

February 2018



## Roadmap to Implementing the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems

## 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. <http://ccsso.org/>

## EDUCATIONCOUNSEL

EducationCounsel is a mission-driven education consulting firm that works with leading nonprofit organizations, foundations, and policymakers to help significantly improve education opportunity and outcomes. We do this by leveraging policy, strategy, law, and advocacy to help transform education systems, from early learning to K12 to higher education. We work with partners at the state, federal, and local levels to advance evidence-based innovations and systems change, with a central focus on equity. <http://www.educationcounsel.com/>

Authors:

Dan Gordon, Bethany Little, and Emily Webb

Suggested Citation:

Council of Chief State School Officers and EducationCounsel. 2018. *Roadmap to Implementing the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems*. Washington, DC.

## COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

Carey Wright (Mississippi), President  
Carissa Moffat Miller, Interim Executive Director

One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700 • Washington, DC 20001-1431  
Phone (202) 336-7000 • Fax (202) 408-8072 • [www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org)



© 2018 CCSSO. *Roadmap to Implementing the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems* is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

On July 21, 2017, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released a set of [10 principles](#)—*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 principles are derived from what we know based on current research, evidence, experience, and the input of state leaders, key stakeholders, and other experts. These school improvement principles build off CCSSO’s [next-generation state accountability system principles](#) and closely align with its [commitments to advancing educational equity](#).

The goal of the principles is to articulate the core *components* of any effective school improvement system, not necessarily a common *model* or *theory of action*. 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, is publishing “Deep Dives” into each of the 10 principles. The series begins with this overview or “Roadmap” to implementing the principles along with the first two Deep Dives for Principles #1 and #2. The remaining Deep Dives will be published in the coming months to help inform states’ decision making as they finish designing and begin implementing their school improvement systems under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

We hope the Deep Dives help states and their partners take action on the principles for the benefit of students enrolled in identified schools. Each Deep Dive is designed to unpack these thematic and cross-cutting principles via six elements listed in the boxes below.



After publishing all of the Deep Dives, we will produce a set of appendices that aggregate some of the elements (e.g., a comprehensive list of relevant resources). Our intention is for these resources to be “living” documents with ongoing

updates to reflect new promising practices that emerge from states’ implementation over time.

The remainder of this introductory Roadmap provides (i) a list of the principles, (ii) baseline information about school improvement under ESSA, and (iii) some general suggestions about how states can connect the principles to key, concrete decisions about their systems.

Finally, note that while the principles and the Deep Dives are oriented toward state leaders (particularly state chiefs and their state education agency [SEA] teams), all stakeholders can benefit from these resources. Indeed, the principles must manifest at *each* level of the system, including school districts and schools. Although SEAs should certainly integrate each principle at the state level (e.g., routines for continuously improving SEA strategies under Principle #9; ongoing state-level stakeholder engagement under Principle #3), they must be equally if not more committed to ensuring the principles “live” throughout the system (e.g., requiring, encouraging, and/or supporting continuous improvement and stakeholder engagement at the district and school levels).

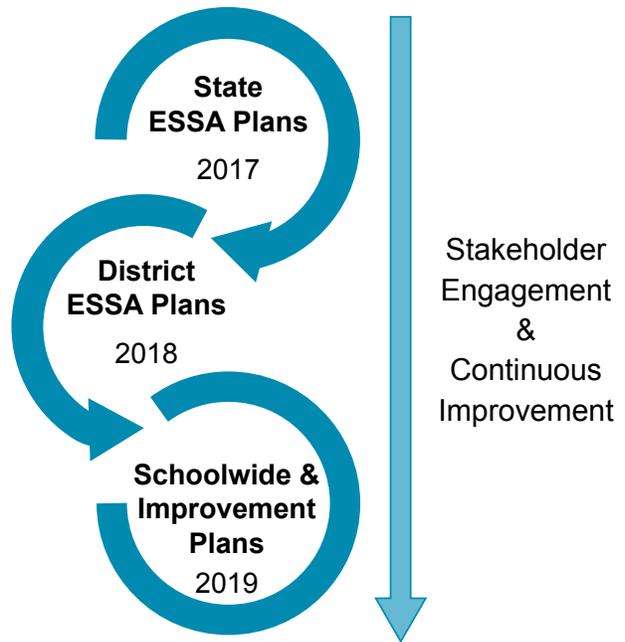
## CCSSO PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS

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>

## OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT UNDER ESSA

Under ESSA, states have a new responsibility and opportunity to lead on school improvement. In contrast to the more top-down approaches to school improvement of the No Child Left Behind Act and Elementary and Secondary Education Act flexibility waivers, ESSA establishes some federal guardrails (especially regarding equity considerations) and then empowers each state—working in close partnership with its LEAs, schools, principals, teachers, parents, students, civil rights leaders, community members, tribes, and other key stakeholders—to design its own system of school improvement. This includes developing (or evolving) the state system’s vision and theory of action; its architecture and policies; its implementation, supports, incentives, and consequences; and its efforts to ensure that all levels of the system fulfill their specific roles. School improvement is not a “one and done” moment of ESSA implementation. Rather, it is part of a sequence of opportunities for innovation, evaluation, and continuous improvement that connects state, local, and school efforts to improve student outcomes.

To help maintain a strong connection between the principles and the decisions states must make as they implement ESSA’s new school improvement regime, this Roadmap includes below a review of the “nuts and bolts” about the new law’s school improvement requirements, specifically the rules governing which schools must be identified (though states can choose to identify more) and the distribution of responsibility across state, district, and school for the various aspects of the support and improvement process. (See CCSSO’s [ESSA Implementation Timeline](#) for more information.)



## IDENTIFICATION OF SCHOOLS

States must identify their lowest-performing schools and schools with low-performing subgroups as follows:

Category	At Minimum, Which Schools Must Be Identified?	When Are They First Identified?	How Often?
<b>Comprehensive Support &amp; Improvement (CSI)</b>	Any high school with <67% graduation rate	SY18-19 (based on SY17-18 data)	At least every 3 years
	Lowest-performing 5% of Title I schools		
	Non-exiting ATSI schools (Title I only)	After state-determined # of years to exit ATSI status	
<b>Targeted Support &amp; Improvement (TSI)</b>	Schools with a “consistently underperforming” subgroup, as defined by the state	After state-determined # of years	Annually
<b>Additional Targeted Support &amp; Improvement (ATSI)</b>	TSI schools with a subgroup that— if the subgroup were a separate school—would perform at the level of the bottom 5% of Title I schools	SY18-19*	State-Determined**

\* Although the default rule under ESSA §1111(d)(2)(C) is to identify ATSI schools from among the TSI schools, ESSA §1111(d)(2)(D) establishes a “Special Rule” that requires states to identify an initial cohort of ATSI schools in SY17-18 without first waiting for the state to identify “consistently underperforming” subgroups after a state-determined number of years. The U.S. Department of Education then delayed the special rule until SY18-19 in an [April 10, 2017, Dear Colleague letter](#). States have adopted different approaches in their ESSA state plans regarding when to first identify ATSI schools.

\*\* ESSA does not explicitly state how often ATSI schools must be identified. States have adopted different approaches in their ESSA state plans.

## RESPONSIBILITIES FOR SUPPORT AND IMPROVEMENT

The law then establishes a limited but important set of requirements regarding efforts to support and improve identified schools. In general, states have significantly more responsibility for CSI schools while districts take the lead with TSI schools. Roles and responsibilities are allocated as follows:

Category	Conducts Needs Assessment	Identifies Resource Inequities	Develops Improvement Plan	Approves & Monitors Plan	Awards Any Funding	Sets Exit Criteria	Takes Additional Action
Comprehensive Support & Improvement (CSI)	District	District	District	State	State	State	State
Targeted Support & Improvement (TSI)	N/A*	N/A	School	District	State	District**	District
Additional Targeted Support & Improvement (ATSI)	N/A*	School***	School	District	State	State	<u>Non-Title I:</u> District <u>Title I:</u> Becomes CSI

- \* Needs assessments are not explicitly mandated for TSI/ATSI. However, ESSA does require that TSI/ATSI support and improvement plans must be “informed by all indicators [of the accountability system], including student performance against long-term goals” (see ESSA §1111(d)(2)(B)(i)). In some ways, this connection between performance and plan serves a similar function as a needs assessment, although such an approach, on its own, would be unlikely to provide the rich data of a true school-level needs assessment.
- \*\* Although ESSA does not require “exit criteria” be set for TSI schools, there is a requirement that there be “additional action following unsuccessful implementation” of the improvement plan. The criteria used by an LEA to decide when implementation has been unsuccessful is similar to “exit criteria.”
- \*\*\* Because ESSA charges TSI schools with developing their plans, the additional requirement for ATSI schools to identify resource inequities is imputed to schools. That said, §1111(d)(2)(C) also explicitly mentions that the inequities to be identified and addressed “may” include district-level budgeting in addition to school-level budgeting. Thus, districts may also naturally play a key role here.

## CONNECTING PRINCIPLES TO SPECIFIC SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT REQUIREMENTS

In each Deep Dive, we will highlight the concrete aspects of ESSA's requirements for school improvement—the “architecture” that must be designed and constructed—that are most relevant to a state’s effort to manifest the principles. For example, under ESSA, states must determine how they will allocate school improvement funds (see the second bullet below and ESSA §1003(b)(2)(A)). In the Deep Dives for Principle #7 on resources and #10 on sustaining improvement efforts, we incorporate specific suggestions, considerations, and resources for designing an allocation methodology that aligns with the concepts embedded within each of those two principles. To offer some specific entry points that can be leveraged to manifest these school improvement principles, following are key requirements of this state-to-local school improvement architecture, with references to the relevant ESSA provision. (See a fuller treatment of considerations for each ESSA requirement [here](#).)

- **Accountability determinations and the identification of schools for improvement:** States create the structure by which schools will enter school improvement when they decide how accountability determinations will be made for schools (e.g., the criteria for summative rating systems based on an index, matrices, or data dashboards) (see ESSA §1111(c)(4)(C)) and how schools will be identified for CSI and TSI, including initial identification and exit criteria (see ESSA §1111(c)(4)(D) and §1111(c)(4)(C)(iii) (identification) and §1111(d)(3)(A)(1)(i) (exit criteria)).
- **Determine method of allocation of school improvement funds:** States have the opportunity and responsibility to allocate funds from ESSA’s required 7% set-aside of Title I Part A grants to LEAs for the purposes of school improvement (see ESSA §1003(a) & §1003(b)(2)(A)). States must prioritize funding based on criteria around a high level of need and commitment in the districts (see ESSA §1003(f)), however states can design additional criteria that advance key priorities. States must also decide whether or not districts will be allowed a planning year and what level of funds districts will receive for that planning year (see ESSA §1003(c)).
- **Develop mechanisms, tools, and technical assistance to make data reporting actionable for informing comprehensive needs assessments and school improvement:** States are required under ESSA to report on multiple, disaggregated measures, including the accountability measures approved in their state plans (see ESSA §1111(h)).
- **Develop the template(s) for the application for school improvement funds (Title I, Section 1003) and for the Comprehensive Support and Improvement Plan:** Under ESSA, states are responsible for developing the local application for school improvement funds (see ESSA §1003(e)) based on the method of funding allocation they select (see #2 above). They may also provide a template for CSI plans themselves given ESSA requirements (see ESSA §1111(d)(1)). Finally, because states are also responsible for approving CSI plans (see ESSA §1111(d)(1)(B)), they must also design its review and approval process, including, for example, scoring rubrics and timelines.
- **Local needs assessment, including deeper data analysis and diagnostic review:** ESSA requires that every CSI plan be based on a school-level needs assessment (see ESSA §1111(d)(1)(B)(iii)), so states will have to design their approach to providing LEAs with guidance, tools, technical assistance, and/or expectations. States could also encourage or require deeper diagnostic review and needs assessments for TSI schools.

- **Elements and processes for resource equity analysis:** ESSA creates two requirements for resource equity analyses that can be leveraged to provide clear direction and support to schools. First, states must periodically review resource allocations across schools in districts serving a significant number of CSI and TSI schools (see ESSA §1111(d)(3)(A)(ii)). Second, ATSI schools must identify resource inequities (at the LEA and/or the school budgeting level) to be addressed by the school improvement plan (see ESSA §1111(d)(2)(C)).
- **Provide guidance to districts and schools on school improvement strategies and requirements beyond the plan submission process:** States may provide guidance to LEAs at a minimum about how to implement ESSA’s requirements, such as
  - The use of evidence in school improvement plans: ESSA requires all CSI and TSI plans to include evidence-based interventions (see ESSA §1111(d)(1)(B)(ii) and §(d)(2)(B)(ii)). Further, any plans funded in part with the Title I set-aside must include at least one intervention with strong, moderate, or promising evidence (Tiers I-III within ESSA’s definition of “evidence-based” (see §8101(21)(B))).
  - Stakeholder engagement on local school improvement plan: ESSA requires CSI and TSI plans to be developed “in partnership with stakeholders (including principals and other school leaders, teachers, and parents)” (see ESSA §1111(d)(1)(B) and §1111(d)(2)(B)).
- **Provide ongoing technical assistance to districts and school leaders:** ESSA requires states to provide technical assistance (TA) to districts serving significant numbers of schools in comprehensive and targeted support and improvement (see ESSA §1111(d)(3)(iii)).
- **Determine process for more rigorous action in schools not meeting exit criteria:** For CSI schools that have not met their states’ exit criteria, the states must determine what “more rigorous” actions will take place (see ESSA §1111(d)(3)(A)(1)(i)(I)).
- **Monitor, evaluate, and ensure periodic review and continuous improvement:** States are responsible for monitoring the use of Title I school improvement set-aside funds in school districts (see ESSA §1003(b)(2)(B)), and states are required to monitor and periodically review CSI plans for continuous improvement (see ESSA §1111(d)(1)(B)). ESSA also sets expectations across Titles that the state will periodically evaluate or review and improve plans and strategies (see, for example, ESSA §4203(a)(14) and §1111(a)(6)(A)(ii)).
- **Ensure ongoing communications about state supports, guidance, and expectations around school improvement:** States are required to ensure that stakeholders are a part of school improvement planning processes (see ESSA §1111(d)(1) & (2)).

\* \* \*

ESSA provides states with an opportunity to build out new and improve upon existing components of their school improvement systems. As states do so, the goal should be to design a comprehensive, coherent, integrated system of school improvement that not only includes all the specific components listed above, but also manifests the 10 school improvement principles in meaningful ways. We hope the Deep Dives provide states a head start in translating theory to action.

We also acknowledge that we all have so much to learn from each other and from close study of everyone's efforts to implement ESSA and improve outcomes in all identified schools. Thus, the principles themselves and the Deep Dives should be considered "living documents" that will continuously improve over time. In that spirit, we welcome feedback on this Roadmap and each Deep Dive. Please send suggestions and comments to [dani.steuber@ccsso.org](mailto:dani.steuber@ccsso.org).

The authors extend their gratitude to the following individuals for their thoughtful contributions to the accompanying Deep Dives into each of CCSSO's Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems:

- Catherine Barbour (American Institutes of Research)
- Samantha Batel, Laura Jimenez, Lisette Partelow and Scott Sargrad (Center for American Progress)
- Juan D'Brot (Center for Assessment)
- Ashley Jochim (Center on Reinventing Public Education)
- Rosalyn-Rice Harris, Dani Steuber and Monica Taylor (Council of Chief State School Officers)
- Courtney Hitchcock, Nicole Katz, Cooper Redpath and Jonathan Travers (Education Resource Strategies)
- Chris Gabrieli (Empower Schools)
- Tiara Booker-Dwyer (Maryland State Department of Education)
- Karen Ruple (Michigan Department of Education)
- Jo Hannah Ward (Ohio Department of Education)
- Tim Boyd (Oregon Department of Education)
- Guy Johnson and Kedda Williams (Partners for Each and Every Child)
- Ary Amerikaner (The Education Trust)
- Lenay Dunn (WestEd)



One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20001-1431  
voice: 202.336.7000 | fax: 202.408.8072