

PLN PROFILES



PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORK PROFILES

Continuous Improvement Increases Child Counts and Reshapes the Meaning of Teamwork

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Publish Date:
June 2023



A Note on the Partnership Between the California Department of Education and WestEd

WestEd provides technical assistance and support to the California Department of Education (CDE) to cultivate the highest quality identification and recruitment (I&R, or IDR) practices across the state. In California, each subgrantee takes local responsibility for its I&R efforts. The partnership between the CDE and WestEd is committed to continuous improvement, including (1) approaching I&R through an investigative mindset wherein we value curiosity and innovation as well as research, (2) making the I&R and improvements to I&R context-specific, and (3) using both qualitative and quantitative data to see whether our improvement efforts are working—and making adjustments if they are not.

The partnership is driven by a commitment to fostering equity and building systems that support and sustain diverse learners in many different contexts. We work toward the goal that each student receives the support and opportunity to succeed in school and beyond; is able to choose from a wide variety of postsecondary options; and comes through the experience of schooling feeling valued, validated, and like a fundamental, contributing member of the school community.

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Suggested citation: Medina, Heather, & Liz Jameyson. 2023. *Continuous Improvement Increases Child Counts and Reshapes the Meaning of Teamwork*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.

Acknowledgments: Acknowledgments are extended to the Region 23 team, including Manuel Nunez, Director; Yolanda Esparza, (former) Data Specialist; Nancy Millan, (former) Data Specialist; Ruth Aguilar, (former) Recruiter; and Maria Marquez de Mendoza, Data Specialist, for being open minded and collaborating in the continuous improvement work for the benefit of their region's I&R component. A special acknowledgment is extended to Javier Mendoza-Sanchez, Program Manager, for his unfailing commitment to the PLN, to his staff, and to the migratory children in Region 23.

PLN

PROFILES



This profile describes work accomplished by the San Joaquin County Office of Education Migrant Program, a Migrant Education Program (MEP) subgrantee in California. The San Joaquin County MEP, known as Region 23, took part in a professional learning network (PLN) in which participants used a continuous improvement process to make progress on an identified area of focus. Region 23 focused on increasing the number of referrals generated by all MEP staff, increasing the possibility of more children qualified.

San Joaquin County Office of Education Migrant Education Program (Region 23)

Counties served:

- San Joaquin
- Contra Costa (and, in rare situations, families in Tuolumne)

Districts served: 18

2021–22 child count: 2,089

Agricultural work: There is temporary work at dairies and nurseries. There is also seasonal work with cherries in May and June; peaches, apples, and pears during midsummer; grapes in late August and September; and pumpkins in October. Cherries represent the region's shortest peak season of about three weeks and the biggest migration of agricultural workers into the region.

Recruitment model: The program manager supports recruitment by conducting site visits and supervising five regional recruiters who conduct identification and recruitment activities in three categories: school based, community based, and employer or field based.



For a child to be enrolled in the MEP, they must meet specific eligibility requirements for migratory children as outlined by the Office of Migrant Education (OME) at the U.S. Department of Education. To determine if a child is eligible, a recruiter conducts an interview and asks a series of questions. One primary recruitment challenge is finding potential eligible families to interview. Recruiters often rely on referrals from school personnel to build their list of potential families to contact.

Establishing the Focus of the Work

The Region 23 continuous improvement team (known as “the team” throughout this brief) began their improvement project in September 2020. They began by analyzing local recruitment data for the 2019–20 performance period.

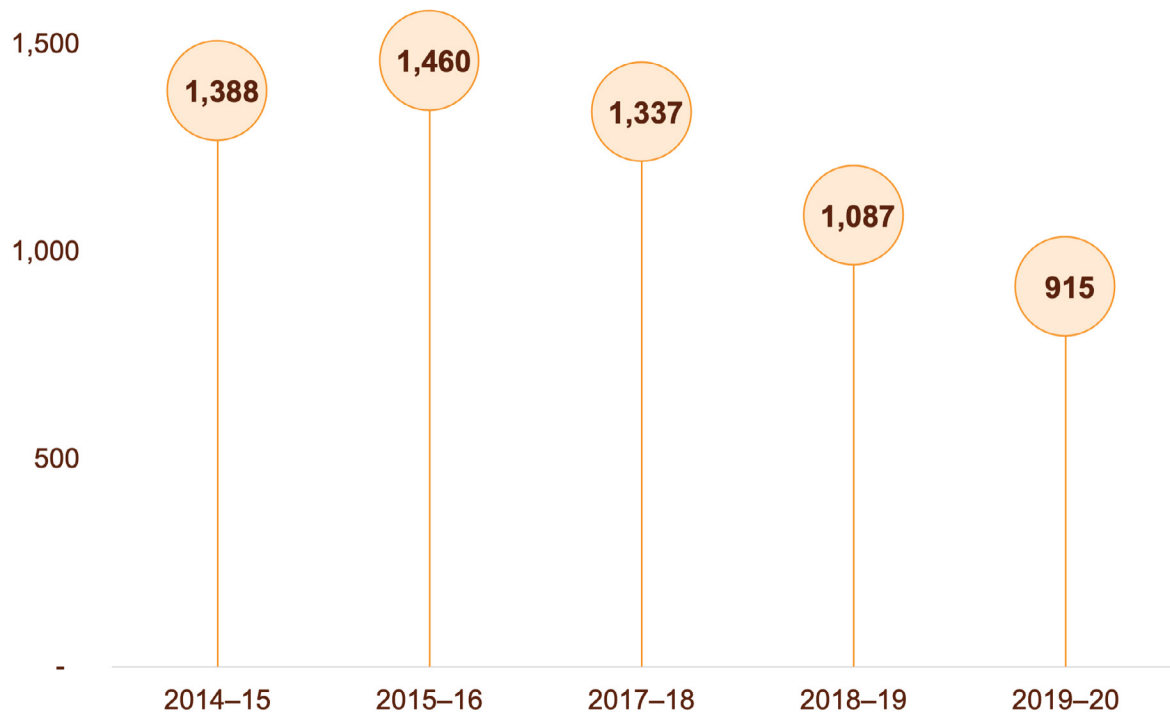
The team used a data-analysis protocol focused on four questions:

- What parts of this data catch your attention (just the facts)?
- What does the data tell us? What does the data NOT tell us?
- What strengths are there to celebrate?
- What are the problems of practice suggested by the data?

From their initial analysis during the first PLN session, the team learned that since a peak during the 2015–16 performance period, the number of migratory children qualified during each consecutive performance period steadily declined.

Figure 1 below is a lollipop chart that shows the number of migratory children qualified in Region 23 on a Certificate of Eligibility (COE) completed during each performance period. The team’s peak of 1,460 children qualified was in 2015–16. That number subsequently declined to only 915 children being qualified in the 2019–20 performance period. The data shown in figure 1 was the data that the team saw in the first meeting of the PLN.

Figure 1. Number of Migratory Children Qualified, 2014–15 Through 2019–20



Source: MSIN, September 4, 2020. (The number of children qualified during the 2016–17 program year is omitted, as California transitioned to a new migrant student information system that year.)

After discussing the decline in children recruited shown in figure 1 above, the team established the following aim statement in October of 2020:

“We will increase the number of [identification and recruitment] I&R referrals [generated] by 20 percent each quarter based on the previous performance period quarters, by October 2021.”

The team retained this aim statement during both years of participation in the PLN. For the second year, the aim statement was revised to update the year to 2022.

Using a Continuous Improvement Approach to Inform the Subgrantee Professional Learning Network

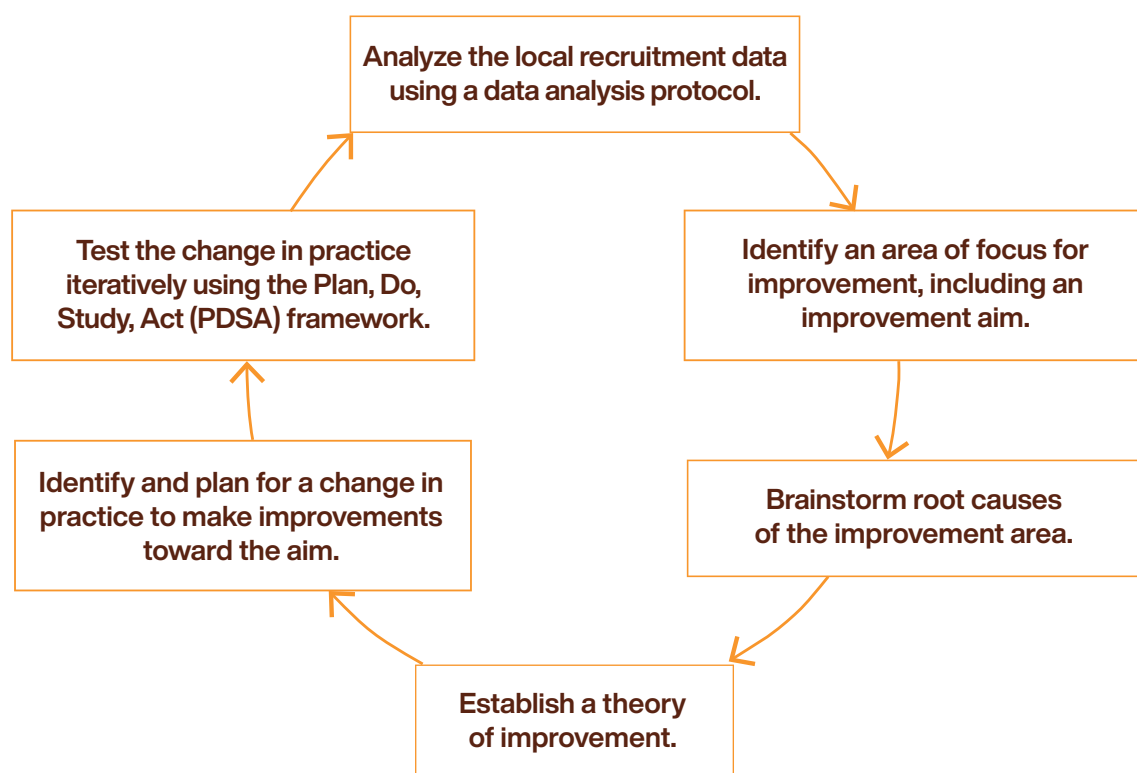
The PLN is the result of a partnership between the CDE and its service provider, WestEd, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service organization.

The CDE and WestEd launched the PLN in 2019. Each year, a cohort of teams from five subgrantees comes together several times to collaboratively engage in continuous improvement. The continuous improvement approach used in the PLN is grounded in improvement science, primarily using the methodology described in below *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better*.¹

The PLN sessions were framed around the steps in the continuous improvement process depicted in figure 2 below. During each session, subgrantee teams learned about the principles and tools of this continuous improvement approach, then had an opportunity to apply them to their own areas of focus. Each participating subgrantee began by identifying an area of focus related to identification and recruitment based on their local data and context. The subgrantees then engaged in a disciplined continuous improvement process related to their areas of focus. Following each session, subgrantee teams met with a WestEd coach to make progress on their areas of focus.

- 1 Bryk, Anthony S., Louis M. Gomez, Alicia Grunow, and Paul G. LeMahieu. 2015. *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED568744>

Figure 2. The Continuous Improvement Process Occurs in an Iterative Cycle



Identifying and Implementing Changes in Practice

After establishing their aim statement, the team began analyzing the root causes of the lack of referrals generated. From this analysis, the team identified several changes in practice that could be implemented to improve their I&R referral process. The team decided that the idea with the most potential was training district MEP staff on how to generate and utilize two types of reports—one type using the state’s student information system, MSIN (or Migrant Student Information Network), and the other using the district database.

The first type of reports, called MSIN data monitoring reports, allow MEP staff to quickly identify children who might be missing from the current school year MEP enrollment for all districts assigned to a region. The team implemented a process of reviewing MSIN data monitoring reports *monthly* (and in some cases weekly or daily). Previously, the team had only focused on these reports toward the end of the data close deadline. The program manager exported data from one of the MSIN reports² to create a main Google Sheet that showed children with prior eligibility who were not eligible in the current performance period. He sorted the main Google Sheet per school or district, as appropriate, then assigned each sheet to MEP staff for follow-up.

The second type of report, which uses district databases, is the gains and losses report. This report shows any changes in district enrollment for a specific date range. This is especially helpful in identifying new enrollees to the district who have not yet been referred to a recruiter to determine if they are eligible for the MEP. Regional recruiters spent approximately one to two days a week working directly with the district staff to generate referrals from this report. The program manager required MEP staff to complete a monthly identification and recruitment School Contact Log (IDR School Contact Log) to track the effectiveness of this change. A template for the IDR School Contact Log is shown in appendix A.

Deciding to use these reports, however, was only the beginning. The team also planned several changes to ensure these reports were utilized effectively. The program manager created a form that he uses to categorize the child referrals generated by an MSIN data monitoring report³ (see appendix B for a sample of this form). This form helps

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- 2 The “R enrolled, not EIP” report was used. This is a list of children who have a Type = R (regular) enrollment line in the selected School Year, but they are not Eligible-in-Period because they are missing a date in the selected Performance Period (9/1 to 8/31) to show they are/were present. These children may be counted if evidence of their presence is entered, such as a service date(s), an Annual Verification, or other Communication Event.
 - 3 The qualifying arrival date or “QAD age eligible” report was used. This is a list of children who were enrolled in the recent past, but they do not have an enrollment line in the selected School Year. They could be enrolled (and counted) if they are present because they still have an eligible COE and they are under 22 years old.

MEP staff determine what follow-up actions to take for each child referral. Importantly, the team set clear expectations that all MEP staff are responsible for helping identify new families by generating referrals. This expectation is particularly crucial when I&R staff is limited.

As the reports were generated each month, the progress made by recruiting more eligible children was easy to see in real time. The team took opportunities during all-staff meetings to express appreciation for all the hard work and flexibility everyone had demonstrated during the pandemic to continue recruiting and serving families.

In addition to utilizing all of the reports available to increase school-based recruitment, the recruiters did not neglect other avenues of recruitment such as field- and employer-based recruitment. For example, during peak season recruiters met weekly with the program manager to adjust their recruitment schedule. The program manager shared that “every week of the peak season does not look the same. Because if I do a schedule the same, then I’m missing out on potential families that have different schedules. We meet to address the need.” The program manager was able to see the value of being flexible and adapting schedules and recruitment strategies in real time as the need arose.

Outcomes from the Change

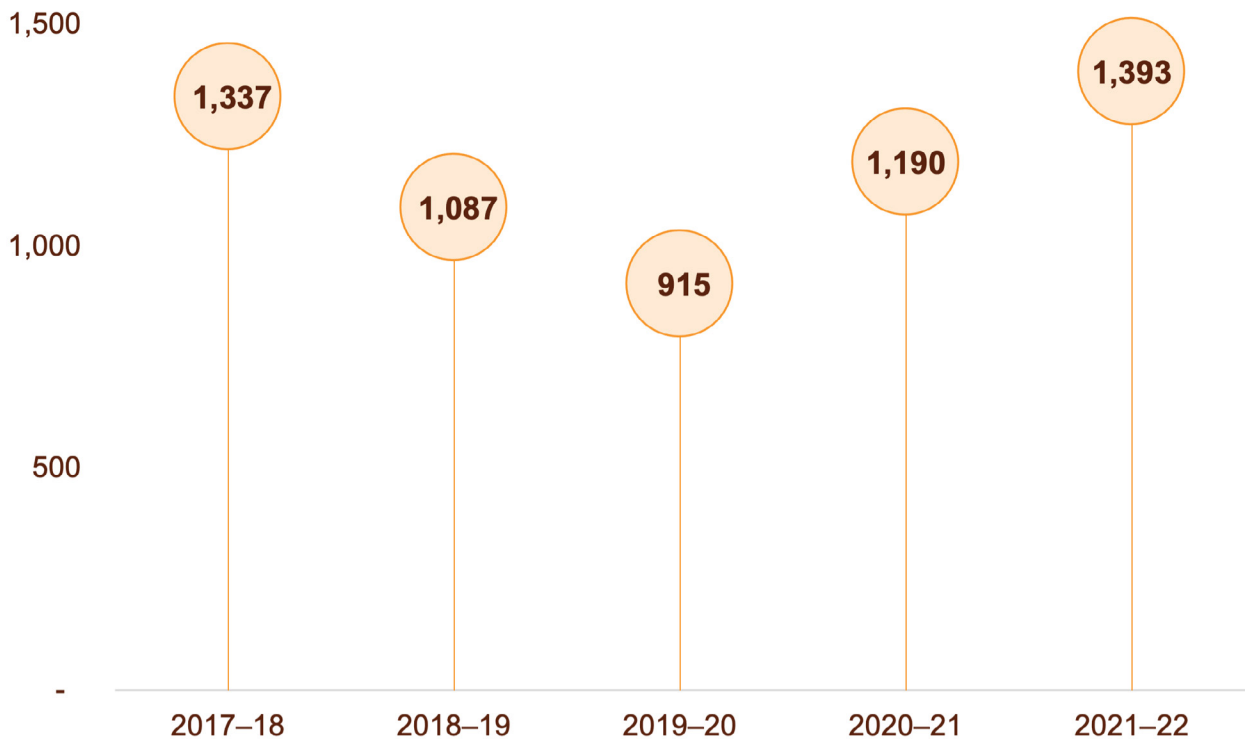
Creating a system that included the program manager analyzing and tracking referrals collected by all MEP staff resulted in an increased sense of accountability for all. The form provided to document referrals provided data to track the desired results. For example, one staff member increased the number of referrals generated between February 2020 (when the change was implemented) and February 2021 by 56 percent.

As a result of the team’s efforts to increase the number of referrals generated, more eligibility interviews were conducted, and more migratory children were qualified. The number of migratory children qualified during the 2020–21 performance period was 1,190, which reflected an increase of 275 children (growth of approximately 30 percent) more than the 2019–20 performance period (915 children). Region 23 was pleased with the progress they had made during their first year in the PLN and saw potential for even more improvement in the second year. The team saw the potential to reach or exceed 1,337 children qualified, the same amount that had been reached during the 2017–18 performance period.

Similar to the first year of the PLN, Region 23 saw outstanding results from implementing their change idea in the second year of PLN work. They surpassed their aspiration of achieving 1,337 children qualified by reaching 1,393 qualifications during the 2021–22 performance period.

Figure 3 below is a lollipop chart that shows the number of migratory children qualified in Region 23 on a COE completed during each performance period from 2017–18 to 2021–22.

Figure 3. Number of Migratory Children Qualified, 2017–18 Through 2021–22



It is interesting to note that although the team’s improvement aim did not specify a goal of increasing the number of children qualified, their aim to increase the number of I&R referrals generated by 20 percent correlates closely with their actual 17 percent increase in children qualified (203 more children) on COEs completed in 2021–22 compared to the previous performance period.

The team’s continuous improvement work over the past two years has stabilized a decline in MEP enrollment that could have been a detriment to the longevity of their program. Their hard work was validated by the impressive results of the total child counts for both the 2020–21 and the 2021–22 performance periods. After one year of PLN work, the Region 23 total child counts increased by 6 percent (from 1,720 to 1,829). At the end of Year 2, they increased by 14 percent (to 2,089).

In addition to the total child counts confirming that their changes in practice were a success, something else came to light during the team’s PLN work. Through his work

in the PLN, the program manager learned to ask questions that got at the root causes of issues of staff morale and growth. For example, he asked recruiters things such as the following: What are your current I&R daily, weekly, and monthly activities? What do you think are your areas of strength and areas of growth? What is working and what is not working for you? This questioning has helped him gain insight into his staff members' well-being and how to make small changes to improve it (such as creating alternating schedules for recruiters to stay in the office a day or two when they needed a break from recruiting in the field). He realized that more priority needed to be given to building staff morale in the midst of changing referral practices.

Accordingly, the management team started intentionally highlighting the positive efforts of the MEP staff and hosting staff appreciation events to celebrate the team efforts. The program manager explains,

When your team trusts you to try new strategies and you're able to see and share the results reflected in the data, everyone feels validated and motivated to work harder by continuing to use these strategies. All the hard work invested pays off when you see results. As more new families were being identified with the new strategies, this motivated them to continue searching for more. Since low staff morale (that had been building up even before the pandemic started) came up as one of the possible reasons for a decrease in recruitment during a reflective activity in the PLN, I shared this with our MEP director. We took the initiative to surprise the whole MEP team by not having the all-staff meeting that they were expecting but hosting a longer appreciation luncheon instead. This also helped boost team morale.

Next Steps

The team finished Year 2 of the PLN excited to see the direct connection between the implementation of new practices and an increase in overall child counts. They have recently reshaped their strategy of working with data monitoring reports. While they used to have one all-staff meeting, they now have smaller group meetings with each MEP component (for example, the preschool component, the out-of-school youth component) to enable them to target specific recruitment needs depending on the component. They continue to work on building up staff morale and have created a positive mindset model in the form of an acrostic to illustrate a new concept of team-work for the I&R component. This mindset model is shown in the text box below.

Mindset Model

TEAMWORK:

Trust – the process, the strategies, the program, the changes, each other, yourself, your work

Empathy – toward migrant families, each other, colleagues, each unique situation, districts

Adaptability – to the changes (staff), new schedules, the need of migrant families/program, flexible

Mindful – of our counts, upcoming peak season, short migration periods, weather conditions

Workable – open to working under any situation that arises, with staff members, different work assignment

Organized – keep clear concise notes, be always aware of assigned schedule, prioritize


Resourceful – utilize your contacts and established relationships, reach out/ ask for support, be a resource

Knowledgeable – use years of experience in recruitment, use prior knowledge, use successful strategies


Region 23 experienced outstanding results during their participation in the PLN. This motivated the team to implement more change ideas in the year after the two-year PLN process. They have adopted the PLN's continuous improvement methodology as an integral part of their local I&R practices, and they plan to use it indefinitely to increase child counts and promote teamwork.

Appendix A. IDR School Contact Log

This form is completed by MEP staff and submitted monthly to the program manager to track staff efforts to generate referrals at specific school sites.



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IDR School Contact Log

MEP Staff Name: _____ Position Title: _____

Month: _____

Date	School Name	Type of Attempt	Outcome

Type Codes

- Phone Contact
- Drop in
- Scheduled Visit
- Appointment

Outcome Codes (related to IDR efforts)

- Spoke to secretary, registrar, counselor (position)
- Obtained referrals (name from who)
- Scheduled follow up presentation/meeting
- Left message with (Person Name)
- Left Migrant Education IDR information/materials
- Obtained and/or ran gain/losses reports
- Obtained EL/newcomer lists
- Talked about the program, requirements and services
- Established contact/working relationship
- Conducted presentation (type)

Appendix B. “QAD Age Eligible” Report Findings

The program manager uses this form to categorize the findings from the “QAD age eligible” report. The form is used to guide staff meeting discussions and improve data quality and local data management practices.

COLOR	FINDINGS	REQUESTED INFORMATION	COUNT
PINK	Student has good QAD/ CALPADS has a current enrollment for 2022–23 school year/ Currently enrolled in a district in our region but not enrolled in our region for 2022–23 school year	Send enrollment form to data specialist and cc me/provide comment on plausible reason student was missed in the reenrollment and/or rollover process	39
YELLOW	CALPADS has a current year 2022–23 enrollment at another region/MSIN does not have an enrollment for their current region after departing from our region	Send an MSIX move notice to the appropriate region/Provide comment when MSIX move notice is completed	14
GREEN	Manager could not find student in CALPADS/Most likely an OSY/ PK/Type N did not enroll in CA public schools/MSIN has no current enrollment for 2022–23 school year in Region 23	Follow up with family to locate the family/Provide comment of attempts and outcomes	38
BLUE	Student EOE prior to school start/Student was not rolled over to new school year/CALPADS has a current enrollment for 2022–23 in a district in our region	Follow up with family to see if they have had any new moves/provide comment of attempts & outcomes	42
PURPLE	CALPADS has a current year 2022–23 enrollment at another region/MSIN has them already enrolled in current region	N/A—No action required	36
WHITE	Last enrollment in MSIN for our region is also the last enrollment in CAL-PADS/Departure dates are correct/Information on both systems is current	Follow up with family to locate the family and see if there have been any current changes and/or moves/Provide comment of attempts and outcomes	55
TOTAL			224