network county and district stakeholders underscored the value of Cardea and the CSE networks in helping them navigate heated conversations with parents, school board members, and sex ed opposition groups. Through direct TA and resources shared through network meetings, districts have effectively met with parents, board members, and others in the community to talk about CHYA and the importance of CSE and succeeded in adopting and implementing curricula.



“ We had a district where a parent [was] really pushing back on their board policy and even though network wasn't at forefront from that, [the network was] behind the scenes providing back up research. The board [ultimately] said no, we will stay in alignment with state law. **The network wasn't highly visible, but [provided] behind the scenes support and resources and moral support.** ”

- Network participant

“ We had a district that was really struggling with opposition and opt out issues and issues with religious values and they reached out to us. They had been attending our network ...**the network allows you to feel like you have someone else who can help you.** [The network] sent information, but also followed through with legal analysis of the education code and help deciphering the law. ... **Those to me are successes - when they don't feel alone.** ”

- Network lead

How have CSE Networks Advanced Sex Ed in California?

CSE Network Spotlight: How the Santa Clara Network Addressed Controversy

The Santa Clara CSE network played an essential role in helping districts navigate community pushback about the CHYA-aligned curricula that they were adopting. Parents in several counties raised significant concerns about the content of the curricula that were selected for their children's schools. The controversy in one of the districts garnered media attention, which fueled concerns in other neighboring districts.

CSE network districts engaged Cardea to facilitate community meetings, parent sessions, and board discussions to provide information about the law and the districts' requirements for providing sex ed and to respond to parent concerns in a way that ensured parents felt heard while also underscoring the importance of sex ed for all students. By the 2017-18 school year, one of the districts that experienced significant challenges the prior year had successfully re-engaged in a curriculum selection process, adopted new curricula, and implemented sex ed. As a result, students in middle and high school received improved CSE and despite the prior experience with parent pushback, very few parents opted their children out of sex ed.

To help other districts learn from the challenges, the network brought districts together to share guidance, resources, and peer learnings to support them to manage controversy both proactively and responsively.



**Lessons for the Field:
How to Replicate the
CSE Network Approach**

Building and Sustaining a Network: What Resources Does it Take?

Interested in starting a CSE network in your county? Cardea staff and county leads described the resources it takes to start a network and to keep it going once its established. They shared that it's largely a matter of investing the time into the relationship building up front and recruitment, and then planning and coordination for regular network meetings.

Getting Started

Identify a CSE network lead and secure COE support: Getting a network started primarily requires people power – having a champion who can take the lead on planning and facilitating meetings, and an investment in time for building relationships in the county and getting people interested in the idea of a CSE network. The process begins with learning about the landscape of the county, identifying education system and community partners, and in particular, finding the right person at the County Office of Education who has purview over sex education and will be a champion for the network.

Plan a launch meeting: Once a relationship with the COE champion is established and the county expresses support for the network and agrees to an initial CSE network meeting, the next steps are to plan and recruit for the initial meeting. This requires meetings with local organizations who are involved in sex education and related issues to invite them to participate in the network, and inviting staff from local school districts who have purview over sex education policy and curriculum. Cardea staff have found that having the superintendent encourage districts leadership to participate in the initial meeting is an effective strategy for recruiting participants. Cardea shares draft email language with the superintendent to tailor and send out to district stakeholders that shows support for the CSE network and encourage them to attend. In the initial event, the network lead facilitates a meeting with an overview of the role of the network and presentations about CSE policies and time for districts to introduce themselves and what they want to learn through the CSE network. One Cardea staff member explained that the key to a successful first meeting is to build excitement about the topic and the network so that people want to come back.

Starting a Network

Estimated staff time needed: .25 FTE to start up a network

Length of time: Three months to one year, depending on COE contact level of interest and championship and engagement of local partners



Once you get people there **you need an interesting agenda that is relevant to their current work to make them want to come back.** The first meeting is typically an overview of CHYA and what CSE is and really just sharing – having districts introduce themselves and share their successes and challenges and get to know who they are and what they are dealing with and who to connect with. **The first meeting is getting them excited to work on this issue and letting them know who else is in the room,** so they know they have support from experts and they don't need to recreate the wheel.

- Cardea staff



[Starting a network is] **99% people power.**

- Cardea staff

Building and Sustaining a Network: What Resources Does it Take?

Maintaining a Network

Once a network is started, running it is not highly time intensive. The network needs a lead person to plan and coordinate quarterly meetings, and many networks have established committees that help with the planning process. The meeting agenda is informed by district input (gathered during meetings, through assessment surveys, or via email). Depending on the agenda topics, the lead often identifies speakers or community partners to participate in meetings to present about specific content. Leads send out emails to invite people to the meetings, gather RSVPs, book a room for the meeting, and then facilitate the meeting. Following the meeting they send minutes, relevant resources, and any meeting evaluation materials, as well as follow up to respond to any questions.

While Cardea has played key roles in starting the networks across the state, many CSE networks are building their capacity to be run independently or with only periodic support from Cardea. Identifying a local lead who has connections to local partners in the community is critical for sustainability. COEs with a staff person who can assume the role have made the most progress toward independent sustainability.



Maintaining a Network

Monthly staff time needed: Approximately 10 hours a month for the month of a meeting; less in non-meeting months.

Other resources: Meeting room space, often which can be free if held in COE or other district facilities; refreshments.

CSE Network Spotlight: Cross-Network Connections

Cardea facilitates cross-network planning calls in which leads from CSE networks across the state participate. The calls facilitate learning and resource sharing across the networks, which provides the network leads with opportunities to learn from the experiences of other networks and identify new resources they can bring to their own network. Just as the county CSE network meetings facilitate cross-district relationship building and learning, the cross-CSE network calls contribute to building a state-wide network of CSE leaders.

Building and Sustaining a Network: Tips for Success

Network leads and participants shared recommendations about how to build a successful CSE network:

- ☑ **Identify the key players:** Who are the champions for sex ed within districts? Who has decision-making power related to policy, curriculum, and other sex ed supports in a district? Who are the administrators, staff, and teachers within schools who can speak to student needs and lead school-level efforts? Who is not at the table who needs support?

- ☑ **Do an assets and needs assessment:** Assess the current state of sex ed across the county to identify what policies are in place and what is happening in the districts. The assessment should also explore:
 - **Local needs:** Identify needs both specific to CSE and also related to other issues that affect students like social-emotional wellness, bullying, trafficking, and trans inclusion.
 - **Local assets:** Scan the county for organizations that can be brought in as partners and identify who the local champions are for CSE and student wellness. Explore what systems and structures are already in place in the COE that support the health and wellbeing of students that could be built upon for a CSE network (in particular, what task forces or committees exist around health education, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, and other prevention efforts?).

- ☑ **Start small and build momentum:** Relationships are central to building a network. Start with cultivating relationships with key players in the COE, school districts, and with community partners that bring expertise and can provide information and other resources. Bring people together to explore needs, interest, and build enthusiasm. Time invested up front for relationship building will create a strong foundation for the network on which to build.

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You need to have the right players at the table and be constantly assessing– Do we have a sense of what students need? Do we need to reach out to certain folks, or schools that are not at the table, to provide additional support?

- Network lead

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Bringing together key stakeholders within the county or region. Being **really responsive to districts and their needs**, and this is a slow process – and **always being willing to change and try new things**. It doesn't have to be the same as what other states, regions have implemented. It's going to be unique based on their needs.

- Network lead

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- ☑ **Hold space for sharing and learning:** Creating time in the network meeting agendas for people to share about their successes and challenges and ask each other questions facilitates connections, cross-district learning, and surfaces ideas and opportunities. Open discussion time allows participants to learn from each other, find support, and celebrate their successes.
- ☑ **Get creative to overcome geographical barriers:** While the existing CSE networks come together in-person for meetings, this is easier for some than others given the geographical size of the counties. While the in-person nature of the meetings is something that participants emphasize is incredibly valuable, some recognize that there are technology solutions that can breach the geographic divide to connect leaders across districts in other counties. Digital spaces for meetings – both video and phone – along with online platforms for offline discussion and resource sharing can also facilitate collaboration and cross-county learning.



“ We’re geographically close, so it works for us to meet in person. It’s feasible for us, but not the case for all counties in our state. Even though there are things that can’t replace in person meetings – there is tech for online meetings and phone conferences. [It is important to] **think outside the box in terms of how to have a digital space for people to share and get questions.** ”

- Network lead

Why Should You Join a Network?

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[The network] always has community agencies that share resources or ideas and so for me, sometimes we get in siloes in districts and I think going to the network has made the work about more of a balance of what we're here for in supporting students. **It broadens the view of what the mission is and gives tangible tools and information** to think about.

- Network participant”

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Unless you're a content expert, it helps you out in many ways, because you're able to learn about things you didn't know before. I keep going back to this – **you're not isolated in the work**. It connects you to a network and is a connection to other leaders in the work.

- Network participant”

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Expand your view and have an open mind of why we are here and the importance of connecting to each student and teaching this important content and building relationships and supporting the teachers so they can do the work. **Come with an open mind and heart because it's not just about compliance – it has to be about inclusivity.**

- Network participant”

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Definitely join and get active. **The networking benefits are amazing**, the resources... [it's] nice to go there when you have questions and say hey have you done this or worked it out. **[It's] great to feel supported and you know if you have a question and people you can call...** And if there's something you need to figure out, you can ask network [if they could] bring in a resource for this. The networking, guest speakers, support, and just keeping you updated with everything that's new.

- Network participant”

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It's very **meaningful to have discussions** even if they're questions you don't want to hear sometimes... It's surprising when you're dealing with a sensitive topic that people don't get it, or don't know they've crossed a line, or not done enough. That part of it is really important.

- Network participant”

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Even if [you're] the one person at the organization/district, there are others out there who will support [you]. **It might feel like you're working on [your] own, [but you're] not.**

- Network participant”

Looking Ahead

Cardea continues to expand the network approach in California and launched two new networks in the 2017-18 school year.

Cardea is also developing an online toolkit that will serve as a “how to” for counties interested in starting a CSE network. The toolkit will be a step-by-step guide to starting and managing a network and will include resources such as sample letters for the superintendent to send to invite district leads to participate in the network, agenda outlines and activities, and links to online resources.

Want more information about CSE Networks?



Cardea welcomes questions about the CSE Network model. For more information, please contact Jeff Gould at 510.835.3700 or jgould@cardeaservices.org and visit <http://cardeaservices.org>.

About the WISE Funder Collaborative

Led by the Grove Foundation, the WISE initiative is supported by a collaboration of funders including the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

About the WISE Initiative

Established in 2008 with grantmaking beginning in 2009, WISE is a national initiative dedicated to institutionalizing sex education – so that sex education is part of schools' ongoing curricula. The goals of the WISE initiative are to 1) advance school-based sex education programs by supporting targeted implementation efforts and 2) expand the field's body of knowledge related to best practices for institutionalizing sex education.

About Cardea

Cardea envisions communities where all people, especially those who have been most underserved, have equitable access to quality health and human services. For more than 45 years, we have strived to improve organizations' abilities to deliver accessible, high quality, culturally proficient, and compassionate services to their clients through training, organizational development, and research and evaluation services.

About Learning for Action

Established in 2000, Learning for Action is headquartered in San Francisco's Mission District. LFA's mission is to partner with social sector organizations to advance knowledge, capacity, and culture of learning in the service of equity and justice. LFA's technical expertise and community-based experience ensure that the insights and information we deliver to nonprofits, foundations, and public agencies can be put directly into action. We aim to support structural change that addresses the underlying root causes of inequities so that all members of our communities have access to the opportunities they deserve for productive, healthy, and meaningful lives.