**May 2018**

**QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF**

**WHILE IMPLEMENTING**

**THE CCSSO PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS**

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**About This Document**

On July 21, 2017, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released a set of [10 principles](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)—*from* states and *for* states—to inform the design and management of effective systems to improve or replace low-performing schools and schools with low-performing subgroups of students.

The particular choices each state makes in applying the principles should align with its particular theory of action and reflect its unique set of conditions. For these principles to be actionable, though, we must have a common understanding of what each principle is (and is not). Accordingly, CCSSO, with the support of EducationCounsel, published in early 2018 a “Roadmap” to manifesting the principles along with “Deep Dives” into each of the 10 principles.

Included in each Deep Dive is a set of questions for state education agencies (SEAs) to ask themselves as they seek to manifest the relevant principle. This document compiles all ten sets of questions to help SEA leaders and other stakeholders make practical use of the questions, whether by typing answers to the questions directly into this document, pasting them into a work plan that identifies *who* will do *what* by *when* to implement new ideas that arise from considering the questions, or whatever other use that helps SEAs manifest the principles in the design of their school improvement systems.

**About The Co-Authors**

**The Council of Chief State School Officers**

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public. [www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org)

**EducationCounsel**

EducationCounsel is a mission-based education consulting firm that combines experience in policy, strategy, law, and advocacy to drive significant improvements in the U.S. education system. <http://educationcounsel.com/>

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[**Principle #1**](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-1-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

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.

*If everything’s a priority, nothing is.*

1. Have you created a **shared vision and sense of urgency with key state-level leaders** (e.g. governor, key state legislators, state board of education)?
2. Have you articulated and shared widely the **theory of action** that drives your approach to school improvement? Can you show how your systems, plans, and budget have been **aligned** to that theory of action?
3. Have you clarified in writing the **division of roles and responsibilities** for school improvement within the SEA and also among the SEA, local education agencies (LEAs), and schools?
4. Is there a **school improvement lead** who wakes up every day focused on executing your vision for school improvement? Does this person report directly to you and have the necessary authority and resources to elicit needed information and make necessary changes? How are you ensuring this person effectively collaborates with other SEA offices?
5. At the same time, how are you **ensuring that all members of your team are invested in improving these schools**? What processes are in place to maintain individual and collective focus on this priority?
6. To what extent is your state’s approach known by key **stakeholders** throughout the system and are stakeholders aware of how their input informed this approach? How have you engaged stakeholders and put structures or feedback loops in place to continue to engage them through implementation?
7. Does your **strategic plan** specifically prioritize school improvement?
8. What is your **communications strategy** to effectively and proactively share your vision, raise awareness and build support? For example, are you elevating school improvement as a priority in your public remarks such as your **State of the State address** or **testimony** in oversight hearings? Is it consistently featured in your communications with superintendents and school leaders? Are you meeting regularly with members of the media to discuss your plan and also maintain realistic expectations for success?
9. What “real estate” does school improvement occupy on your SEA’s **website**? Can visitors to your website easily locate information about school improvement?
10. Are you allocating a significant portion of **your own time** to this work? For example, does your **school visit schedule** reflect the importance you are placing on school improvement? How often are you **receiving updates** or **engaging with stakeholders** on school improvement efforts compared to other strategic priorities?
11. Have you **identified specific practices or initiatives the state will stop doing** to help focus on school improvement as a priority?

[**Principle #2**](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-2-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

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.

*Put students at the center so that every student succeeds.*

*Setting High Expectations*

1. Have you **defined the full range of knowledge, skills, and mindsets** necessary for students to succeed in college, career, and civic life?
2. Are the **components of your school improvement system aligned** to that definition, including but not necessarily limited to identification and exit criteria, needs assessments, planning templates and frameworks, scoring rubrics, and progress monitoring?
3. Do your **public communications** about school improvement (see Principle #1) consistently include references to this definition as applied to students in identified schools?
4. Do staff at the SEA, LEA, and school level share your commitment to **holding equally high expectations for all students**, including students in CSI schools and those in subgroups leading to TSI identification? Do adults throughout the system—especially those working in identified schools—**believe all students are capable of meeting those expectations**?
5. What steps are you taking to **build and sustain those expectations and mindsets** throughout the state? For example, when hiring staff (and providing technical assistance to LEAs on hiring), do you **explicitly screen candidates for their beliefs** about what all students can achieve?
6. Have you reviewed state policies impacting **students with disabilities and English learners** to ensure students in these populations have access to the academic supports and educational opportunities necessary to meet those expectations?

*Challenging the Status Quo*

1. Have you **systematically reviewed or audited state policies and practices** to identify barriers to executing your school improvement theory of action? To surface opportunities to create new enabling conditions? What external partner can you involve in the process to provide a fresh set of (objective) eyes?
2. Have you **asked school and LEA leaders with a track record of successful school improvement efforts** to identify constraining policies and practices and to share how they overcame those constraints (e.g., seeking waivers or relying more on partners’ resources)?
3. How can you **make it easier for identified schools and their LEAs to focus more time and resources on their improvement plans**? Can you waive certain requirements? Reduce paperwork? Align timelines? Give preferential treatment in SEA processes?
4. Are you taking full advantage of **existing state authorities** (e.g., achievement school districts) to intervene in schools and/or LEAs at the beginning of the improvement process? After a school fails to exit? Are there **additional authorities** you could seek?
5. What **autonomies** could you grant to identified schools and/or their LEAs to support improvement efforts, including autonomies related to hiring, placing, and replacing staff, budget, curriculum, professional learning, the length and use of the school day and/or year, procurement, grading, and discipline and school climate?
6. For areas beyond state control, how are you educating and **encouraging LEAs to grant needed autonomies** to identified schools?
7. Is your state’s **methodology for allocating financial resources** aligned to your commitment to helping each and every student meet your high expectations? How does the methodology explicitly take into account what students need to succeed and how does it account for all sources of funding? Does the methodology reduce or exacerbate inequity?
8. What role **do LEA consolidation, school closure, and school choice** initiatives play in the state? What are you doing to ensure those strategies are fairly considered when deciding what is in the best interests of students?

[**Principle #3**](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-3-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

 Engage early, regularly, and authentically with stakeholders and partners so improvement is done with and not to the school, families, and the community.

 • 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.

*If you want to go far, go together.*

*Stakeholder Engagement*

1. As you plan for and conduct stakeholder engagement, how are you **adapting the key steps** used in state ESSA plan development to the school improvement context (see Figure 1 above)? As described more fully in Figure 2 below, **how are your approaches maximizing representation, transparency, sustainability, collaboration, and alignment**?
2. **What can you leverage from your approach to ESSA consolidated state plan stakeholder engagement**, including policies, practices, partners, and relationships? What missteps can you avoid repeating?
3. **For which decisions about how to design your state system of school improvement are you engaging stakeholders** (e.g., the requirements discussed on pp. 6-7 of the [Roadmap to Implementing the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/roadmap-implementing-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems))? Are you working with the same groups to inform each of these design decisions (e.g., a standing committee), or are you differentiating *who* contributes to *what*?
4. What **expectations do you have for LEAs and schools** for engaging stakeholders throughout the school improvement process, and how have you communicated those expectations? As with your own state-level design process, are your expectations for LEAs and schools different for different parts of the process? Are there specific stakeholders that must be engaged?
5. What **resources, guidance, and/or technical assistance** will you provide to help LEAs and schools meet your expectations or navigate areas where additional clarity is needed?
6. How will you know if your **expectations are being met** for LEA- and school-level stakeholder engagement?
7. What role, if any, will **evidence of stakeholder engagement** play in your state-level review and approval of CSI plans? Of applications for school improvement grants?
8. **Is stakeholder engagement itself a required (or recommended) improvement strategy** in CSI and TSI plans—to involve families and other stakeholders not just as providers-of-feedback but also as additional capacity for the day-to-day improvement efforts? What resources and technical assistance can you provide to help build the awareness, motivation, and capacity of LEAs, schools, and the stakeholders themselves to engage in these (likely unfamiliar) ways? Are there opportunities to engage reciprocally by leveraging LEA/school staff to support stakeholders’ improvement efforts in the community beyond the school?

*Partnerships*

1. How are you **coordinating statewide efforts** to improve outcomes for students in CSI and TSI schools with your peers at other state agencies and the state’s early childhood, higher education, social services, and workforce systems?
2. How can the state **support LEAs and schools in identifying and engaging in *valuable* partnerships** across agencies and with other entities in the community? What role, if any, will such collaboration play in how the state designs requirements and templates governing the development, approval, funding, and monitoring of CSI and TSI plans?
3. Is your school-level (and LEA-level if applicable) **needs assessment** designed to diagnose root causes that exist beyond the school walls and outside the school day and year? Does it point toward partnerships to help address any identified challenges?
4. How can you support LEA and school efforts to **inventory school and community assets** that can be leveraged in improvement efforts, including but not limited to state, county, and municipal agencies; private and not-for-profit providers (e.g., child care, afterschool, and summer enrichment providers); philanthropies; research institutions; tribal organizations; employers; and other potential partners?
5. How are you working with LEAs and schools to **surface and resolve any bureaucratic barriers** to connecting students and communities to the supports they need? Are there state policies or practices that need revising to facilitate these partnerships?
6. How are you **linking government data sets**—with appropriate privacy protections—to support more effective partnerships, decision-making, and allocation of resources?
7. What requirements, guidance, and/or technical assistance will you provide to LEAs to help them **“use a rigorous review process to recruit, screen, select, and evaluate any external partners with whom the [LEA] will partner”** in school improvement efforts, as required by ESSA §1111(e)(1)(D)?
8. What process will be followed if **directly engaging at the SEA level with school improvement partners** or vetting them on behalf of LEAs?
9. How will you hold any SEA partners **accountable for results**?
10. Are you **leveraging better performing LEAs and schools** as partners for CSI and TSI schools (and their LEAs) that serve similar groups of students?

[**Principle #4**](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-4-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

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.

*One size does not fit all.*

1. Which approaches in the **continuum** presented above (or others not included) are you currently using, whether for newly identified or non-exiting schools? Which new strategies are you willing and able to implement?
2. To the extent you pursue strategies that reflect **greater state involvement** (e.g., SEA takeover of an LEA) or place an emphasis on **replacement** (e.g., chartering), how are you building the capacity, political capital, and stakeholder support at each level of the system involved?
3. Have you reviewed existing state laws and policies to identify the **full range of tools in your toolbox**? Are there additional authorities you should seek (including the ability to grant additional authorities to others)?
4. Are there ways to **leverage the possibility of more direct SEA action** (e.g., an achievement school district or LEA receivership) to inspire more urgent and effective improvement efforts?
5. Given your theory of action about school improvement, where in the school improvement process should you be more “**tight**” and where should you be more “**loose**” (e.g., a *statewide* needs assessment but *open-ended* guidelines for the content of improvement plans)?
6. Even in areas where you defer to local control or empower local decision making, how can your SEA’s templates, processes, rubrics, and other resources “**nudge**” local leaders toward decisions that align with your theory of action? How can you help LEAs and schools avoid adopting one-size-fits-all approaches themselves, or just doing what they have always done?
7. What **capacity** do you need to build at the SEA or through partners to effectively support your chosen strategy or strategies? How can you take the best advantage of the additional capacity available through regional service agencies, regional educational laboratories (RELs), comprehensive centers (CCs), and others?
8. What is your **process for matching** particular LEAs/schools to particular strategies? How does your process account for whether the particular actor (whether SEA, LEA, school, receiver, or other partner) has the capacity to execute the given strategy and take advantage of any accompanying autonomies? Are there lessons you can learn from prior school improvement efforts to maximize the fit between context, need, capacity, and approach?
9. How are you ensuring your **technical assistance** system and any partner providers are aligned with a one-size-does-not-fit-all approach? In delivering these supports, how will you account for differences in LEA and school capacity, results of LEA- and school-level needs assessments, prior improvement successes and setbacks, the number/percentage of an LEA’s schools that are identified for improvement, and other factors?
10. How are you ensuring LEAs/schools conduct high-quality, comprehensive **needs assessments**? What requirements, resources, and support can you provide so the assessments surface root causes for underperformance, as well as both gaps and assets beyond the school building?
11. If you design a **statewide or model needs assessment**, is it aligned to your theory of action about what causes low performance and what conditions for learning are most important to establish?
12. To what extent is your SEA **reducing the burden on LEAs/schools** conducting needs assessments by pre-populating as much data as is available to the SEA?
13. How are you ensuring LEAs/schools **draw explicit connections** between the results of their needs assessments and the improvement plans they develop?
14. How are you helping LEAs/schools avoid taking a “one size fits all” approach to **selecting evidence-based interventions**? (See [Principle #5](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-5-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems) for more information about making wise selections.)
15. Do your school improvement processes and deadlines allow for sufficient time, between identifying schools and reviewing/approving plans, for LEAs and schools to complete a comprehensive needs assessment and then use the results to inform plan development? Will you allow for (and how will you support) a **planning year**?
16. In addition to the federally required school-level needs assessment for all CSI schools, are you requiring or supporting **needs assessments for TSI schools**? District-level assessments for LEAs with schools identified as CSI and/or TSI?

[**Principle #5**](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-5-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

Support LEAs and schools in designing high-quality school improvement plans
informed by:

 • 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.

*Failing to plan is planning to fail.*

1. Does your theory of action about school improvement include setting ***statewide* expectations for the content of improvement plans**? If so, what are the key priority areas that you will require LEAs and schools to address in each plan?
2. What, if anything, must those plans include regarding **support and improvement for the LEA** itself?
3. If you are using statewide versions of any components of the planning process—or even just encouraging LEAs/schools to use models developed by the SEA—do your **designs align with your theory of action** about what truly drives improvement in low-performing schools? For example, how are you advancing your priority areas through a statewide needs assessment, the process for conducting a resource equity review, the CSI or TSI plan templates, the required components of a school improvement grant application and/or scoring rubric, and the scoring rubrics used to review and approve CSI/TSI plans?
4. How does your methodology for **allocating the 7 percent set-aside** for school improvement (e.g., competition, formula, hybrid) support the development of high-quality improvement plans?
5. Are you providing technical assistance, funding, and/or time (e.g., a planning year) to **support the planning process**? How are you ensuring any such resources are aligned to your theory of action, are themselves high-quality, and are effectively used by local leaders?
6. Will you require that improvement plans draw explicit **connections between the results of needs assessments and the chosen improvement strategies**? How are you helping LEAs/schools make these connections as they develop their plans?
7. In addition to funding, what other [**dimensions of resource equity**](https://www.erstrategies.org/tap/what_is_resource_equity) will you require, support, and/or encourage LEAs to include in the reviews required by ESSA for each CSI and ATSI school, such as access to effective teachers and leaders? Will you require that improvement plans explicitly explain how any identified inequities will be addressed through implementation of the plan?
8. How are you requiring, supporting, and/or encouraging LEAs and schools to reflect in their plans the **science of learning and development**, including what we know about the impact of poverty, trauma, and adversity on learning?
9. How are you leveraging ESSA’s requirement that every CSI/TSI plan must include **evidence-based interventions** to increase the quality of improvement plans? How can you make it easier for LEAs/schools to access and understand the existing evidence base? How can you support LEAs/schools in making thoughtful selections of evidence-based interventions that take into account whether interventions under consideration
	* align to your overall theory of action,
	* cohere with the rest of the CSI/TSI plan,
	* respond to the results of the school-level needs assessment,
	* are supported by the strongest available evidence,
	* are appropriate for the context of the school or subgroup of students, and
	* can be implemented by the particular school with fidelity and with any necessary but reasoned adaptations to account for the school context?
10. Given how many improvement efforts fail during implementation (see [Principle #9](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-9-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)), what are you expecting LEAs/schools to state in their plans and/or applications for funds about how they will approach **implementation** of their plan? How will LEAs/schools demonstrate their plans will be used in practice and not just sit on a shelf?
11. How are you ensuring the **CSI plan review and approval process** (and the same process for reviewing/approving applications for school improvement funds) reinforces your expectations for quality (e.g., thoughtful selections of evidence-based interventions)?
	* What role do experts across the SEA play in reviewing/approving the plans? For example, how do program offices responsible for literacy, special education, etc. participate?
	* Is the process iterative in that LEAs/schools who do not initially meet your bar for quality receive specific feedback and the opportunity to revise and resubmit their plans?

[**Principle #6**](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-6-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

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.*

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 (see, e.g., [these](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) and [these](https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/School-Improvement-Brief-March-2016.pdf))? 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?
	* Does each initiative sufficiently **prioritize CSI/TSI schools and local education agencies (LEAs)** with significant numbers of identified schools?
	* 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?
	* 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)?
	* 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?
	* 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?
	* 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?
	* 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. 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?

[**Principle #7**](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-7-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

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.*

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](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-5-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems))?
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](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-10-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems) explores this question of sustainability in greater detail.)

[**Principle #8**](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-8-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

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.

*What gets measured gets done.*

1. What is your **process for selecting the measures** that your SEA will use to progress monitor CSI school improvement efforts? Which SEA staff beyond your school improvement office will help you answer the following questions? Which external partners and/or stakeholders will you include in the decision making process?
	* What research can you review and/or conduct to help identify the **most predictive leading indicators** (or measures)? How will you **sequence those measures** over the course of a multi-year improvement cycle? In other words, what is the right mix and sequence of input, output, and outcome measures?
	* Which measures will be common across all CSI schools and which measures (if any) will be **customized for particular types of schools** (e.g., schools identified via the bottom 5% versus the graduation rate criteria)?
	* Which measures (if any) will be **customized for individual schools** per the results of their needs assessment and the priorities of their improvement plan?
	* What **LEA-level measures** will you include? Will those be common or customized across LEAs?
	* What are the relationships among your progress monitoring measures and your state ESSA plan’s **accountability indicators,** **long-term goals, measures of interim progress, and/or CSI exit criteria**?
	* Have you explicitly considered whether selecting each measure under consideration could have **unintended consequences** in terms of encouraging ineffective or inappropriate practices at the school or classroom level? Whether the measures are particularly susceptible to any “gaming” of the data? If so, have you identified ways to mitigate these risks (e.g., addressing misunderstandings about the “stakes” accompanying these progress monitoring measures)?
	* Are there **metrics you considered for your accountability system or exit criteria** that you ultimately decided were not ready or appropriate for those uses but that nevertheless may be important benchmarks of the improvement you want to see in identified schools (e.g., measures related to students’ social and emotional learning)? If so, are they ready and appropriate for inclusion in school improvement progress monitoring?
2. Is the SEA doing all it can to **minimize the data collection and reporting burden** on LEAs and schools? If there are measures you want to use but are not currently available (perhaps due to limitations on your data systems), what steps are you taking to remove those barriers?
3. Are data entry policies and the relevant business rules clearly established and designed to allow comparable analyses across LEAs and schools (e.g., shared definitions of “chronic absenteeism”)?
4. How will you establish **ambitious but achievable benchmarks of progress and performance** on each of the measures? Can you use statistical models to determine whether particular benchmarks are reasonable? How will you differentiate for different types of schools and for different phases of the improvement cycle?
5. How are you **engaging LEAs, schools, and other stakeholders** in the selection, development, and continuous improvement of these measures and benchmarks? In decisions about the content, form, and frequency of **public reporting** on progress over the course of the improvement effort?
6. Will your decisions about measures and transparency **help all these stakeholders view progress monitoring as a process that *contributes* to the improvement effort** rather than distracts from it for the sake of state or federal compliance?
7. How will you **continuously improve the metrics over time** by identifying and focusing on the ones most predictive of success and by fine-tuning the sequencing of metrics to best match the experience of successful (and unsuccessful) improvement efforts? Do you have sufficient internal capacity to collect and analyze the data needed to evaluate the effectiveness of your metrics, or are there external partnerships (e.g., research institutions) you should pursue?
8. Will you require LEAs to use a particular set of measures and benchmarks while **progress monitoring TSI schools**? If not, what guidance, technical assistance, and/or incentives will you provide LEAs in this area?

[**Principle #9**](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-9-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

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.

*Ideas are only as good as they are implemented.*

1. Do your approaches to implementation and continuous improvement align with your **theory of action** for how the SEA drives improvement in LEAs and schools? For example, if your theory of action and, accordingly, your needs assessment and your grant application, emphasize the importance of building LEA capacity, are your implementation and progress monitoring supports also aligned to that same focus?
2. Conversely, do the **other aspects of your school improvement system** manifest a commitment to implementation and continuous improvement? For example, does your needs assessment include inquiries into LEA/school structures and processes for continuous improvement? Does your CSI plan template require a description for how the LEA/school will improve the plan itself over time in response to data?
3. How are you **building a culture of learning** at the SEA, especially among staff involved in the school improvement process, such as your progress monitors, grant administrators, and technical assistance providers? For example, do you screen for and intentionally develop learning-oriented mindsets in your staff? How are you supporting a learning culture among LEAs, schools, and their stakeholders? Where does distrust exist in the system, and how can you begin to address it? Are there policies or practices that serve as barriers to making these shifts?
4. How can you design the mechanics of your implementation and monitoring structures and processes to **emphasize learning and improvement over mere compliance**? For example, do the same people conduct monitoring of and provide support to LEAs and schools? If so, how do you signal their role in the school improvement process, and how do you clarify what “stakes” are attached to the results of the monitoring? Do your monitoring routines generate actionable and timely feedback for LEAs/schools?
5. How are you striking the right balance between the benefits of gathering useful data (see [Principle #8](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-8-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)) at frequent enough intervals and the burdens on LEA and school staff of collecting that data and participating in monitoring activities? Are there ways you can **reduce the administrative burden** by, for example, pre-populating data reports with data the SEA already collects?
6. Will existing **state and local data systems, policies, and practices** support high-quality monitoring? Are there opportunities to link educational data systemswith other state or local government data systems to support more robust data collection and analysis? Can vetted partners (e.g., researchers) access the data needed to support monitoring efforts? Are there sufficient privacy safeguards in place?
7. Have you audited whether the SEA has sufficient **internal capacity to effectively monitor implementation beyond compliance**? Are there external partners you can tap to bolster your efforts? To help build more internal capacity?
8. What [**continuous improvement methodology**](https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/blog/tag/Improvement_Approaches/)will you integrate into your progress monitoring? What adjustments, if any, do you need to make to the **SEA’s organizational design** to effectively implement your chosen approach?
9. How are you requiring, encouraging, and/or supporting **LEAs and schools** to embrace a learning posture and commit to a systematic, continuous improvement of their Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)/Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) plans? For example, what are your expectations for LEAs to describe in school improvement plans and/or applications for funds their improvement processes, staff positions focused on continuous improvement, feedback loops, and stakeholder engagement plans?
10. Besides informing improvement at the LEA and school levels, what will the SEA do in **response to information collected during monitoring**? For example, how will monitoring reports impact ongoing state support efforts and resource allocation, decisions to renew school improvement grants, etc.?
11. What internal and external capacity exists to **conduct rigorous evaluations and disseminate the findings** to inform continuous improvement and future decisions about how to invest public funds? What partners are available for collaboration in order to expand capacity?
12. Have you established a **research or learning agenda** to guide your (and any partners’) evaluations of school improvement across the state to build more evidence for what works, for whom, and under what circumstances? What types of studies (e.g., measuring implementation or impact) will you conduct and when? Are you preparing to meet any data collection needs and to respond to any study design considerations *before* implementation begins? What guidance, resources, and support are you offering LEAs and schools to help them build more evidence of what works, for whom, and under what circumstances?
13. How will **future cohorts of CSI/TSI schools** take advantage of what is learned from your monitoring and evaluation efforts?
14. How are you preparing to **continuously improve the state school improvement system itself**? Given the many design decisions you have made to manifest all ten principles, how will you review and revise those decisions over time? How will you engage stakeholders within and outside the system in these reflections and revisions?

[**Principle #10**](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-10-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

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.

*Don't be a flash in the pan.*

[*Principle #1*](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-1-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

* 1. What are you doing to ensure school improvement remains a top priority not just at the beginning, but also through the implementation of initial improvement plans, the implementation of “more rigorous” state-led interventions for non-exiting schools, the identification of additional cohorts of schools, and the repeat of the entire school improvement cycle for those newly identified schools?
	2. How are you ensuring that the organizational and cultural changes within the SEA necessary to manifest all the principles take hold and become the new “way we do business”?

[*Principle #2*](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-2-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

* 1. Have you established a regular practice of systematically reviewing state policies and practices—including any new ones implemented as part of your effort to manifest Principle #2—to ensure your school improvement system continues to align with your theory of action, help students graduate prepared for success, and not only drive initial improvement in identified schools but also sustain that growth over time? Are there SEA-level policies, mindsets, silos, initiatives, funding sources, etc. that in practice undermine sustainability?
	2. How are you inviting feedback and suggestions from those responsible for making progress in identified schools about what they need to sustain and extend their successes?

[*Principle #3*](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-3-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

* 1. Does your SEA’s approach to stakeholder engagement—and your expectations/support for LEAs and schools—explicitly emphasize *ongoing* consultation and partnering?
	2. To the extent you have state-level school improvement partners, are they focused on helping build SEA, LEA, and/or school capacity, so that new practices can be implemented in perpetuity?
	3. As you consider potential partners and/or vet them for LEAs and schools, are you investigating their track record of sustaining improvements?

[*Principle #4*](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-4-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

* 1. Beyond the initial planning process, how frequently do you and your LEAs and schools assess needs, analyze root causes, and check the fit of their strategies for improvement?
	2. To the extent the SEA is significantly involved in school improvement efforts (e.g., managing non-exiting schools as part of an achievement school district), have you worked with the relevant parties and stakeholders to map out the eventual transition from the current model to whatever long-term approach to authority and governance will be in place? To help sustain progress, are there LEA-level readiness criteria to consider in addition to school-level exit criteria?

[*Principle #5*](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-5-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

* 1. Do you require that CSI plans explicitly address sustainability, so LEAs and schools have to plan for it from the beginning and not just as they approach exiting improvement status? For example, do you ask an LEA to explain whether each part of their improvement plan needs to be sustained beyond the improvement plan (i.e., it is addressing an underlying need that will continue to exist indefinitely) or is by design a temporary, transitional investment needed to jump start the improvement effort (and thus a wise investment of federal school improvement funds)?
	2. Is sustainability part of your technical assistance for the planning process and your scoring rubrics for approving plans and awarding grants?

[*Principle #6*](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-6-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

* 1. How are you supporting the retention of effective teachers and leaders in identified schools, especially after a school exits improvement status when (unwanted) turnover can quickly lead to backsliding?
	2. Are there pipeline initiatives specifically targeted to backfill vacancies at those schools with staff who are prepared from day one to be effective in CSI/TSI settings and sustain the progress that has been made?
	3. Are you requiring or supporting succession planning for key roles related to school improvement in LEAs and schools?

[*Principle #7*](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-7-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

* 1. How can you leverage and align federal, state, and local funds and other types of resources to promote sustainable improvement for LEAs and schools after the expiration of their federal school improvement grants?
	2. What other SEA resources can you leverage (e.g., time, guidance, technical assistance, partnerships, networks with other LEAs/schools) to help mitigate the impact of any “funding cliffs”?
	3. Have you considered structuring school improvement grants to taper over time, so that even during the grant period LEAs and schools begin identifying other funds to help sustain any essential supports and interventions?
	4. How are you ensuring that LEAs and schools continue to address resource inequities identified during the school improvement process? If the resource equity reviews surface broken cost structures or inequitable policies at the LEA level, how are you making sure LEAs are addressing those systemic issues to increase their ability to sustain school-level improvement?

[*Principle #8*](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-8-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

* 1. Does your progress monitoring system includes measures of sustainability?
	2. What can you learn from prior school improvement efforts—those that have and have not sustained progress—to inform how you measure LEAs’ and schools’ readiness to sustain their improvement after exiting improvement status?
	3. What early warning indicators will you track, within and beyond your annual accountability system, to identify schools that may be heading toward identification as CSI or TSI?

[*Principle #9*](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-9-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

* 1. Are you building SEA, LEA, and school capacity along the way during plan implementation in order to sustain improvement over time?
	2. Which parts of the school improvement implementation and continuous improvement processes should continue after a school exits?
	3. How are you intentionally learning lessons about successes and challenges to sustain improvements with current and future cohorts of identified schools? What structures, processes, and culture must be built?
	4. After schools exit improvement status, who at the SEA has responsibility for tracking their continued progress and flagging early signs of backsliding?

[*Principle #10*](http://www.ccsso.org/resource-library/deep-dive-principle-10-ccsso-principles-effective-school-improvement-systems)

* 1. Do the exit criteria for CSI and additional targeted support and improvement (ATSI) schools that you established in your ESSA plans set a high enough bar for school improvement to give you confidence that exiting schools will not backslide into being identified again once the improvement supports are removed? For example, do you expect significant growth? In consecutive years? As part of your process, do you review a comprehensive sustainability plan for the school that addresses key issues like budgeting and succession planning?