

Evaluating State Accountability Systems Under ESEA

Module 7: State Support System for Identified Schools

All states have developed or revised their state’s accountability systems in response to requirements in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). A state’s accountability system includes multiple indicators, each of which illuminates a different facet of school performance. These results are used to identify schools that need support; help direct support to improve outcomes for all students; and communicate performance to parents, advocates, and the community. And ultimately, these actions are intended to improve student outcomes.¹

For the ultimate purpose of accountability policy to be fulfilled, it is best for school identification processes to be connected with supports that enable the lowest-performing schools to improve. ESEA as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) included requirements around state supports for identified schools. ESEA as amended by ESSA, however, does not include any statutory requirements around state systems of support for identified schools. Regardless, it is still important for SEAs to consider what supports identified schools will need to succeed. In this module, the *state support system* refers to any systems or structures within the SEA for supporting identified schools.

Under ESEA, schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI), targeted support and improvement (TSI), or additional targeted support and improvement (ATSI) receive technical assistance and resources to promote and accelerate improvement. Each state may allocate funds to districts with CSI and TSI schools, provide technical assistance to districts serving a high concentration of CSI and TSI schools, and require “more rigorous state-determined actions” in schools that do not exit CSI status in a timely manner (ESEA §1111(d)(3)). Each state also periodically reviews resource allocation to support school improvement in local educational agencies (LEAs) in the state serving a significant

¹ For more information on accountability system design and implementation, please see [An Introduction to Accountability Implementation: A Preface to the Operations, Performance Standards, and Evaluation Resources](#) from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Please note: The inclusion of links to resources and examples do not reflect their importance, nor is it intended to represent or be an endorsement by the Department of any views expressed, or materials provided. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in this document.

This module is part of the [Evaluating State Accountability Systems Under the ESEA tool](#), which is designed to help state educational agency (SEA) staff reflect on how the state’s accountability system achieves its intended purposes and build confidence in the state’s accountability system design decisions and implementation activities.

Thank you to Juan D’Brot from the National Center for Assessment, Kerstin LeFloch from American Institutes for Research, and David English formerly with American Institutes for Research for their support and contributions to this resource.

number or percentage of schools identified for CSI or TSI. States have built on longstanding systems² to provide meaningful assistance to struggling districts and schools through a comprehensive system of technical assistance and support.

This module can help stimulate reflections and internal SEA discussions regarding how the system design is likely to build local capacity, improve instruction and student support, and improve student outcomes. SEA staff can use this module to do the following:

- Critically assess the clarity of roles and responsibilities.
- Assess the extent to which supports are sufficiently coherent, intense, stable, and aligned to school needs.
- Determine whether a formal evaluation is appropriate.

This module includes two sets of self-reflection prompts that are intended to support your description and reflection on the state support system. These sets of prompts are not intended to be discrete; instead, they are intended to work together to help you answer questions in the next sections of this module.

Table 1. Overview of Module 7: State Support System for Identified Schools

Section	What is it?	Why is it important?	How it should be used?
Articulate the Rationale for the State Support System for Identified Schools	A description of the components of the state support system, the principles anchoring the approach, and the processes through which schools and districts are expected to enact change	This message can be used as an anchor for multiple audiences to describe the “what” and “why” behind the state support system.	The rationale for the state support system asks you to describe the expected policy objective, behavioral intent, and expected results associated with the state supports. This rationale can be used as an anchor when reflecting on whether the system is implemented and perceived as intended. This will also help you, in the next section, assess the strength of the rationale.
Confidence in Design and Operations of State Support System for Identified Schools	Based on your description of the theory of action, an examination of your level of confidence that theoretical linkages are sound and evidence supports your assumptions	Determining your overall confidence in the soundness of the theory of action can help you determine where to collect evidence, make system revisions, or develop outreach materials.	The confidence in operations and results section will help you identify potential evidence that can help confirm your rationale regarding how the system components and actors interact with and support school stakeholders. The rationale can also be used as a point of comparison for design decisions, and the strength of rationale can be used to focus attention on key confidence claims.

² Including statewide systems of support developed under ESEA as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Evaluating State Accountability Systems Under ESEA
Module 7: State Support System for Identified Schools
Section 1: Articulate the Rationale for the State Support System for Identified Schools

In the first two modules of this tool (**Module 1: Theory of Action** and **Module 2: State’s System of Annual Meaningful Differentiation (AMD)**), you mapped the overall theory of action for your state’s accountability system and considered the design, signals, and results of the AMD system and how it supports the overall theory of action. In addition to the overall theory of action for the state’s accountability system, the set of supports for the lowest-performing schools and districts has its own *component rationale* (or “mini theory of action”). The first section of this module focuses on the component rationale for the state support system, which should integrate seamlessly with the overall theory of action for the state’s accountability system.

Consider the following questions regarding the rationale behind the state support system.

Table 2. Articulate the Rationale for the State Support System for Identified Schools

Articulate the Rationale for the State Support System for Identified Schools	
<i>Reflection Questions</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Policy intent: What are the specific policy objectives that you are trying to accomplish through the state support system? Is this reflected in and consistent with your overall system theory of action?	
Policy mechanisms or levers: What are the specific components of the state support system (e.g., individuals, organizations, roles, tools, processes, communication, methods)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which components are most central to the system as a whole? • Which are grounded in rigorous research? Which are in a demonstration phase? • How are the components intended to interact? 	
Intended use: What behaviors are you trying to encourage through the components described above (e.g., behaviors for policymakers, state staff, district leaders, principals, educators, and the public)?	
Expected results: Through the collective implementation of the system components, what outputs or outcomes do you expect to observe (including short-term district-, school-, and classroom-level practices, as well as longer-term student outcomes)?	

Evaluating State Accountability Systems Under ESEA
Module 7: State Support System for Identified Schools
Section 2: Assess Confidence in the State Support System for Identified Schools

The following self-reflection prompts provide states with the opportunity to consider whether the design of the state support system is sufficiently sound and whether there is sufficient basis to conclude that the policy intent is likely to be achieved. The following claims, considerations, and examples of evidence are presented to help determine whether states can be confident that the system as a whole is likely to work as intended.

We recognize that ESEA devolves much of the responsibility to supporting low-performing schools to LEAs.³ Still, many states have embraced this responsibility at the state level and provide a comprehensive framework for support, the elements of which vary greatly across states.

Respond to the following prompts to engage in the reflection around the state support system:

1. Read the claim, consideration, and potential sources of evidence.
2. Examine the specific evidence available in your state. Reflect on whether you believe you have collected enough evidence to be confident in the claim stated or whether there is a need for further examination.
3. Finally, respond to questions at the end of each claim that ask whether you have (a) sufficiently explored the confidence claims and (b) believe that you have collected enough evidence that these claims can be confirmed. Some questions may be based on opinion, whereas others will require an examination of data, supplemental analyses, or conversations with other members of your state department.

Table 3. Assess Confidence in the State Support System for Identified Schools

Claim 1: The input and activity components within the state support system are practicable.	
<i>For each consideration, review the key questions presented and use the key evidence checks to help answer those questions.</i>	
<u>Consideration 1.1: Each of the components of the state support system is well-defined, including the actors, organizations, tools, and the relationships among them.</u>	
Assess Confidence in Operations and Results	
Reflection Prompts	Notes
Key questions: Who are the key actors within the support system? With whom are they intended to interact, and are their responsibilities clearly defined? What tools do they have access to, and have those tools been piloted?	

³ The SEA and LEAs both have support requirements related to CSI schools; however, most requirements related to TSI schools are for the LEA.

Reflection Prompts	Notes
<p>Why is it important? Systems of support often include a complex set of components. If roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined (and understood by everyone involved), it is less likely that individuals will behave as expected. Likewise, if processes and tools are burdensome and the purpose unclear, local administrators are unlikely to engage with them.</p>	
<p>Key evidence checks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify actors associated with different responsibilities in the state support system. Determine whether any components are missing specific actors and where clarifications may be needed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review written role profiles for key support providers, including intermediary agencies, if appropriate. Determine whether language used in resources, processes, policies, and outcomes align with state and local language. If needs-assessment, planning, or reporting tools are required, ensure clarity of purpose and ease of use. 	
<p>Potential next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly document the roles of different individuals and organizations in supporting CSI and TSI schools. If necessary, revise written documents, procedures, and tools to ensure clarity of purpose. Use accessible language and test tools when possible. 	
<p>Consideration 1.2: Administrators and educators have sufficient access to information and other resources to enable them to engage with the state support system.</p>	
<p>Assess Confidence in Operations and Results</p>	
Reflection Prompts	Notes
<p>Key questions: Are data systems user-friendly and inclusive of the information local actors need? If local administrators and educators must select an external provider or intervention, do they have the resources necessary to make an informed decision? In districts with high numbers of CSI and TSI schools, are district administrators designated to support the needs of these schools? Are key individuals overextended?</p>	

Reflection Prompts	Notes
Why is it important? To fulfil the promise of a state support system, individuals at the state, regional, and local levels need access to information, materials, time, and expertise.	
Key evidence checks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine how many CSI schools are supported by any given district official and whether their dedicated level of effort is commensurate with the task. If local administrators are expected to use a planning or reporting tool, ensure that they have access to the data necessary to do so in a comprehensive manner. Check usage statistics on online tools and data to ensure that regional and local administrators are using web resources. 	
Potential next steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with regional and local officials to determine optimal allocation of human resources so highest-need schools receive the attention and support they need. Identify duplicative services and problematic gaps. If resources are underutilized, consider conducting focus groups with end users to determine the reasons for which they are not meeting local needs. 	
Consideration 1.3: [If applicable]: The state has access to a sufficiently skilled pool of external partners with an evidence base of success with schools similar to the CSI and TSI schools in our state.	
Assess Confidence in Operations and Results	
Reflection Prompts	Notes
Key questions: How are external support providers selected? Are there expectations for the training of individuals who work within regional organizations or external support providers? Are there regions that have less access to qualified support providers? Are there substantive gaps in terms of expertise provided to low-performing schools and districts?	

Reflection Prompts	Notes
<p>Why is it important? To build capacity within low-performing schools, state support systems often rely on individuals external to the school. If these individuals do not have sufficient expertise or a track record of success, the likelihood of addressing schools' challenges is diminished. In addition, this capacity might be uneven within a given state.</p>	
<p>Key evidence checks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the number of providers operating in your state and their qualifications. • Determine whether regions or types of districts are underserved by qualified providers. • Evaluate the information provided to districts and schools by external providers and whether the information is sufficient to draw appropriate conclusions about their capacity to meet school needs. 	
<p>Potential next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there are underserved regions or districts in your state, identify strategies for recruiting individuals with appropriate expertise, including use of regional or intermediary organizations. Also consider whether external grants could better support underserved districts or regions. • Determine the extent to which federally funded centers (e.g., the Comprehensive Center network or Regional Educational Laboratories) can support efforts to better allocate expertise within the state. 	
Claim 1 Reflection Questions	Claim 1 Response
My state has sufficiently explored the input and activity components above to understand whether our state support system is practicable.	Yes/No
My state has collected enough evidence to assert that our state support system is practicable.	Yes/No

Claim 2: The design of the state support system is coherent, and supports are timely, appropriately intense, and aligned with local needs.

For each consideration, consider the following statements and explore the suggested evidence that supports the design of your state support system.

Consideration 2.1: The components of the state support system are coherent.

Assess Confidence in Operations and Results

Reflection Prompts	Notes
<p>Key questions: Are there parallel structures that provide similar support to low-performing schools in your state? If multiple groups provide support to the same district or school, are they aware of their respective roles and schedules? Are there individuals, organizations, or state-supported interventions that are reflective of the priorities expressed through indicator weighting?</p>	
<p>Why is it important? Too often, policies aimed at supporting the lowest-performing schools are overlapping and potentially confusing to stakeholders, ultimately hindering a sustainable change process. In addition, state supports may not be sufficiently aligned with the intent expressed in the state theory of action.</p>	
<p>Key evidence checks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically review policy documents and assess potential overlap of state-level organizational expectations for struggling districts and schools. • Document the number of entities that provide support to LEAs and schools and assess alignment of activities. • Solicit and review input from LEAs regarding their perceptions of the coherence of state supports. 	
<p>Potential next steps:</p> <p>If evidence checks and questions reveal duplicative organizations intervening at the local level, identify strategies to support streamlined supports. For example, some states engage a “portfolio manager” to assess and manage coherence of supports at the local level.</p>	

Consideration 2.2: The supports provided to districts and schools are of sufficient intensity and timeliness to stimulate improvement.

Assess Confidence in Operations and Results

Reflection Prompts	Notes
<p>Key questions: In what month are school improvement funds through ESEA Section 1003 disbursed to LEAs? Does this align with the timing of expenditures necessary to support improvement? Does the state provide prompt feedback to district inquiries and reports? Do external providers allocate sufficient time to meet the needs of low-capacity and low-performing schools?</p>	
<p>Why is it important? The <i>time</i> element is an important consideration in a state support system, both in regard to the allocation of resources and the intensity of supports. Although a “light touch” support might be sufficient for schools with fewer needs, the lowest-performing schools are unlikely to improve with sporadic or infrequent supports.</p>	
<p>Key evidence checks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine dates of disbursement of critical funding streams to districts and schools; assess potential challenges to purchase of materials or payment for professional services. • Assess the intensity of supports provided to districts and schools, as measured by time on site, remote support, and responsiveness to questions; evaluate in relation to the intensity of supports provided to schools that have exited (or are expected to exit) CSI (i.e., comprehensive support and improvement) status. 	

Reflection Prompts	Notes
<p>Potential next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit internal SEA processes to improve the timeliness of resource allocation to the local level. • Establish tools for monitoring the intensity of supports to districts and schools and by which organizations. • Encourage districts to engage with external support providers and to advocate for supports of the appropriate intensity to meet school needs, especially those with a lengthy history of low performance. Underscore that a one-time workshop or sporadic check-ins are unlikely to stimulate the lasting changes that are needed in these schools. Hold external providers to contractual expectations regarding intensity of support. 	
Consideration 2.3: The components of the state support system are aligned to local needs.	
Assess Confidence in Operations and Results	
Reflection Prompts	Notes
<p>Key questions: Do individuals operating within the state support system (whether they are associated with the state, district, regional organization, or private provider) have expertise and experiences that are aligned with the unique circumstances of the schools they are supporting?</p>	
<p>Why is it important? Although the lowest-performing schools often need external expertise, school stakeholders may be suspicious or reticent to engage productively with individuals external to the school. This will be augmented in cases in which there is an obvious misalignment in terms of expertise or experiences. For example, a school or district with a high concentration of English learners will be skeptical of support from a provider with no familiarity with the unique needs of English learners. Effective provision of support requires a mix of appropriate experience, expertise, dispositions, and skill working with adult learners.</p>	

Reflection Prompts	Notes
Key evidence checks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the public materials describing the capabilities and evidence base associated with private external support providers. Review the résumés of individuals (or a subset, if necessary) who are providing support to low-performing districts and schools. Assess organizational expertise in conjunction with the needs assessments of low-performing schools. 	
Potential next steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish regular, low-burden data collection activities to monitor local experiences and perceptions with the range of organizations and individuals who provide support to districts and schools. As necessary, engage the district as an advocate for schools in securing support providers with appropriate expertise. 	
Claim 2 Reflection Questions	Claim 3 Response
My state has sufficiently explored the confidence claims above to understand whether the supports within our state are coherent, timely, intense, and aligned to local needs.	Yes/No
My state has sufficiently explored the confidence claims above to assert that the supports within our state are coherent, timely, intense, and aligned to local needs.	Yes/No

Congratulations! You have now completed the *Evaluating State Accountability Systems Under ESEA* tool and can use the results of your reflections to inform your future work. For further information or support, please contact the State Support Network at statesupportnetwork@air.org.