

Deep Dive into Principle #6 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems



Principle #6

Focus especially on ensuring the highest need schools have great leaders and teachers who have or develop the specific capacities needed to dramatically improve low-performing schools.

Talent matters.

THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

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1	Elevate school improvement as an urgent priority at every level of the system—schools, LEAs, and the SEA—and establish for each level clear roles, lines of authority, and responsibilities for improving low-performing schools.	<i>If everything's a priority, nothing is.</i>
2	Make decisions based on what will best serve each and every student with the expectation that all students can and will master the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college, career, and civic life. Challenge and change existing structures or norms that perpetuate low performance or stymie improvement.	<i>Put students at the center so that every student succeeds.</i>
3	Engage early, regularly, and authentically with stakeholders and partners so improvement is done <i>with</i> and not <i>to</i> the school, families, and the community. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with schools, families, and community members to build trusting relationships, expand capacity, inform planning, build political will, strengthen community leadership and commitment, and provide feedback loops to adjust as needed. • Integrate school and community assets as well as early childhood, higher education, social services, and workforce systems to, among other things, help address challenges outside of school. 	<i>If you want to go far, go together.</i>
4	Select at each level the strategy that best matches the context at hand—from LEAs and schools designing evidence-based improvement plans to SEAs exercising the most appropriate state-level authority to intervene in non-exiting schools.	<i>One size does not fit all.</i>
5	Support LEAs and schools in designing high-quality school improvement plans informed by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each school's assets (and how they're being used), needs (including but not limited to resources), and root causes of underperformance; • research on effective schools, successful school improvement efforts, and implementation science; • best available evidence of what interventions work, for whom, under which circumstances; and • the science of learning and development, including the impact of poverty and adversity on learning. 	<i>Failing to plan is planning to fail.</i>
6	Focus especially on ensuring the highest need schools have great leaders and teachers who have or develop the specific capacities needed to dramatically improve low-performing schools.	<i>Talent matters.</i>
7	Dedicate sufficient resources (time, staff, funding); align them to advance the system's goals; use them efficiently by establishing clear roles and responsibilities at all levels of the system; and hold partners accountable for results.	<i>Put your money where your mouth is.</i>
8	Establish clear expectations and report progress on a sequence of ambitious yet achievable short- and long-term school improvement benchmarks that focus on both equity and excellence.	<i>What gets measured gets done.</i>
9	Implement improvement plans rigorously and with fidelity, and, since everything will not go perfectly, gather actionable data and information during implementation; evaluate efforts and monitor evidence to learn what is working, for whom, and under what circumstances; and continuously improve over time.	<i>Ideas are only as good as they are implemented.</i>
10	Plan from the beginning how to sustain successful school improvement efforts financially, politically, and by ensuring the school and LEA are prepared to continue making progress.	<i>Don't be a flash in the pan.</i>

Introduction

In fact, leaders...that go from good to great start not with “where” but with “who”. They start by getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats...first the people, then the direction.

—Jim Collins, *Good to Great*¹

State education agencies (SEAs) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) have long recognized that effective school leaders and teachers are critical to any school’s success.² Indeed, a robust body of evidence confirms that teacher quality is the primary in-school factor correlated with student success, followed closely by the quality of school leadership.³ The latter also is a key driver of the former, since effective teachers are more likely to continue working in a high-needs school if a strong leader is in place and cultivating a positive school environment with strong staff cohesion.⁴ Simply put, *talent matters*.

As reinforced in CCSSO’s [Equity Commitments](#), the need for great leaders and teachers is greatest in low-performing schools and for subgroups of underperforming students and yet, too often, students in these schools are disproportionately served by ineffective and/or inexperienced leaders and teachers.⁵ Compounding this inequity, the adults working in our schools rarely match the diversity of the students enrolled in them,⁶ which can also negatively impact achievement.⁷

1 Collins, J. C. (2001). *Good to great: why some companies make the leap and others don’t*. New York, NY: HarperBusiness.

2 See the [“Teachers and Leaders”](#) section of the CCCSSO website for a wide array of related resources.

3 See, e.g., Nye, B., Konstantopoulos, S., & Hedges, L. V. (2004). How large are teacher effects? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 26(3), 237–257. Retrieved from [https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/uploads/002/834/127%20-%20Nye%20B%20%20Hedges%20L%20%20V%20%20Konstantopoulos%20S%20%20\(2004\).pdf](https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/uploads/002/834/127%20-%20Nye%20B%20%20Hedges%20L%20%20V%20%20Konstantopoulos%20S%20%20(2004).pdf) (teacher impacts); Jackson, K.C. (2016). *What do test scores miss? The importance of teacher effects on non-test score outcomes*. (National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 22226). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w22226>. (teacher impacts on non-academic outcomes); Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/how-leadership-influences-student-learning.aspx> (school leader impacts).

4 See, e.g., Almy, S. & Tooley, M. (2012). *Building and sustaining talent: creating conditions in high poverty schools that support effective teaching and learning*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust. Retrieved from https://1k9gl1yevnfp2lpq1dhrqe17-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Building_and_Sustaining_Talent.pdf; Sutchter, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.*, Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coming-crisis-teaching>.

5 The Aspen Institute Education & Society Program & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2017). *Leading for equity: Opportunities for state education chiefs*. Washington, DC: Authors. On the current patterns of inequitable access, see, e.g., Partee, G. (2014). *Attaining equitable distribution of effective teachers in public schools*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/TeacherDistro.pdf>.

6 See, e.g., Hrabowski, F.A., & Sanders M.G. (2015). Increasing racial diversity in the teacher workforce: One university’s approach. *Thought & Action*. Retrieved from http://ftp.arizona.edu/assets/docs/Hrabowski_101-116_Layout%202-REV.pdf; See also, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service. (2016). *The state of racial diversity in the educator workforce*. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf>

7 See, e.g., Gershenson, S., Holt, S. B., & Papageorge, N.W. (2015). *Who believes in me? The effect of student-teacher demographic match on teacher expectations*. (Upjohn Institute Working Paper No. 15-231). Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.17848/wp15-231>; Gershenson, S., Hart, C.M.D., Lindsay, C. A., & Papageorge, N.W. (2017). *The long-run impacts of same-race teachers*. (Institute of Labor Economics working Paper No. 10630). Bonn, Germany: Institute of Labor Economics. Retrieved from <http://releases.jhu.edu/2017/04/05/with-just-one-black-teacher-black-students-more-likely-to-graduate/>

This Deep Dive does not attempt to cover all that SEAs can do to improve the quality of teaching and leading statewide. Instead, it focuses specifically on how SEAs can best manifest Principle #6 to ensure comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) and targeted support and improvement (TSI) schools have and sustain the teachers and leaders who are ready, willing, and able to make significant, sustained improvements on behalf of their students.

Even in states with longstanding workforce initiatives in place—including those with initiatives explicitly focused on supporting low-performing schools—the additional flexibilities the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has given SEAs makes this an important opportunity to review, revise, and refocus current efforts on supporting great teaching and leading in identified schools. These educators’ jobs are different in important ways than other school-based assignments, and SEAs, LEAs, and schools cannot continue to treat them the same as everyone else. SEAs must deeply understand—and help LEAs and schools do the same—what it takes to lead and staff a successful improvement effort. Armed with that knowledge, SEAs must then focus on leveraging their resources, policies, relationships, and bully pulpits to attract, prepare, develop, and retain the very best talent to work in the schools that need them the most.



Questions To Ask Yourself

1. What is your **theory of action** about how the SEA can best help improve the quality of leadership and instruction in identified schools—directly and/or indirectly through LEAs? Where will your talent management framework be “tight” or “loose” with LEAs and schools on each part of the continuum, from attracting to preparing to developing to retaining effective teachers and leaders? How do your efforts across the continuum relate to and integrate with each other?
2. Have you identified a set of **specific competencies** that *leaders* need to be effective in schools identified for improvement?⁸ Are there similar competencies identified for *teachers* in those schools, such as the capacity to deliver trauma-informed pedagogy, partner with students and families in culturally competent ways, and use evidence-based practices to accelerate students’ growth? Alternatively, how are you helping LEAs identify analogous competencies for their own contexts?
3. How is each of your **education workforce initiatives**—whether focused on attracting, preparing, developing, and/or retaining—aligned to your theory of action and (if applicable) focused on promoting the distinct competencies needed to drive improvement at CSI/TSI schools?

8 For an example of a set of school improvement leader competences, see University of Virginia Partnership for Leaders in Education, Darden School of Business and Curry School of Education. *Leader competencies and turnaround actions shown to influence student achievement: A model to inform talent management and development in schools*. Charlottesville, VA: Authors. Retrieved from https://www.darden.virginia.edu/uploadedFiles/Darden_Web/Pages/Faculty_Research/Research_Centers_and_Initiatives/Darden_Curry_PLE/School_Turnaround/Turnaround%20Leadership%20Competencies%20and%20Actions.pdf; see also Le Floch, K., Garcia, A., & Barbour, C. (2016). *Want to improve low-performing schools? Focus on the adults*. Washington, DC: Education Policy Center at American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/School-Improvement-Brief-March-2016.pdf>.

- o Does each initiative sufficiently **prioritize CSI/TSI schools and local education agencies (LEAs)** with significant numbers of identified schools?
 - o Where appropriate, are these initiatives **designed specifically to meet the needs of teaching/leading in identified schools** (e.g., incorporating the competencies mentioned above into leadership development initiatives, including retention rates of effective teachers in statewide expectations for leadership evaluation, or designing micro-credentials aligned to your teacher competencies)? How are you helping LEAs do the same?
 - o Where appropriate, are identified schools given **priority access** to these initiatives' opportunities, resources, and support (e.g., directing more technical assistance support and professional development to identified schools)?
 - o As you **vet and select potential partners** for these initiatives (e.g., teacher/leader preparation programs, professional development providers), how are you ensuring they have the commitment and capacity needed to support identified schools and their LEAs?
 - o When you apply for **competitive federal grants** related to teachers and leaders, are you prioritizing CSI/TSI schools and their LEAs in your grant applications? When you distribute other state and federal funds?
 - o Where gaps exist, how are your initiatives **increasing the diversity of teachers and leaders** to address disparities between the demographics of schools' faculties and student bodies?
 - o If relevant to your state context, what efforts are being made to **build the capacity of existing staff in rural or remote schools** that face particular workforce challenges?
4. Are there **changes to systemic barriers** that must be made at the SEA or LEA level—such as policies related to seniority-based staffing, rules governing a reduction in force, minimum hiring requirements, and differential pay scales—to ensure that CSI and TSI schools are receiving the right talent? Do CSI/TSI school leaders have the hiring, placement, and firing authorities they need?
 5. How will you leverage the **SEA's role in approving (and monitoring) LEA Title II plans** to advance your theory of action about school improvement? What expectations and/or recommendations are you making via guidance and technical assistance to LEAs and via your SEA's review and approval process (e.g., prioritizing support for CSI/TSI schools, reducing gaps in access to effective teachers)?
 6. If LEAs propose to use their **Title II funds on those allowable uses that ESSA says must be evidence-based** (e.g., class-size reduction or LEA-provided professional development), how are you reviewing the evidence cited in support of the proposed uses? What sort of technical assistance are you providing about this?
 7. Just as you might include your SEA's teacher/leader department in reviewing CSI plans, how are you **involving your school improvement department in reviewing Title II plans**?

8. What **data** are you using, providing to LEAs, and sharing publicly to help identify gaps and increase equitable access to effective teachers and leaders? For example, are you able to surface **teacher equity gaps** not only across the state or among schools in a district, but also in patterns of teacher assignment *within* a particular CSI or TSI school?⁹
9. How are you ensuring LEAs and schools examine teacher/leader effectiveness and equitable access to effective teachers/leaders as part of the **school improvement process**, including via needs assessments, resource equity reviews, improvement plans, scoring rubrics for plan approval, and progress monitoring?
10. If you are using the **3 percent set-aside of Title II funds to support school leadership**, how does your plan for those resources prioritize CSI and TSI schools and LEAs with large numbers of identified schools? If you declined to take the set-aside for this year, do you have an annual process in place to consider whether to take the set-aside in subsequent years, especially if data suggest school leadership continues to be an obstacle to your school improvement efforts?
11. To what extent will you leverage the resources available through the **5 percent SEA set-aside of Title II funds** to help manifest Principle #6 with its focus on identified schools?



State Spotlights

In addition to the spotlights below, [this recent update](#) on implementation of the CCSSO Equity Commitments highlights some promising SEA practices related specifically to addressing inequitable access to effective teachers and leaders.¹⁰



Initially born out of a partnership with the [University of Virginia School Turnaround Program](#), **New Mexico** created the [Principals Pursuing Excellence](#) (PPE) program, a selective professional development program designed specifically for leaders of New Mexico’s low-performing schools. At the core of the PPE program is the behavioral event interview (BEI), a rigorous selection process designed to measure an interviewee’s specific behaviors, thoughts, and actions as they have manifested in actual situations in their prior experiences. The BEI helps New Mexico evaluate schools leaders on the state’s turnaround leader competencies and then tailor capacity building across individual leaders’ areas for growth. Throughout the two-year program, each participating leader works with a mentor to support short- and long-term improvement plans for themselves and their schools.

9 Tennessee’s [equity report](#) provides one example of the data analysis SEAs can produce and publish. Missouri invites LEA teams (including stakeholders) to “[Equity Labs](#)” to explore similar data, conduct root cause analyses, and develop plans to address inequities.

10 America’s Promise Alliance, The Aspen Institute Education & Society Program, & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2018). *States leading for equity: Promising practices advancing the equity commitments*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/States%20Leading%20for%20Equity%20Online_031418.pdf.

New Mexico also created another SEA-led program, [Teachers Pursuing Excellence](#) (TPE), to support teachers in low-performing schools through professional development, mentoring by highly effective peers, and learning plans that respond to teachers' areas for growth identified through the state's teacher evaluation system and student achievement data. To create a throughline in the improvement process, the SEA requires that LEAs or schools that apply to TPE must have first completed at least one year of PPE.



In **Colorado**, the [School Turnaround Leaders Development Program](#) provides training specifically for teacher leaders and school leaders who serve in low-performing schools and the LEA officials who support them. As one of many evidence-based school improvement resources available through Colorado's EASI process (see [Principle #4](#)), this program matches LEA, school, and teacher leaders into rigorous leadership programs specifically designed to the leadership competencies shown to be most effective in a turnaround setting.



New York's Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE), the foundation for its school improvement cycle, explicitly focuses on the effectiveness of LEA leaders, school leaders, and teachers (pp. 86-87 of [ESSA plan](#)).¹¹ The SEA also published a [DTSDE Resource Guide](#) that outlines practices and strategies leaders and teachers can use to respond to their initial diagnostic assessment and improve on identified areas of weakness.

Recognizing that its struggling schools need differentiated support from the LEA, New York will also now require LEAs to identify specific ways in which they are providing additional support to the principals of CSI schools that are not making progress each year (p. 100 in [ESSA plan](#)).¹²



Utah operates the Effective Teachers in High Poverty Schools Incentive Program, which provides annual salary bonuses to teachers at high-poverty schools whose students earn a median growth percentile of 70 or higher. Additionally, National Board Certified teachers who work at Title I schools are eligible to receive a small bonus.¹³



Maine developed an online special education teacher mentorship and training program to better support less-than-fully certified special education teachers across the state. The mentorship program pairs conditionally certified teachers with special education teachers or other education professionals, including recently retired educators, to provide intensive support and mentoring. Because the mentorship program is mostly virtual but with scheduled in-person contacts throughout the year, it has the capacity to support teachers in more rural areas who may not otherwise have another special education teacher with whom to collaborate.¹⁴

11 New York State Department of Education. (2017). *Consolidated state plan for The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Albany, NY: Author.

12 Ibid.

13 According to the [National Council on Teacher Quality 2017 Yearbook](#), 23 states (including Utah) incentivize teachers to work in high-needs schools. See National Council on Teacher Quality. (2017). *2017 State Teacher Policy Yearbook*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.nctq.org/yearbook/national?id=452>.

14 Maine's program is among the promising practices highlighted in Metz, R. & Socol, A. R. (2017). *Tackling gaps in access to strong teachers: What state leaders can do*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust. Retrieved from <https://edtrust.org/resource/tackling-gaps-access-strong-teachers/>.

Supporting Targeted Support and Improvement Schools

- Leading and teaching in TSI schools can be quite different than in CSI schools—especially for TSI schools that are otherwise high-performing—yet Principle #6 applies equally to the TSI context. SEAs, LEAs, and schools should consider just as rigorously whether there are **specific competencies needed to drive improved outcomes for consistently underperforming subgroups of students in TSI schools**. These competencies may include specific instructional skills (e.g., how to best support students with disabilities or English learners) and more general skills necessary for improvement efforts (e.g., data-informed decision making). SEAs should consider how to work with LEAs and schools to support the development of these TSI competencies.
- When a TSI school is identified because of consistent underperformance of students with disabilities or English learners, there may be a tendency to focus attention and resources solely on the teachers providing those students with specialized instruction. Yet these students are supported by all faculty and staff. SEAs should ensure their efforts to strengthen the workforce in TSI schools includes **building the capacity of general education teachers to support the success of all students**, even if some students also receive specialized instruction.
- Given the importance of equitable access to effective instruction, SEAs need to ensure TSI schools (and their LEAs) investigate and, if necessary, address **inequities flowing from how teachers are assigned to classrooms within TSI schools**. This may require collecting and/or reporting new data—where appropriate and consistent with privacy rights—than what have typically been part of teacher equity initiatives and partnering with LEAs/schools to help them use these data. An SEA could also consider how to leverage the data in needs assessments and resource equity reviews, to the extent the SEA requires or supports conducting those for all TSI schools.



Common Mistakes

Don't forget Principle #4. "One size does not fit all," the primary message of [Principle #4](#), has been embraced by educators when it comes to supporting individual students. Although we have a long way to go to truly differentiate and meet every student's needs, SEAs, LEAs, and schools are increasingly rethinking one-size-fits-all policies and attitudes. Yet, the education system too often

continues to treat teachers and leaders as if they are doing the same job, regardless of meaningful differences in their schools' contexts, assets, and challenges. To manifest Principle #6, SEA, LEA, and school talent management efforts cannot treat teachers and leaders in CSI/TSI schools the same as other teachers and leaders. The former are working in particular contexts that demand, wherever possible, strategically differentiated guidance, support, and resources.

Don't forget that talent *always* matters. While funding cliffs are the most common concern raised about the sustainability of improvement efforts, there is perhaps an even greater danger posed by leadership churn or low retention rates of effective educators especially during the first three to five years of a major improvement effort. School improvement typically takes time to produce results and even longer to create a stable foundation that can withstand high turnover of effective staff. Too often, though, the very same people who are driving the early gains are promoted to take on supervisory roles at the LEA, a change that may slow and even reverse progress at the school. As discussed further in [Principle #10](#), SEAs must plan for how to help LEAs sustain effective leaders and teachers in CSI and TSI schools.



Recommended Resources

Leaders

[“What It Takes” For a Turnaround: Principal Competencies that Matter for Student Achievement](#), by Dallas Hambrick Hitt and published by The Center on School Turnaround at WestEd (CST) (2016), details insights drawn from CST's partnership with the University of Virginia/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education (UVA/PLE), specifically related to the development and use of turnaround leader competencies. The paper provides information on what these competencies are and how behavioral event interviews can be used to identify and support strong turnaround leaders.

[Prioritizing Talent in Turnaround: Recommendations for Identifying, Hiring, and Supporting Principals and Teachers in Low-Performing Schools](#), by Dallas Hambrick Hitt and Coby V. Meyers from UVA/PLE and published by CST (2017), describes research on how LEAs can attract and retain effective principals and teachers to work in their lowest-performing schools. Based on this research, the report also provides recommendations for LEAs and SEAs to support increased innovation and effectiveness in human capital management in low-performing schools.

[Public Impact's](#) website on school turnaround provides an array of resources to support school leaders (and teachers) in their improvement efforts. Among other resources, the website includes reports focusing on turnaround school leader and teacher competencies and evidence-based actions of successful turnaround school leaders.

[Turnaround High School Principals: Recruit, Prepare and Empower Leaders of Change](#), published by the Southern Regional Education Board, focuses specifically on the role of school leaders in low-performing high schools. The report discusses the importance of strong school leaders in turnaround high schools

and describes methods to better “identify, prepare, and support” leaders for these schools.

[School Leadership Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Evidence Review](#), published by the Rand Corporation (2016), reviews the (ESSA-aligned) evidence base for school leader improvement interventions. The report also describes opportunities under ESSA to support school leader growth and development.

[The Principal Pipeline Podcast: Practitioners Share Lessons from the Field](#), created by the Wallace Foundation, is a six-episode podcast series of interviews with school, LEA, and SEA leaders, as well as higher education officials, about their experiences building strong principal pipelines.

Teachers

[Moving Toward Equity Data Review Tool](#), published by the Center on Great Teachers & Leaders at American Institutes for Research (2014), is a tool for SEAs to use as they collect, analyze, respond to, and communicate equitable access data. The tool provides step-by-step questions for SEAs to consider in their equitable access data review, opportunities to troubleshoot challenges that may arise, and examples of ways in which SEAs have brought this process to life.

[Tackling Gaps in Access to Strong Teachers: 5 Ways State Leaders Can Make a Difference](#), written by Rachel Metz and Allison Rose Socol and published by The Education Trust (2017), discusses five ways SEAs can help ensure LEAs address inequitable access to effective teachers.

[Achieving Equitable Access to Strong Teachers: A Guide for District Leaders](#), written by Marni Bromberg and published by The Education Trust (2016), draws on lessons learned from LEA leaders across the country on how to begin to address inequities in access to high-quality teachers. This report provides a seven-stage process that helps LEA leaders identify and address underlying causes of inequitable distribution of high-quality teachers.

Public Impact’s [Opportunity Culture](#) initiative maintains a website with resources aligned to its model for expanding the impact of high-quality teachers via strategic staffing and other talent management strategies. It also provides recommendations and information on how to attract, develop, and retain more high-quality teachers.



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