

CRITICAL AREA OUTLINE: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SUPPORTS

The state's accountability system will signal to schools their broad areas of strength and weakness and give districts information about where major interventions in schools need to occur. Based on that, state leaders need to identify the level of support they will provide to districts and schools along the spectrum of need. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides states with significant flexibility to reimagine how to provide supports for low-performing schools, which the law categorizes as comprehensive improvement and support¹ and targeted improvement and support² schools. The following questions are included in the *State Strategic Vision Guide* that CCSSO provided to chief state school officers to consider.

- What is your vision for a statewide school improvement and supports system?
- What has worked and what has not worked in previous state efforts to turnaround low-performing schools, and what lessons can be applied to a new school improvement and support system?
- How will the SEA support and work with districts in this process?
- How is your teacher and leader development strategy as an agency focused on improving and supporting schools in their targeted areas of need?
- How will you communicate a sense of urgency for change?
- How are you building local capacity to sustain the improvements?

STATE VISION

As state education agency (SEA) staff begin carving out the details of the state's school improvement and support strategy, it will be critical for them to know their Chief's answers to the above questions and those listed below:

- Do I know my Chief's overall state strategic vision?
- What does my chief hope to achieve this through our state's school improvement and support system?
- How does this area of work fit in with the other key ESSA transition areas to create a comprehensive system?

OPPORTUNITIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

ESSA gives states latitude to tailor school and district improvement strategies more so than under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The School Improvement Grant (SIG) program no longer exists, and instead there is a 7% state set-aside under Title I for school improvement activities (which is an increase from the 4% required by NCLB intended to help offset ESSA's elimination of SIG). The four prescribed models of school improvement under SIG

¹ Comprehensive improvement and support schools are defined as the 5% lowest-performing schools in the state, high schools with less than a 67 percent graduation rate, and schools with one or more consistently underperforming subgroups over a number of years.

² Targeted support and improvement schools are defined as schools with one or more low-performing subgroups.

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are not included in the law, but schools are required to use “evidence-based interventions,” which will likely be subject to U.S. Department of Education rulemaking. States have a significant opportunity to shape the evidence-based interventions schools and districts implement.

The plan considerations below identify how a support and improvement system could be laid out and what a state must do or could do under ESSA within each category. The five areas for consideration are: (1) Evaluating Previous School Improvement Efforts, (2) School and District Diagnostic Reviews, (3) Differentiated Supports and Interventions, (4) Exiting School Improvement status and When More Rigorous Action is Needed, and (5) Direct Student Services. This document is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all ESSA requirements pertaining to school improvement, but instead highlights the major new requirements under the law and opportunities provided. A summary of the school improvement provisions in ESSA is available on [CCSSO's ESSA webpage](#).

Consideration #1	Evaluating Previous School Improvement Efforts
<p>Opportunities for State Leadership</p> <p><i>Each state COULD...</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before designing a system, analyze data on previous and current school improvement actions in the state to identify commonalities between schools that have improved and lessons that can be applied to forthcoming improvement and support efforts. Consider the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What interventions/supports have been successful and unsuccessful? ○ When schools improved, were the improvements sustained over time? ○ Are there differences in what worked or did not work in different types of schools/communities? ○ How much time, money, and expertise were needed for successful turnaround strategies? • Reflect on whether the existing system is motivational, not just punitive. Purely extrinsic carrots and sticks often do not incentivize the desired behaviors. SEAs may want to consider research-based characteristics of human motivation when designing their systems, namely, people are motivated by a combination of autonomy, mastery, and purpose.
<p>Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massachusetts' Turnaround Practices in Action, a publication analyzing what previous school improvement efforts have succeeded or failed and why.

Consideration #2	School and District Diagnostic Reviews
ESSA Requirements <i>Each state MUST...</i>	Ensure that LEAs conduct a “school-level needs assessment” for comprehensive support and improvement schools.
Opportunities for State Leadership <i>Each state COULD...</i>	<p><i>School-level</i> Create <u>model school-level needs assessments</u> for optional use by LEAs and build local capacity to conduct these assessments and analyze the data they provide. Consider whether assessments need to be more comprehensive in some or all cases to <u>understand root causes or engage beyond-school partners</u>, e.g. assess early childhood access and quality, health services, housing, youth development opportunities? Classify schools and/or districts by their level of need – from requiring only light touch tweaks to more intensive supports and intervention – and target resources and support across the SEA accordingly. This could be done for the school as a whole (e.g. high need school in general), or for each category in a multiple-measure system.</p> <p><i>District-level</i> Conduct deeper diagnostic reviews at the <u>district level</u> to identify strengths and areas of improvement and to ensure more nuanced, targeted, and timely supports and interventions. Consider a system that supports diagnostic reviews <u>periodically for all districts</u>, in addition to more regularly for districts with many low-performing schools, in order to create a culture of continuous improvement in all districts. Consider how to <u>leverage accreditation</u> to support school-level or district-level needs assessments.</p>
Resources	<p>CCSSO’s Innovation Lab Network (ILN) resources on School-Quality Reviews (SQRs)</p> <p>SEA-created diagnostic tools: Nevada Comprehensive Curriculum Audit Tool for Districts (NCCAT-D) Rubric and Manual , Colorado - District Conditions for Sustained Improvement, Massachusetts - District Review and Michigan – School Systems Review and District Systems Review</p> <p>Non-SEA-created diagnostic tools: UVA District Readiness Assessment, UNC NIRN District Capacity Assessment, Mass Insight District Diagnostic Tool: Evaluating district conditions, capacity, processes, and systems for turnaround, Center for Educational Leadership – Readiness Assessment: Finding your starting points for central office transformation, Education Resource Strategies – Turnaround Schools: District Strategies for Success and Sustainability</p>
Sample Deep-Dive Questions	What role will the state, district, and school play in developing and implementing these processes? Will this look different depending on the capacity of the district?

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	<p>What approaches currently exist for implementing deeper analyses and diagnostic reviews that connect to accountability determinations/classifications and related supports and interventions?</p> <p>What are models for engaging stakeholders meaningfully and productively in a school-level needs assessment and other periodic reviews?</p> <p>How will the SEA support look different for very small or rural/isolated LEAs or in very large, urban LEAs?</p>
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<p>Consideration #3</p> <p>ESSA Requirements</p> <p><i>Each state MUST...</i></p>	<p>Differentiated supports and interventions</p> <p>Ensure that school improvement plans include “evidence-based interventions.”³</p> <p>Develop an SEA process to periodically <u>review resource allocations</u> for supporting school improvement in each LEA that serves a significant number of schools identified for either comprehensive support and improvement or targeted support and how the SEA will provide technical assistance to each such district.</p> <p>For districts with schools identified for <u>comprehensive support and improvement</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the district plan for school improvement. SEAs must determine the plan approval process and what is required for approval. They must also develop the process by which the state will provide ongoing monitoring and review of the plan. • Decide if they will permit differentiated improvement activities for high schools that predominantly serve students who are either retuning back to school after dropping out, or who are significantly off-track to graduate. • Decide if they will permit high schools with a total enrollment of less than 100 students to forgo the otherwise required improvement activities. <p>For districts with schools identified for <u>targeted support and improvement</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify districts annually if they have any school where any subgroup of students is consistently underperforming • Decide what constitutes “consistently” and “underperforming” and how frequently to identify these schools.
<p>Opportunities for state leadership</p> <p><i>Each SEA COULD...</i></p>	<p><i>Through using the 7% state set-aside for school improvement funds or through other means:</i></p> <p>Focus of SEA support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the results of a deeper diagnostic review or other assessment of LEA needs, identify <u>districts with less capacity</u> to intervene in low-performing schools or a history of not exiting schools from low-

³ This will likely be subject to U.S. Department of Education rule-making. Also, school improvement plans have other requirements, but the implications of those requirements are not as substantial for the SEA.

Consideration #3	Differentiated supports and interventions
	<p>performing status in the past and provide those districts additional supports, coaching, and technical assistance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a strong model available to all districts for <u>reviewing resource allocations</u> in LEAs aligned to their areas of greatest need. • Consider requiring <u>annual plans for continuous improvement</u> for all public schools/districts. <p>Delivery System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a <u>clear delivery system and strengthen capacity</u> (state, district, external) to help the full range of schools and districts, as appropriate. Consider networks in this regard. • Build <u>statewide systems of supports</u> available to all schools and districts to enable evidence-based plans for continuous improvement. • Consider how these systems can promote the kinds of <u>shifts in teaching, learning, and supports</u> necessary to help all students master college- and career-ready knowledge and skills – including shifts toward personalization, competency-based pathways, focus on cognitive and non-cognitive skills, and shifts to further build professional capacity and growth (e.g., high-quality professional development, instructional leadership teams consisting of principals and teacher leaders, teacher-leader career tracks, educator development plans). • Identify standards-aligned instructional practices that <u>improve outcomes for targeted subgroups</u>, such as English learners (ELs) and students with disabilities (SWDs) and share these evidence-based practices with all schools and districts in order to continuously improve performance across all schools and districts. • <u>Coordinate SEA programs</u> and supports to LEAs and schools, such as those through the special education State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), college- and career-readiness standards implementation, state early childhood programs, and teacher effectiveness and support systems, so supports to schools are coherent and focused on their greatest areas of need. <p>Evidence-based Interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish <u>alternative evidence-based interventions</u> that can be used by LEAs in comprehensive improvement schools. • Consider how the <u>state will research/evaluate</u> what has or has not worked with school improvement efforts previously and use that evidence to drive what interventions are used locally. Regularly gather evidence on effectiveness of interventions and modify interventions accordingly.

Consideration #3	Differentiated supports and interventions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage expertise the staff in the SEA’s academic (i.e., literacy and mathematics) and special education offices have about evidence-based interventions. • Provide guidance on evidence-based interventions to educators, schools, and districts on improving students’ English language proficiency while building knowledge and skills in academic subject areas. <p>Human Capital (also see <i>Teacher and Leader Development</i> outline)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and improve, in partnership with districts, the <u>specific competencies that teachers and principals need</u> in order to successfully lead school improvement efforts. • Develop a statewide or regional <u>human-capital pipeline</u> to fill instructional and leadership gaps in the lowest-performing schools. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Utilize the Teacher and Leader Academies program opportunity in Title II (no more than 2% of total state set-aside) to prepare candidates for high-needs schools with a year-long residency. May partner with other states on such academy. • Spotlight those schools that have improved performance for targeted sub-groups and have those building <u>leaders share their approaches and expertise</u> with school leaders who have similar issues. • Creating <u>networks of districts/schools to share best practices</u>, regardless of their status; “pairing” leaders within in-status schools with mentor leaders from not-in-status schools; providing and/or publicly reporting data on school/district improvement or progress toward goals, for all schools regardless of status. <p>Funding⁴ <i>Beginning in 2017-2018, SEAs must reserve 7% of their Title I, Part A grant to support school improvement activities, which is an increase from the 4% required by NCLB, intended to help offset ESSA’s elimination of NCLB’s School Improvement Grant (SIG). SEAs must allocate at least 95% of the reserved funds to LEAs to serve comprehensive and targeted improvement schools (although a state may allocate less than 95% if they work with the LEA to take a different approach). To leverage these funds, SEAs could:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set criteria in the <u>LEA grant application</u> that prioritizes certain high-leverage strategies or approaches, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ having a curriculum and instructional materials aligned to college- and career-standards,

⁴ For ESSA requirements around uses of the 7% state set-aside for school improvement, please see this CCSSO resource: [Summary of Significant Spending and Fiscal Rules in the Every Student Succeeds Act School Improvement Supports](#)

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ensuring a strong principal (who has turnaround competencies) leads the building, ○ creating a data-based decision culture through the school, ○ providing appropriate wraparound service to address barriers for struggling students, and ○ school and district systems/policies/practices (i.e. how are teachers assigned to classrooms with higher percentages of identified subgroups? Do students of the identified subgroup receive equitable disciplinary actions?) ● Closely monitor progress during the year and ensure that <u>grant renewals</u> are only awarded to schools and LEAs that implemented the previous year with fidelity and request funds for programs/resources based on data. ● Implement a <u>targeted strategy</u> focused on a subset of the <u>lowest-performing schools</u>, rather than spreading money among all schools identified. The targeted strategy could include a sequencing approach that begins with schools facing similar challenges to coordinate services, the greatest capacity and willingness to dramatically improve their identified schools, or those that are geographically close to each other to consolidate resources.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● University of Virginia’s Partnership for Leaders in Education (UVA-PLE) program works in many districts building capacity of both building and district leaders. ● New Mexico’s “Principals Pursuing Excellence” program and forthcoming “Teachers Pursuing Excellence” program. ● The Center for School Turnaround’s series of leadership modules and resources. ● The Center on School Turnaround’s resource Using Federal Education Formula Funds for School Turnaround Initiatives: Opportunities for State Education Agencies ● Public Impact’s Opportunity Culture
Sample Deep Dive Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is the most effective state role? What do districts, schools, and stakeholders most need from a statewide systems of support? ● How can the state help districts in creating strong improvement plans with their school(s) by providing technical assistance or models/examples of elements of effective plans? ● What do we know about and how can the SEA best promote or facilitate evidence-based, comprehensive activities as part of these statewide systems of support (including through delivery systems, use of intermediaries, strengthening the market, etc.)?

Consideration #4	Exiting school improvement status and when more rigorous action is needed
<p>ESSA Requirements</p> <p><i>Each state MUST...</i></p>	<p>Exiting schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify what it means to “exit” comprehensive support and improvement status, e.g. how much growth a school must make and what conditions must be in place to exit. <p>More Rigorous Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decide how many years (not to exceed four) <u>comprehensive support and improvement schools</u> will be identified for status in order to meet the criteria for continued support For comprehensive support and improvement schools, decide <u>which “more rigorous” actions</u> must be taken by such school (which may include addressing school-level operations) if improvement isn’t seen within the state-determined number of years. For <u>targeted improvement and support schools</u>, determine the number of years after which such schools will instead be identified for comprehensive support and improvement. Take actions to <u>initiate additional changes in LEAs</u> where either a significant number of schools are consistently identified for comprehensive school improvement and are not meeting the state’s exit criteria or a significant number of targeted improvement and support schools exist.
<p>Opportunities for State Leadership</p> <p><i>States could...</i></p>	<p>Exiting status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taper off coaching and monitoring to schools that are improving, rather than having them lose external support all at once, when exiting improvement status. <p>More rigorous action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place the school in a school district run directly by the state, charter management organization (CMO), or a recovery/achievement school district. Implement a broader approach to turnaround efforts in the most challenged schools and communities, following the example of the Harlem Children’s Zone with deep community engagement, expansion of access to quality early childhood experiences, mental health services, social services targeted to family needs, and out-of-school time opportunities. Provide school choice options for families
<p>Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tennessee’s achievement district and iZone schools and their impact on student achievement Massachusetts’ Turnaround Practices in Action which analyses school and district practices, systems, and policies, and use of resources contributing to successful turnaround efforts in the state Louisiana’s Recovery School District: 10 Years in New Orleans

Consideration #5	Direct Student Services
Opportunities for State Leadership <i>Each state COULD...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set aside up to 3 percent of their Title I funds in order to establish a program of direct student services, which include academic courses not otherwise available at a student’s school, career and technical education, credit recovery and acceleration, courses and exams (such as AP and IB), “components of a personalized learning approach,” and transportation for students to transfer to another public school. Support LEAs and schools in how to target these direct student services funds in ways that will most positively impact performance.
ESSA Requirements <i>Each state MUST...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give priority to LEAs with the largest percentage of schools in comprehensive or targeted support and improvement.

STRATEGY

CROSS CUTTING ACTIONS

Stakeholder Engagement

Your SEA will likely have an overall engagement strategy for working with stakeholders in the ESSA transition process. Be sure to coordinate with the overall agency strategy before proceeding. Questions to consider:

- Who are the critical partners in determining how to create an effective improvement and support system for schools and districts?
 - At the state level, have you engaged civil rights groups, representing traditionally underrepresented students, who too often disproportionately attend schools identified for improvement? If not, how will you do so?
- Are you receiving feedback from schools and districts that have been or are currently engaged in support, improvement & turnaround initiatives about what has been helpful and what hasn’t been helpful in the current model?

Communications and Messaging

The new law presents a communications and messaging challenge that states should be proactive in discussing with key stakeholders. Questions to consider:

- How will you communicate with key audiences (such as legislators and district leaders) about the school improvement and support process?
- Internal Communications: Communicating within the SEA is critical to ensure school improvement supports are integrated across the agency’s implementation of ESSA.
- Has the SEA developed key messages for communications across the agency?

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- Is communication occurring across the agency during the brainstorming and planning process? What about cross-agency meeting(s) to brainstorm and discuss implementation steps?

Data Use and Technology Supports

As you consider changes you may make to school improvement supports, it is important to address the implications of these changes on your data collection and reporting process from the start so you have the infrastructure in place to deliver on your goals. Questions to consider:

- What types of information and data will be necessary to identify a school or district's area of need and to determine if supports and interventions are working? Have you worked with your Chief Information Officer (CIO) to ensure availability and quality of this data? Is the data already public, or does it require a communications plan for release?

Advocacy

As part of your overall ESSA transition strategy, the state will need to identify the school improvement support issues for which advocacy will be useful or necessary. Questions to consider:

- Are changes to state policy or practice necessary to implement your SEA's vision?
- Are the policies in place to make your implementation successful? (e.g. changes to state law, policy, or SEA practice)
- Are additional state resources necessary to carry out the work (e.g. people, time, money, or structure)?

IMPLEMENTATION

Structure

- What staff, time and money will need to be dedicated to this endeavor? What additional resources might you need? How can the SEA be reorganized to provide more aligned, coordinated, and efficient services to LEAs and schools?
- Who is the single person responsible for this strategy's success?
- Is there a team of people who will support your point person?
- What time, money, and technology will be needed for successful implementation of this strategy?
- Do you have data and information systems in place to track outcomes and measure success?
- Who are the key stakeholders you need to help implement this strategy?

Measuring Success and Continuous Improvement

- How will the SEA know if its school improvement and support efforts are on track to improve performance in schools? What are leading indicators of progress towards increased student achievement?

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- How can states establish systems of periodic review and continuous improvement that can help shift culture toward learning systems that can best advance college- and career-ready outcomes over time?
- What forms of evidence should those systems consider and on what cycles?
- How can states establish structures for productive, ongoing stakeholder engagement? What are the core strategies and models?

Fiscal Considerations under ESSA

The Fiscal Year 2016 appropriations act clarified that the ESSA provisions affecting formula grants will not take effect until the 2017–2018 school year. The formula funds (for Titles I, II, and III, etc.) that states will receive in July 2016 and use mainly in 2016–2017 will be carried out under No Child Left Behind. ESSA provides the Secretary of Education with the authority to “take such steps as are necessary for the orderly transition” from NCLB to ESSA, so the U.S. Department of Education (ED) will likely issue additional guidance on the transition in the coming months.

DRAFT