



**Improving Outcomes for Students:
Bringing Accountability and School Improvement
Together to Drive Change**

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, Bureau of Indian Education, 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.

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INTRODUCTION

Accountability and school improvement systems are key drivers of educational equity. The goal of effective accountability and school improvement systems is to help improve student outcomes. Accountability systems are “a core state responsibility with profound implications for equity” that include “the design of school performance rating systems and oversight of evidence-based interventions in low-performing schools with persistent and significant achievement gaps.”¹ While school improvement efforts are primarily focused at the local level, it is state leaders’ “responsibility to advance equity” by providing “targeted supports and guidance to districts.”² These two systems are interconnected and designed to help close achievement gaps by identifying targeted support to struggling schools and student groups. It is critical for these two systems, and the people that lead these systems, to work in concert as a key part of an overall strategy to ensure educators have the resources they need and ensure every student receives a high-quality education. CCSSO has developed this resource to provide state leaders with guidance on the connections that exist between accountability and school improvement systems and to pose key questions for states to consider as they work to make the connections more explicit.

Accountability and school improvement systems have long been in place, but how states have approached accountability and school improvement has evolved over the years. In recent iterations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), states have received more flexibility for the support they provide to local education agencies (LEAs) and schools in the improvement process. For the most part, accountability and improvement systems have been treated separately when in fact there are connections across these systems that need to be made for states and districts to identify and provide differentiated support to improve student outcomes. With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states have an opportunity to “reinforce the connection between accountability systems and school improvement systems, and the need for ongoing continuous improvement.”³

In 2011, state education chiefs came together to develop the [Next-Generation Accountability Principles](#). These principles provide states with a set of core actions to guide the development and improvement of accountability systems that will lead to the success of all students. These principles include alignment of goals to college-and career-ready standards, commitment to disaggregation, deeper diagnostic reviews, targeting lowest-performing schools, and continuous improvement. Then, in 2017, the states reconvened to build on the Next-Generation Accountability Principles and developed the [Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#). These principles provide states with the core components of an effective school improvement system, which include making school improvement a priority, supporting the development of high-quality school improvement plans, efficiency of resources, progress monitoring, and sustainability.

1 The Aspen Education & Society Program & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2017). *Leading for Equity: Opportunities for State Education Chiefs*. Washington, DC.

2 The Aspen Education & Society Program & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2017). *Leading for Equity: Opportunities for State Education Chiefs*. Washington, DC.

3 D’Brot, J., & Keng, L. (2018). [An Introduction to Accountability Implementation: A Preface to the Operations, Performance Standards, and Evaluation Resources](#). Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

State accountability systems serve multiple purposes:

- Accountability systems **specify performance targets** and **incentivize actions** that lead to improved student outcomes.
- Accountability systems provide all schools with **timely information** on the quality of education they provide to students.
- Accountability systems encourage all schools, even the highest-performing schools, to **continually reflect on and improve** the quality of education they are providing to students and student groups.
- Accountability systems **identify schools that are struggling the most** to provide a high-quality education so that the state and district can provide targeted resources to those schools.

School improvement systems are dependent on the outcomes of accountability systems, in coordination with other relevant data, to inform the supports for low-performing schools.

- States use school improvement systems to provide districts and schools that are in the most need of support with **root cause analyses** of data from multiple sources, including information from the accountability system.
- Districts and schools use that information to **implement evidence-based programs** to improve the education of all students in their community.

These two systems should be linked from the design of the accountability system through the identification of schools to the data-driven decisions tied to the selection of interventions detailed within the school's improvement plan.

THE INTERDEPENDENCIES ACROSS SYSTEMS

Throughout the continuous lifecycle of accountability and school improvement systems, multiple events or activities rely on the alignment of a state's accountability and school improvement and require state teams to work in tandem to guarantee the successful development and implementation of the state's accountability and improvement system. These events and activities, or interdependencies, include five key stages:

- the design and refinement of **the identification system**;
- the development and use of **the needs assessment process**;
- the development of **the school improvement plan**, including the selection of **evidence-based practices**;
- the **progress monitoring** and continuous improvement of school improvement plans; and
- and the development of **exit criteria**.

During the design phase of an accountability system and school improvement system, state leaders engage with stakeholders to establish an overall vision of what they are trying to accomplish for the students in their state and then formulate a theory of action for how to accomplish that vision. The theory of action supports decisions about what goals to set, what measures are important for their overall vision to succeed, how to communicate about school performance based on that information, and the priorities for supports. It is critical that these two systems, and the theories of actions for each system, be designed so they are mutually supportive. The following figure illustrates portions of the continuous lifecycle of accountability and improvement systems, which is described in more detail in CCSSO’s [Accountability Identification Is Only the Beginning: Monitoring and Evaluating Accountability Results and Implementation](#).



Figure 1. The Accountability and Improvement Cycle⁴

It is also important to understand that the information collected through the accountability process should inform the school improvement efforts, but accountability results and identifications alone will not improve outcomes for kids. Supporting the understanding and use of the accountability outcomes, and the additional data points not included in the system, is critical to drive change.

4 D’Brot, J., & Keng, L. (2018). *Accountability identification is only the beginning: Monitoring and evaluating accountability results and implementation*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

CONNECTIONS TO DATA, FUNDING, AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

This resource also demonstrates specific ways that states can support the connections between states' efforts to more closely align accountability and school improvement efforts through data, funding, and continuous improvement. The teams that lead the work across these functions are critical to the success of accountability and school improvement systems.

- The **data** in the accountability system is used to draw the school's attention to an indicator, but the additional data found in needs assessment, school report cards, and other data tools can drive decisions in the school improvement system and provide a more comprehensive picture of a school.
- States should consider their priorities, capacity, and opportunities for **funding** to guarantee all schools are receiving the necessary supports.
- **Continuous improvement** is also a critical piece, as states should continuously analyze the design of their accountability and support systems, including their indicators and evidence-based practices, and make necessary adjustments based on the evaluative data.

There are additional state roles and programs where interdependencies exist across the accountability and school improvement systems, but for the purposes of this paper we will only focus on these three areas: data, funding, and continuous improvement.

WHAT IS MEASURED MATTERS? THE IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM

State accountability systems include methodologies that annually differentiate schools based on student performance on various measures and identify which schools are in need of additional support. The system includes various indicators, weighting methods, and business rules that lead to the differentiation and identification of schools. This system provides the state, districts, and schools with information about the schools and student groups that are identified as needing additional improvement to ensure all students receive equitable opportunities. States have thoughtfully designed accountability systems to send signals of what actions are valued by the state and measure indicators that provide meaningful information on the quality of education provided by a school.

State accountability and school improvement teams can *work together* throughout the design and improvement process of an accountability system to:

- Identify the components of the state's accountability system that are aligned to the state's school improvement system.

Questions to consider:

- How is the state's process for identifying schools aligned to the state's school improvement supports and theory of action? What elements did the state take into consideration when developing its process for identifying schools, such as the number of school identified?

- Do the accountability indicators incent the right kind of actions and behaviors to promote the prioritized outcomes?
- How do the indicators and weighting of those indicators align to the state’s priorities with programs and supports?
- What are the relationships among accountability indicators, long-term goals, measures of interim progress, exit criteria, and progress monitoring measures?⁵
- Identify leading indicators (e.g., K-3 literacy, accelerated enrollment) that the state has measured through other programs that have led to improved school and student outcomes, and consider whether they should be used in the accountability system.

Questions to consider:

- How have these measures led to the successful implementation of responsive supports that improved school and student outcomes?
- Should the state consider including this indicator in its accountability system? What are the potentially unintended consequences of including it in the accountability system?
- Are there important assumptions or conditions that need to be satisfied to observe intended outcomes?
- How is the state engaging stakeholders, including district leaders and schools, in the selection, development, and continuous improvement of the indicators included in the accountability system?

Additional Considerations

State accountability and school improvement teams should also consider the following areas of data, funding, and continuous improvement, and work with the respective teams, throughout development and improvement of a differentiation and identification system.

Data:

- Identify outcomes (e.g., more students graduate college- and career-ready) that the state would like to prioritize, and determine data that are available or can be collected to measure these outcomes (e.g., student attainment of high-quality industry credentials), with the potential of including these in the accountability system.

Questions to consider:

- Why does the state want to measure this outcome (i.e., the measure is tied to the state’s vision)? How can the state measure this outcome?

5 Council of Chief State School Officers & Education Counsel. (2018). [Deep Dive into Principle #8 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#). Washington, DC.

- Are districts or schools collecting data that could support the measurement of this outcome? What is the quality and level of confidence in the data? Is there potential for corruptibility in the data? If necessary, how can this be improved?
- To what extent do these data correspond with similar measures? That is, do multiple data sources tell the same story?
- What programs, guidance, or supports can the state provide district and school leaders if the state was to include this measure in the accountability system?
- Develop resources that effectively communicate the data and information from the accountability system.

Questions to consider:

- What guidance and information can the state provide stakeholders to ensure that the data are actionable and can directly impact the development of improvement strategies?
- Does the accountability system convey data outcomes and next steps, potentially through the report card, for improvement for the state, district, and school in a timely manner and with transparency? How are the data outcomes from the accountability system linked to the needs assessment and school improvement plan?
- What mechanisms will the state use to communicate with communities and stakeholders about the data?

Funding:

- Review the state policies (both formal and informal) on the allowable uses of federal funds to determine how well the policies align to the state’s accountability system and school improvement strategies.⁶

Questions to consider:

- Has the state provided written guidance to districts with examples of ways they can use federal funds to support activities aligned to the state’s accountability system and school improvement strategies?⁷ For example, if chronic absenteeism is an indicator of school quality or student success, has the state identified practices it believes are effective at reducing chronic absenteeism, and has the state positioned districts to spend their federal funds on those practices?⁸

⁶ CCSSO would like to thank Sheara Krvaric and Melissa Junge for their significant contributions to the funding sections of this paper.

⁷ Council of Chief State School Officers & Federal Education Group, PLLC. (2017). [Developing Effective Guidance: A Handbook for State Educational Agencies Delivering Guidance on Federal Education Programs to Drive Success](#). Washington, DC.

⁸ For additional information and self-assessment questions on aligning a state’s school improvement actions with its accountability system and across offices, as well as a description of federal programs that can support state- and local-level school improvement work, please see Council of Chief State School Officers & Federal Education Group, PLLC. (2016). [Decision Guide for Implementing ESSA: State Considerations for Effective Grant Programs](#). Washington, DC.

- Do the state’s federal program offices provide technical assistance to districts on issues that affect school improvement and/or accountability (e.g., the types of practices to support with federal funds, how to operate a schoolwide program with Title I funds to upgrade a school’s educational programs)?
- Who in the state reviews district applications for federal funds?⁹
- Who in the state monitors local implementation of federal programs?¹⁰
- To what extent do the federal programs team collaborate with or involve the accountability and school improvement teams in the activities detailed above?

Continuous Improvement:

- Analyze and evaluate the school identification system, including year-to-year indicators, and determine the need to adjust based on the schools that are and are not identified.¹¹

Questions to consider:

- Is the state identifying the schools that are in the most need of support for both all students and student groups based on the state’s theory of action for supports?
- Are the indicators included in the system leading to the intended outcomes, rather than unintended consequences?
- Did the state include external partners in the evaluation process to provide additional feedback in the refinement of the accountability system?¹²

HOW DO WE USE DATA TO UNDERSTAND EACH SCHOOL’S SPECIFIC NEED? THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The measures and outputs of the accountability system are just the beginning in developing a comprehensive understanding of the areas where a school needs supports and improvement. The needs assessment process supports districts and schools in analyzing data, determining strengths and weaknesses, identifying root causes, and informing the improvement plan process. Needs assessments include qualitative and quantitative data, such as demographics of a school, student outcomes (e.g., assessments, graduation rates), personnel policy, professional practices, community partnerships, stakeholder feedback, and school climate.¹³ The needs assessment process helps districts and schools pinpoint where a school should target resources.

⁹ Council of Chief State School Officers & Federal Education Group, PLLC. (2017). [The Role of the State in the Local Implementation of ESSA Programs](#). Washington, DC.

¹⁰ Council of Chief State School Officers & Federal Education Group, PLLC. (2017). [The Role of the State in the Local Implementation of ESSA Programs](#). Washington, DC.

¹¹ For additional guidance on evaluating accountability systems, please read [Accountability Identification is only the Beginning: Monitoring and Evaluating Accountability Results and Implementation](#).

¹² Council of Chief State School Officers & EducationCounsel. (2018). [Deep Dive into Principle #8 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#). Washington, DC.

¹³ Corbett, J., & Redding, S. (2017). [Using Needs Assessment for School and District Improvement](#). Washington, DC: Council for Chief State School Officers.

State accountability and school improvement teams can *work together* throughout the development, implementation, and improvement of a needs assessment process to:

- Identify qualitative and quantitative data points, outside of the required components, that will provide a school with a deeper understanding of the potential root causes linked to the accountability indicators.

Questions to consider:

- What data (e.g., data from early warning systems or the statewide longitudinal data system) could the state include in a needs assessment that would provide a more comprehensive picture of a school's performance on the state accountability indicators?
- What questions could guide a school team to a deeper analysis of the accountability data? How can the school team disaggregate the data in a way that leads to a deeper analysis?
- Are there additional data points (e.g., resource equity data, teacher/leader equity data, other data points from the report card) that districts and schools should be considering during the needs assessment process that will inform decisions about priorities and capacity for implementation that the state could supply and provide guidance on?¹⁴

Additional Considerations

State accountability and school improvement teams should also consider the following areas of data, funding, and continuous improvement throughout the development, implementation, and improvement process of a needs assessment.

Data:

- Identify data tools outside of the needs assessment, such as a state report card, a school report card, local performance goals, or a data portal, that could provide additional data and insight to a district or school throughout the school year.

Questions to consider:

- How can the state provide guidance on the collection and presentation of data that will lead to schools and districts using data to inform decision making?¹⁵
- What assistance could the state provide districts and schools in gathering and disseminating relevant data?¹⁶

14 Cuiccio, C., & Husby-Slater, M. (2018). [Needs Assessment Guidebook: Supporting the Development of District and School Needs Assessments](#). Washington, DC: American Institutes of Research.

15 Cuiccio, C., & Husby-Slater, M. (2018). [Needs Assessment Guidebook: Supporting the Development of District and School Needs Assessments](#). Washington, DC: American Institutes of Research.

16 Cuiccio, C., & Husby-Slater, M. (2018). [Needs Assessment Guidebook: Supporting the Development of District and School Needs Assessments](#). Washington, DC: American Institutes of Research.

- Develop trainings for districts, schools, and stakeholders on data literacy and how to utilize these tools in alignment with other trainings on the accountability system and school improvement plan to ensure stakeholders are empowered to use data effectively to make decisions.

Questions to consider:

- What information and decisions does the state want district leaders, school leaders, and teachers to make from these tools?
- What information and guidance does the state need to provide district leaders, school leaders, and teachers for them to be able to understand the data and use these tools successfully for data-driven decisions?

Funding:

- Identify the various needs assessments districts must conduct as a condition of receiving federal funds,¹⁷ and consider ways the state can support districts and schools in effectively conducting these assessments.

Questions to consider:

- Does the state provide templates or guidance for any of these required needs assessments? If so, were the accountability and school improvement teams involved in developing them?
- How does the state verify the needs assessments were conducted, how deeply does the state review them, and who is involved in the review process?
- To what extent, if at all, can these various needs assessments inform each other?

Continuous Improvement:

- Collect, analyze, and determine leading measures that have led to sustained improvement in schools in the state or in other states. Utilize data from those indicators in the needs assessment to inform supports, with potential for including in the accountability system if warranted.

Questions to consider:

- Which measures have been reflective of improved practices, behavior changes, and capacity increases? If measures have not been identified, can the state identify data that measure key strategies that could lead to improved practices?
- Which measures have shown sustained improvement in schools across the state?
- How can these measures be utilized by school teams in the needs assessment process?

¹⁷ For example, districts developing comprehensive support and improvement plans for identified schools must ensure the plans are informed by a school-level needs assessment. Title I schools operating a schoolwide program must conduct a comprehensive needs assessment that takes academic achievement into account, and districts that receive at least \$30,000 of Title IV, Part A funds must conduct a comprehensive needs assessment related to well-rounded education, health and safety, and access to technology.

ONCE WE IDENTIFY THE CHALLENGES, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

Once a school or district has gone through the needs assessment process to identify and understand their specific challenges and areas of strength, districts and schools develop a plan for improvement. The responsibility to develop a school improvement plan and select evidence-based practices primarily falls on district and school leaders, but state leaders have a critical role in supporting these efforts through the development, approval, implementation of school improvement plan templates; selection of evidence-based practices; and other guidance and technical assistance to support school improvement (e.g., guidance on serving students with disabilities, technical assistance for teachers/leaders in turnaround schools).¹⁸ Understanding the conditions for implementing school improvement plans and the varying degrees of capacity that exist in schools and districts will allow states to create processes and tools that are accessible to and useful for the practitioners implementing the plan.¹⁹

State accountability and school improvement teams can *work together* throughout the development, implementation, and improvement process of a school improvement plan template, including the selection of an evidence-based practice, to:

- Bring together teams from across the SEA to review school improvement plans for approval. Work with those teams to determine if the accountability system and needs assessment are being used in the way the state intended and whether they lead to high-quality school improvement plans.

Questions to consider:

- Which teams from across the SEA should be involved in the review of school improvement plans? What are the roles and responsibilities of those teams in the review process? What are the types of recommendations to the school improvement plan each team is equipped to provide?
- What guidance or tools is the state creating that leads to schools and districts developing school improvement plans and selecting evidence-based interventions that are connected to the data provided by the accountability system and needs assessment?
- What priority options would the state want district and school leaders to consider as they are drafting the school improvement plan?²⁰
- Provide local and school leaders with the necessary trainings, in alignment with other trainings for the accountability system and needs assessment, on how to use data from the accountability system and needs assessment to make well-informed and accurate data-driven decisions as they are developing their school improvement plans.

¹⁸ For more information on the school improvement plan process, please view CCSSO's [Deep Dive into Principle #5 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#).

¹⁹ Cuiccio, C., & Husby-Slater, M. (2018). [Needs Assessment Guidebook: Supporting the Development of District and School Needs Assessments](#). Washington, DC: American Institutes of Research.

²⁰ Council of Chief State School Officers & EducationCounsel. (2018). [Deep Dive into Principle #5 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#). Washington, DC.

Questions to consider:

- What training or tools would provide districts and schools with the most needed information on how to use the accountability system and needs assessment to inform the development of a school improvement plan?
- How will the state provide guidance and support to districts and schools in identifying the most accurate root causes of their performance issues and diagnosing the most significant problems in schools that need to be addressed in the school improvement plan?²¹

Additional Considerations

State accountability and school improvement teams should also consider the following areas of data, funding, and continuous improvement throughout the development, implementation, and improvement process of a school improvement plan and evidence-based practices.

Data:

- Develop systems where trusted data can be easily accessed in a timely manner from existing sources and aligned with guiding questions that will lead to data being readily understood and used in the development of high-quality school improvement plans.

Questions to consider:

- What data systems are accessible to schools and districts at the state level? Did the state develop coherence or alignment across data systems to allow easy access to data?
- Are there other data sources that could inform the school improvement plan that could be incorporated into this data system?
- Could the state partner with outside entities that could assist in providing more timely data that the state may not have direct access to (i.e., regional education agencies, large districts)?
- What guiding questions could the state incorporate into the system that would assist schools and districts in using the data to inform the school improvement plan?

Funding:

- Provide schools and districts with guidance on how federal funds can be used to support and supplement programs and school improvement strategies.

Questions to consider:

- Has the state provided guidance or other technical assistance to districts identifying activities, strategies, and/or practices the state believes are effective at improving schools? If so, has the state included information about how districts could use federal funds to support those practices?

21 Corbett, J., & Redding, S. (2017). [Using Needs Assessment for School and District Improvement](#). Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

- Has the state provided guidance explaining how districts can use multiple federal funding sources to support school improvement activities? For example, a district might provide professional development to teachers on effective interventions for struggling readers using Title I, Title II, and IDEA funds.
- Identify the various plans districts and schools must complete as a condition of receiving federal funds, and consider ways the state can combine, streamline, or align the plans so they are consistent.

Questions to consider:

- Has the state designed an application to maximize alignment across programs such as Title III (for English learners) and IDEA (for students with disabilities)?
- Will the state allow schools to combine school improvement plans and schoolwide plans? For example, a school identified for support and improvement that receives Title I funds might be eligible to operate a schoolwide program, which allows it to use Title I (and sometimes other federal funds) flexibly to upgrade its educational programs. Such schools must develop both a support and improvement plan and a schoolwide plan.

Continuous Improvement:

- Evaluate completed school improvement plans and investigate what the state could do to improve the process for developing a school improvement plan, including the needs assessment, to guarantee the successful implementation of such plans.

Questions to consider:

- What portions of the process were helpful to school and district leaders?
- Which portions of the process could be improved so that there is less burden on school and district leaders?
- What questions or information could the state provide throughout the school improvement plan development process that provide additional support or guidance to school and district leaders?

HOW DO WE KNOW IF THE PLANS ARE WORKING? PROGRESS MONITORING

Following the development of a school improvement plan and the selection of evidence-based practices, the improvement implementation process begins. For many school improvement plans, the implementation process will occur over multiple years, and a state, along with the district, will need to monitor a school's progress throughout implementation. Progress monitoring is essential to the school improvement process since it is critical to make mid-course corrections rather than wait until a school's timeline has expired to adjust the interventions or supports. Developing a strong system for progress monitoring of school improvement plans will lead to an increase in

schools successfully improving their accountability outputs and student outcomes by enabling states to support districts and schools in providing mid-course direction in response to evidence. As indicated in CCSSO's *Deep Dive into Principle #8 of CCSSO's Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems*, "states have already identified some of their key outcome metrics through the exit criteria and long-term goals identified in their ESSA plans. Those outcomes should serve as key drivers for 'back-mapping' the state-designed progress monitoring system."²²

State accountability and school improvement teams can *work together* throughout the development, implementation, and improvement process of a progress monitoring protocol to:

- Select leading indicators aligned to the accountability system for the progress monitoring system that allow a school to make actionable, in-the-moment, data-driven decisions that later impact the indicators included in the accountability system.

Questions to consider:

- How will the annual accountability results be incorporated into the progress monitoring process?
- What in-the-moment information can the state supply district and school leaders that could guide school improvement efforts?
- How can the state provide districts and schools with guidance on how to make mid-course corrections using the data in the progress monitoring process?

Additional Considerations

State accountability and school improvement teams should also consider the following areas of data, funding, and continuous improvement throughout development, implementation, and improvement of a state's progress monitoring protocol.

Data:

- Identify and collect additional data measures that could provide meaningful information to the state, district, and school on the progress the school is making on its school improvement plan. Work to reduce the data collection burden at the local level by using or aligning existing data systems.

Questions to consider:

- Are there metrics the state considered for the accountability system or exit criteria that the state ultimately decided were not ready or appropriate for those uses but that nevertheless may be important benchmarks of the improvement the state wants to see in identified schools (e.g., measures related to students' social and emotional learning)? If so, are these metrics ready and appropriate for inclusion in school improvement progress monitoring?²³

22 Council of Chief State School Officers & EducationCounsel. (2018). [Deep Dive into Principle #8 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#). Washington, DC.

23 Council of Chief State School Officers & EducationCounsel. (2018). [Deep Dive into Principle #8 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#). Washington, DC.

- What research can the state review or conduct to help identify the most predictive leading indicators?²⁴
- Are there existing state and local data systems, policies, and practices that could support high-quality monitoring? Are there opportunities to link educational data systems with other state or local government data systems to support more robust data collection and analysis?²⁵

Funding:

- Analyze what information the state has access to about how districts spend federal funds, and identify ways the state can use that information to monitor spending patterns and inform guidance to districts.

Questions to consider:

- How much information does the state have about what districts do with their federal funds (consider, for example, information collected through the application, expenditure reports, audits, monitoring, etc.)?
- To what extent can districts make the case that this spending has supported improved outcomes?
- How can the state use this information to improve the spending patterns of districts?
- Identify ways the state can prompt districts to change spending patterns if warranted. For more information, please see CCSSO’s [The Role of the State in the Local Implementation of ESSA Programs](#).

Continuous Improvement:

- Review previous progress monitoring protocols to identify lessons learned or best practices that could inform the current progress monitoring protocol.

Questions to consider:

- Are there any lessons learned or best practices in the field, whether in other states or at the local level, that the state could implement?
- Are there any components of the progress monitoring process that district and school leaders found helpful? How can the state guarantee that it keeps those components?
- Are there any components that did not lead to an analysis of a need for mid-course correction? How can the state improve these components?

²⁴ Council of Chief State School Officers & EducationCounsel. (2018). [Deep Dive into Principle #8 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#). Washington, DC.

²⁵ Council of Chief State School Officers & EducationCounsel. (2018). [Deep Dive into Principle #8 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#). Washington, DC.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN WE HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL? EXIT CRITERIA

The goal of the school improvement process is to provide schools with the necessary tools that lead to improved outcomes and prepare them for sustained progress. For a school to leave identification status, the school must meet the exit criteria set by a state or district. The exit criteria set for schools is aligned to the accountability system and may include additional criteria tied to a school exhibiting consistent growth. Exit criteria has a direct connection between the identification system and the school improvement process. States may consider creating exit criteria that provide schools with a clear goal for progress that not only ties to their performance in the accountability system, but also is a strong indicator of sustainability of that progress.

State accountability and school improvement teams can work together throughout the development and improvement process of exit criteria to:

- Examine a state’s exit criteria to identify alignment of the criteria to both the accountability and improvement systems and potentially incorporate criteria focused on sustainability.

Questions to consider:

- What measures or criteria will show that a school has made progress on the accountability measures? Do the criteria require schools to make progress on their individual measures or in comparison to other schools in the state?
- Are the exit criteria aligned to the state’s long-term goals or measurements of interim progress?
- Which components of the criteria are aligned to successful implementation of a school improvement plan?
- What criteria can identify that a school made progress and will be able to sustain that progress?
- What impact do the criteria have on schools sustaining progress versus coming in and out of identification from year to year?

Additional Considerations

State accountability and school improvement teams should also consider the following areas of data, funding, and continuous improvement throughout development of exit criteria.

Data:

- Provide schools with guidance and information on the progress they need to make, based on data, to be able to exit identification status and sustain that progress.²⁶

26 Council of Chief State School Officers & EducationCounsel. (2018). [Deep Dive into Principle #10 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#). Washington, DC.

Questions to consider:

- How could the state provide districts and schools with targeted guidance on the progress the school would need to make to exit identification status?
- Does the state provide schools and districts with data that illustrate the school's trends over time and forecast future performance based on data?
- Does the state provide updates to schools and districts on their progress toward exiting?

Funding:

- Support districts that have used federal funds in allowable ways that have improved schools throughout the monitoring and audit processes and share lessons across districts.²⁷

Questions to consider:

- Are state monitoring tools and rubrics consistent with state policies and the types of spending the state wants to encourage?
- Who in the state reviews audits of local implementation of federal programs? Is program staff, such as school improvement staff, involved in addition to fiscal staff?
- If there is a finding related to spending, who in the state evaluates whether the finding was accurate and the spending was appropriate? Do they coordinate with the accountability and school improvement teams?

Continuous Improvement:

- Analyze the group of schools that do see sustained improvement compared to schools that do not exit or are quickly re-identified.

Questions to consider:

- What were the differences between these schools based on the accountability outcomes?
- If a school was able to sustain improvement, what actions did that school or district take that could be replicated in other schools or districts?
- Why did a school not exit identification or get quickly re-identified?

²⁷ For more information about audits, see Council of Chief State School Officers & Federal Education Group, PLLC. (2017). [The Role of the State in the Local Implementation of ESSA Programs](#). Washington, DC, Part II, Section J.

CONCLUSION

State accountability and school improvement systems provide districts and schools with information and resources that lead to all students and student groups receiving a higher-quality education and being prepared for life after school. As states build and refine these systems, they should consider the interdependencies that exist between these two systems. The identification of schools, needs assessment process, school improvement plans and evidence-based practices, progress monitoring, and exit criteria are integral components of these two systems, which will be most successful when connections across accountability and school improvement systems are created. Taking into consideration these interdependencies will allow state accountability and schools improvement teams to build systems that are connected and work together to build school and district capacity leading to improved student outcomes.

RESOURCES

General Resources

- CCSSO, 2011. [CCSSO Next-Generation Accountability Principles](#)
- CCSSO, 2017. [CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#)
- CCSSO, 2017. [Leading for Equity: Opportunities for State Education Chiefs](#)

Resources Based on Topic Area

Accountability Indicators

- CCSSO, 2017. [Identifying a School Quality/Student Success Indicator for ESSA: Requirements and Considerations](#)
- CCSSO, 2017. [Innovative Approaches and Measurement Considerations for the Selection of the School Quality and Student Success Indicator under ESSA](#)
- CCSSO, 2017. [Birth to Grade 3 Indicator Framework: Opportunities to Integrate Early Childhood in ESSA Toolkit](#)
- CCSSO, 2016. [Destination Known: Valuing College AND Career Readiness in State Accountability Systems](#)

Accountability System Development and Implementation

- CCSSO, 2016. [Key Issues in Aggregating Indicators for Accountability Determinations under ESSA](#)
- CCSSO, 2017. [State Systems of Identification and Support under ESSA: A Focus on Designing and Revising Systems of School Identification](#)
- CCSSO, 2017. [State Systems of Identification and Support under ESSA: Evaluating Identification Methods and Results in an Accountability System](#)
- CCSSO, 2018. [An Introduction to Accountability Implementation: A Preface to the Operations, Performance Standards, and Evaluation Resources](#)
- CCSSO, 2018. [Establishing Performance Standards for School Accountability Systems](#)
- CCSSO, 2018. [Where the Rubber Meets the Road: Operations and Quality Control in School Accountability Systems](#)
- CCSSO, 2018. [Accountability Identification is only the Beginning: Monitoring and Evaluating Accountability Results and Implementation](#)
- CCSSO, 2018. [ESSA Accountability Modeling Tool – No Summative Ratings Version](#)
- CCSSO, 2018. [ESSA Accountability Modeling Tool – Summative Ratings Version](#)

Needs Assessments

- o CCSSO, 2017. [Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement: A Tactical Guide](#)
- o CCSSO, 2017. [Worksheets from Using Needs Assessments for School and District Improvement](#)
- o CCSSO, 2017. [Understanding Federally Required Education Policy Needs Assessments and Maximizing Their Impact](#)
- o American Institutes of Research, 2011. [State Support Network Needs Assessment Guidebook](#)

School Improvement Plans and Evidence-based Practices

- o CCSSO, 2018. [Deep Dive into Principle #4 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#)
- o CCSSO, 2018. [Deep Dive into Principle #5 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#)
- o CCSSO, 2017. [Tool A: School Improvement Planning Template](#)
- o CCSSO and Results for America, 2017. [Leverage Points: Thirteen Opportunities for State Education Agencies to Use Their ESSA Plans to Build and Use Evidence to Improve Student Outcomes.](#)

Progress Monitoring

- o CCSSO, 2018. [Deep Dive into Principle #8 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#)
- o CCSSO, 2018. [Deep Dive into Principle #9 of the CCSSO Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems](#)

Exit Criteria

- o CCSSO, 2017. [State Systems of Identification and Support under ESSA: A Focus on Designing and Revising Systems of School Identification](#)
- o CCSSO, 2017. [State Systems of Identification and Support under ESSA: Evaluating Identification Methods and Results in an Accountability System](#)

Data

- o Data Quality Campaign. [District Actions to Make Data Work for Students](#)
- o Data Quality Campaign, 2018. [Improving Education Outcomes by Building Data-Driven Relationships](#)
- o Data Quality Campaign, 2017. [Roadmap for Effective Data Use and Research Partnerships between State Education Agencies and Education Researchers](#)

Federal Funding

- o CCSSO, 2017. [Maximizing ESSA Formula Funds for Students: State Readiness Self-Assessment](#)
- o CCSSO, 2016. [Decision Guide for Implementing ESSA: State Considerations for Effective Grant Programs](#)
- o CCSSO, 2017. [A Guide to State Educational Agency Oversight Responsibilities under ESSA: The Role of the State in the Local Implementation of ESSA Programs](#)
- o CCSSO, 2017. [Developing Effective Guidance: A Handbook for State Educational Agencies Delivering Guidance on Federal Education Programs to Drive Success](#)

Research and Evaluation

- o CCSSO, 2017. [Advancing School Improvement in SEAs through Research Practice Partnerships](#)
- o CCSSO, 2017. [State Systems of Identification and Support under ESSA: Evaluating Identification Methods and Results in an Accountability System](#)

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