

## Deep Dive into Principle #7 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems



### Principle #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.

*Put your money where your mouth is.*

## THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

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## 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.	<b><i>If everything's a priority, nothing is.</i></b>
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.	<b><i>Put students at the center so that every student succeeds.</i></b>
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"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>	<b><i>If you want to go far, go together.</i></b>
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.	<b><i>One size does not fit all.</i></b>
5	Support LEAs and schools in designing high-quality school improvement plans informed by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• each school's assets (and how they're being used), needs (including but not limited to resources), and root causes of underperformance;</li> <li>• research on effective schools, successful school improvement efforts, and implementation science;</li> <li>• best available evidence of what interventions work, for whom, under which circumstances; and</li> <li>• the science of learning and development, including the impact of poverty and adversity on learning.</li> </ul>	<b><i>Failing to plan is planning to fail.</i></b>
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.	<b><i>Talent matters.</i></b>
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.	<b><i>Put your money where your mouth is.</i></b>
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.	<b><i>What gets measured gets done.</i></b>
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.	<b><i>Ideas are only as good as they are implemented.</i></b>
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.	<b><i>Don't be a flash in the pan.</i></b>

## Introduction

*Equity, after all, does not mean simply equal funding. Equal funding for unequal needs is not equality.*

—Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*<sup>1</sup>

Addressing **funding and resource inequities** is one of the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) [equity commitments](#), and nowhere is it more critical than in comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) and targeted support and improvement (TSI) schools. Decision-making at the state, local, and even school levels can have a dramatic impact on the resources available to the students who need them most, especially low-income students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities. As state education agencies (SEAs) plan for how to support their school improvement systems, they must take a hard look at how current approaches to resources are enabling or constraining improved outcomes for these students. And because self-diagnoses can sometimes be unreliable, SEAs should also invite feedback from stakeholders and other critical friends about whether current resources are sufficient to meet the needs of students in identified schools.

To manifest Principle #7, an SEA must grapple with two primary questions about the extent to which resources are aligned with making school improvement a true priority for the state. **First, are you making effective and equitable use of existing resources, including not only federal, state, and local funding but also other resources such as time, staff, and community partners?** In other words, are CSI and TSI schools receiving equitable financial and non-financial resources given their additional needs? Before considering if existing resource levels are the real obstacle to success, SEAs must carefully consider whether they (and their LEAs and schools) are strategically and equitably using all existing resources, including but not limited to the additional resources available under school improvement grants. Common challenges to the effective use of existing resources include, among other things:

- misalignment between an SEA's school improvement approaches and its policies and practices governing federal funds, including taking a mistakenly narrow understanding of the allowable uses of federal funds,
- a disconnect between, on the one hand, an SEA's theory of action and key priority areas and, on the other, the SEA's methodology for allocating resources,
- treating improvement resources as an "add-on" to an LEA or school plan rather than integrating it into a cohesive improvement plan,
- using improvement resources just to continue ineffective status quo approaches,

<sup>1</sup> Kozol, J. 1991. *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York, NY: Crown Pub.

- inadequate commitment to (and time for) a comprehensive, data-informed planning process, and
- selecting new interventions on the basis of factors unrelated to their appropriateness for a school's context and the likelihood of improving outcomes.

The other principles address many of these challenges. By working to manifest all of the principles in their state systems, SEAs will thus have a better shot at increasing the return on their school improvement investments as intended by Principle #7.

**Second, are *additional resources necessary to accomplish your school improvement goals?*** Although simply increasing resources (especially but not only funding) will never be sufficient to achieve your school improvement goals, more resources may be necessary to truly move the needle for students in CSI and TSI schools. SEAs can and should pursue multiple paths to identifying additional resources to support CSI/TSI schools and their LEAs. Primarily, SEAs should examine strategies to reallocate existing resources to grow the slice of the overall pie that goes to supporting schools identified for improvement. Strategies for this approach include surfacing and addressing funding inequities at the SEA, LEA, or school levels (including via ESSA-required resource equity reviews); braiding and blending funding streams; better aligning the use of non-school-improvement funds (e.g., Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Title II, Title III, and Title IV funds and optional set-asides like Direct Student Services) to support school improvement efforts; and partnering more effectively with other state agencies to coordinate support for CSI and TSI schools and their students.

SEA leaders can also seek to identify additional dollars to expand the overall pie. They can, for example, advocate for more state funding, apply for competitive federal grants, and seek philanthropic support. Note that ESSA requires, beginning with the 2018-19 school year, that SEAs and LEAs collect and report per-pupil fiscal data at the school level. This will lead to an increased public focus on both inequities and inefficiencies in the allocation and use of education resources. Finally, SEAs must consider all the non-financial resources that could be marshalled to increase the likelihood of successful school improvement, including how staff are deployed across the SEA and how to best leverage existing technical assistance resources such as educational service agencies and regional service centers, federally-funded Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) and Comprehensive Centers (CCs), and external partners including non-profit organizations and research institutions.



## Questions To Ask Yourself

1. Does your **methodology for allocating the 7 percent set-aside of Title I** (e.g., via competitive or hybrid methodologies) advance your theory of action about school improvement?
2. What processes are you following to **align the SEA's federal and state funds beyond the 7 percent set-aside of Title I**? Are there intentional plans, for example, to leverage the SEA's set-asides of Title II, III, and IV funds to support your theory of action for school improvement? To align the school improvement approach with the SEA's State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) focused on improving results for students with disabilities?
3. How are you **requiring, supporting, and/or encouraging LEAs to do the same** with their other federal funds? For example, how can you leverage the SEA review of LEAs' ESSA plans to increase the alignment of applicable ESSA funds (e.g., Title II) with the LEAs' efforts to improve outcomes for CSI and TSI schools?
4. How will you ensure high-quality **resource equity reviews** are conducted at least for CSI and additional targeted support and improvement (ATSI) schools, as required by ESSA, and perhaps for all TSI schools as well? What resources beyond funding will you require or encourage LEAs to examine at the school and/or LEA level? How will your approach to the planning process result in improvement plans that explicitly explain how any surfaced inequities will be addressed (see [Principle #5](#))?
5. **For LEAs with a "significant number" of identified schools, how often will the SEA itself conduct the "periodic[] review [of] resource allocation to support school improvement"** required by ESSA? What resources will you include in such reviews? Who will conduct them? How will you share and act upon the results of the reviews?
6. What guidance can you provide LEAs **to take fuller advantage of the often underappreciated flexibility of federal funds**? To increase the return on their investment by spending more on strategies likely to improve outcomes and less on longstanding approaches that have failed to deliver promised outcomes?
7. How can you authentically **grant LEAs (and their federal programs offices) permission to be bolder and more creative with their spending choices** in service of CSI/TSI schools? How are you ensuring your own SEA federal programs office is reinforcing and not undermining your message, whether intentionally or unintentionally?
8. To the extent you allocate some federal or state funds competitively, how are you **giving priority to proposals that focus on improving CSI or TSI schools** and/or that align with your school improvement theory of action? How are you encouraging your LEAs to do the same in distributing any of their discretionary funds?

9. What can you do to **streamline administrative requirements** for LEAs engaged in school improvement? Where can duplicative needs assessments, plans, and applications across other programs be combined to reduce burden and promote alignment with the SEA’s theory of action and priorities?
10. Beyond funding, **what resources can you (re)allocate** to support school improvement, such as technical assistance resources, underutilized SEA staff, external partnerships, funds available through other state government agencies, or philanthropic support?
11. How will you use the **SEA’s 5 percent share of the 7 percent set-aside** that the SEA can reserve for statewide functions such as evaluating your school improvement efforts?
12. Have you evaluated **the effectiveness (and cost-effectiveness) of existing school improvement expenditures**? What role do the results of those evaluations play in building your SEA’s budget? Renewing contracts with providers and partners? In reviewing and approving LEA applications for funds?
13. As you identify additional resources (funding and otherwise), how are you **planning for the long-term support** these schools and their LEAs need beyond their time as officially identified CSI and TSI schools, when they receive additional but temporary resources? (Note that [Principle #10](#) explores this question of sustainability in greater detail.)



## State Spotlights



**Oregon** is working to shift mindsets at all levels away from a traditional, narrow perception of the allowable uses of federal funds. To help facilitate this shift, the SEA developed a [federal funds guide](#) for LEAs and schools that encourages them first to develop a school improvement plan that meets the needs of the particular context and only *then* consider which available funds could be used to support that plan. Oregon aptly describes this as a shift from “planning for funds” to “funding your plan.” The resource guide includes details on the “fiscal flexibility and requirements of each [federal] program,” common past misconceptions regarding allowable uses of some federal program funds, and ideas for how LEAs and schools can maximize the utility of their federal improvement funds.

Furthermore, Oregon is streamlining its school improvement reporting requirements. In particular, the SEA will seek to waive duplicative reporting requirements, so LEAs and schools working on school improvement do not waste time and resources sharing the same data with two or more different SEA departments.



Similar to Oregon, **Tennessee** also developed a [Coordinated Spending Guide](#) to support LEAs and schools as they look to leverage available sources of funding. The guide includes specific information on ways funds can be braided or blended to maximize their impact as well as a framework for coordinated spending to help LEAs and schools determine if the purpose and cost of a program realistically supports their identified needs in a fiscally reasonable way. Tennessee has also developed [ePlan](#), which is an online platform that guides LEAs and schools through plan development and a consolidated funding application.



For its new Partnership Network (see [Principle #2](#)), **Nevada** is braiding federal funds (ESSA Title I, Title II, and Title IV) and state funds to provide a wide range of support for network participants. This approach will also help align efforts toward one common vision rather than pursuing different priorities across each funding stream.



**Kentucky** dedicates significant SEA and federal funds, personnel, and time to its school improvement process, especially by placing [Education Recovery Teams](#) in every CSI school. These teams consist of an Education Recovery Leader, who often is a former school or LEA administrator, and two Education Recovery Specialists, who are former classroom teachers or instructional coaches. In partnership with the school, the Education Recovery Team supports improvement plan development and implementation on a daily basis through activities ranging from guiding the analysis of needs assessment results to building sustainable systems to leadership and instructional coaching.



As spotlighted in [Principle #5](#), **Louisiana** has set a high bar for school improvement plans. The SEA is maintaining its bar not only through a rigorous approval process but also by how it allocates school improvement funds. By using a competitive and rolling methodology, the SEA targets its limited funds to the highest-scoring plans judged to be most likely to improve student and school outcomes. For LEA and school leaders whose plans are not approved before all available funds have been awarded, the SEA gives them the opportunity to revise their plan after thinking through how to best carry out their improvement activities within existing resources.

## Supporting Targeted Support and Improvement Schools

- SEAs must balance many competing interests when determining how best to allocate federal school improvement funds (and other available state resources). Spread the money too thin and you may not invest enough to truly make a difference, especially in the lowest-performing CSI schools. Concentrate the money too much and you may have no additional funds to offer schools—most likely TSI schools—whose students also need help. Accordingly, SEAs should take a comprehensive look at **possible funding sources to support TSI plans**, such as:
  - o non-monetary resources, including among other things SEA staff time, external partners, and opportunities to network with other schools and LEAs,
  - o other federal formula funds, including Title III or IDEA, that can be aligned to TSI plans, and
  - o federal or state funds that are or can be awarded competitively and that
- could thus give priority to proposals that focus on supporting struggling subgroups, such as Title II set-asides, the 3 percent Direct Student Services set-aside of Title I, and Title IV grants including 21st Century Community Learning Centers.
- Although reviews of possible resource inequities are not required by ESSA for all TSI schools (only those identified for additional targeted support), **SEAs should consider requiring or supporting such reviews in all TSI schools**. Even ESSA’s new rule about reporting school-level per-pupil spending will not shine a light on **within-school inequities**. A careful review of how TSI schools allocate their resources (including the assignment of effective teachers) may very well surface additional root causes for subgroups’ underperformance as well as potentially effective opportunities for improvement.



### Common Mistakes

**Don’t plan for funds, but rather fund your plans.** One of the biggest risks, whenever SEAs, LEAs, or schools rely on federal funding, is that the starting place is not “What do our students and schools need?” but instead some combination of “What are we *allowed* to do with these federal funds?” and “What have we *always done* with our federal funds?” The latter mentality constrains thinking and often is artificially limited by what turn out to be merely perceived limitations on the allowable uses of federal funds.

**Don't miss a chance to stare directly at the sun.** As noted above, ESSA's financial transparency rules will shine new light into per-pupil spending at the school level, breaking down *actual* expenditures by funding source. As SEAs prepare to report these data on annual report cards, there are many technical decisions to make about methodologies (e.g., whether to attribute transportation costs to the LEA or school budgets). But more importantly, the new data present an opportunity to engage with stakeholders at all levels in conversations about resource equity, especially at your lowest-performing schools. SEAs should consider how to leverage this upcoming moment to drive more resources to the schools and students who need them most, including not just money but also other critical resources like access to effective educators or rigorous academic opportunities. At the same time, these conversations must also focus not only on how *much*, but also on how *well* resources are being used and how any additional resources will be used effectively.



## Recommended Resources

[Implementing Change: Rethinking School Improvement Strategies & Funding Under the Every Student Succeeds Act](#), developed by Chiefs for Change (2016), provides guidance for SEAs committed to advancing their newfound local flexibility and innovation under ESSA, while also incentivizing LEAs to identify and implement evidence-based school improvement strategies and holding them accountable for results.

Within the larger paper entitled [The Three Essentials: Improving Schools Requires District Vision, District and State Support, and Principal Leadership](#), produced by the Southern Regional Education Board with support from the Wallace Foundation (2010), [Strategy 6](#) concentrates on the best use of resources to positively impact student outcomes. The overall document includes recommendations for actions at the SEA, LEA, and school levels to support the implementation of strategies supporting school improvement.

[Thought Leadership Forum Brief: Braiding Federal Funds Under ESSA](#), by the Center on School Turnaround at WestEd (2017), explains the concept of braiding funds and how it can help maximize the use of federal funds, as well as several recommendations for states should they choose to pursue this strategy.

[Developing Effective Guidance: A Handbook for State Educational Agencies Delivering Guidance on Federal Education Programs to Drive Success](#), produced by the Council of Chief State School Officers (2017), provides SEA staff implementing federal programs with recommendations on the importance and purpose of developing quality SEA guidance, engaging stakeholders, tailoring guidance content to an audience, and transforming guidance into action.

[Decision Guide for Implementing ESSA: State Considerations for Effective Grant Programs](#), produced by Council of Chief State School Officers (2016), explains the ways in which ESSA may require SEAs to alter their federal grant processes including potential changes they will need to make to their policies and procedures, organizational structure, and staff roles and responsibilities.

It also helps SEAs identify the connections between spending regulations, administrative processes, and program implementation, and how changes under ESSA impact SEA capacity given their larger oversight role in the school improvement process.

[What Is Resource Equity?](#), by Education Resource Strategies (2018), expands the discussion of resource equity beyond funding to include a total of nine research-based “dimensions of equity.” The paper identifies how each dimension is related to student outcomes and the typical drivers of inequities within school systems. The report then provides multiple ways LEAs and schools can increase equity through changing their resource allocation and includes a self-diagnostic to guide systems in identifying and addressing these resource inequities.

[Budget Hold'em for Districts](#) and [Budget Hold'em for Schools](#), developed by Education Resource Strategies (2017), are interactive exercises that allow LEA and school leaders to consider the thoughtful tradeoffs they must make to fund their priorities and meet their student and teacher needs. Modeled off a card game and grounded in the evidence base for various potential improvement strategies, the activity allows LEA and school teams to have rich conversations about what works best for their context.

The Building State Capacity and Productivity Center, in partnership with the Edunomics Lab, developed a series of SEA and LEA [resources and tools](#) to use as they work to understand and implement the new ESSA financial requirements and increase fiscal transparency. The resources include information on per-pupil expenditure, a tool to support school level finance surveys, and a guide to using data to drive action steps to support overall system improvements.



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