

# Developing and Implementing Statewide Systems of Support for Low-Performing Schools

## Design Elements of Statewide Systems of Support

### Introduction

State education agencies (SEAs) are in the midst of developing and implementing systems of support to assist districts and schools that have been identified for improvement under state accountability systems. It is important that SEAs build upon state and local context and assets while ensuring that those same contextual elements do not negatively influence the effectiveness of support strategies or overly constrain the range of potential support strategies. Developing contextually relevant and effective strategies and approaches entails that SEAs make explicit their theory of action for improving districts and schools and strive to align and integrate state-level supports<sup>1</sup>. An explicit theory of action and aligned statewide system of support involves leveraging the resources of different state offices (e.g., Title I, Title III, Special Education, School Improvement) as well as Institutions of Higher Education and other statewide resources.

The questions and Design Elements provided below and in the following pages provide a framework for SEAs to describe and refine their statewide system of support, and in doing so to:

- ✓ Make explicit their espoused and actual *theory of action* for improving districts and schools;
- ✓ Assess the extent to which their system of support is *aligned and coherent* (e.g., by identifying points of integration and interference); and
- ✓ Provide benchmarks and long-term objectives for *evaluating the effectiveness* of their statewide system of support.

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### How can state education agencies improve underperforming districts and schools?

- How is the state organized to provide support?
- How does the state provide support to districts/schools and what are the criteria for selecting and using different support strategies at different levels (e.g., districts, schools) and at varying levels of intensity?
- What is the process used by schools (and districts) involved in planning for school improvement? Is it based on a framework?
- What best practices and tools are used by the SEA or LEA to support school improvement?

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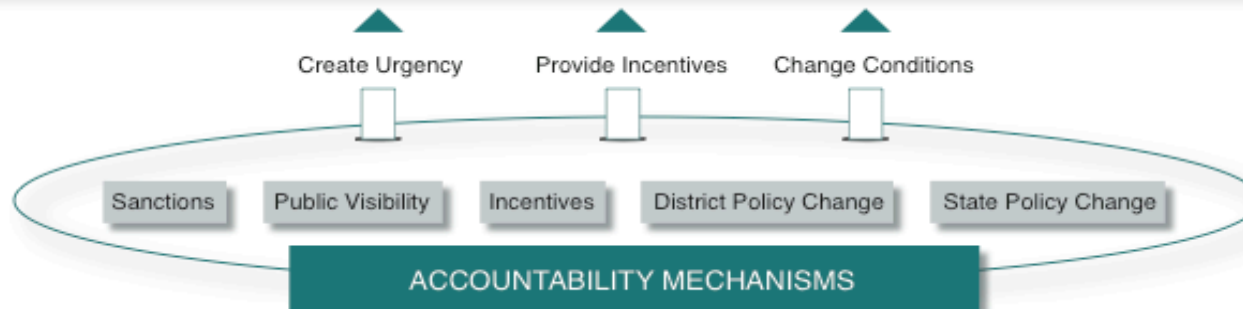
<sup>1</sup> The body of research upon which this statement is based includes: Childress et al. 2006; Dwyer, 2005; Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2005; Lusi, 1997; Reville, 2005.

The Comprehensive School Reform Support and Capacity Building Program of the Education Alliance is funded under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Grant # S332BO50027A). The contents of this document do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.



## DESIGN ELEMENTS OF STATEWIDE SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Structure and Organization	Supports to Districts & Schools	Implementation of Support Activities
What configuration of state education offices and ways of working together will allow the state to be most effective in providing support to identified districts and schools?	<p><b>Provision:</b> What are the mechanisms to provide support?</p> <p><b>Level:</b> Where is support most needed?</p> <p><b>Intensity:</b> How much support is needed?</p> <p><b>Content:</b> What type of support is needed?</p>	What types of tools, frameworks, or processes best support planning and implementation of school improvement efforts in underperforming districts and schools?



*Educational accountability mechanisms and statewide systems of support work in tandem to build capacity and promote district- and school-level improvement.*

## Design Elements of Statewide Systems of Support

**Structure and organization of State Department of Education:** How can a state education agency create the conditions (e.g., the configuration of state education offices and ways of working together) that enable and lead to the leveraging of state resources and the provision of effective and useful support to identified districts and schools?

Factors to consider:

- Developing an Office of School Improvement responsible for managing and coordinating the state's district and school improvement efforts or making other organizational changes needed to enhance school improvement efforts—How useful and feasible is this approach?
- Analyzing the management of different offices responsible for federal programs (Title I, Title III, Special Education, Reading First) that support school improvement efforts. How do these and other offices coordinate work and supports to districts and schools?
- Developing strategies to facilitate and support dialogue across state education offices involved in school improvement efforts.

**Provision (or Deployment) of support:** How can a state most effectively provide service to targeted districts and schools, given existing technical assistance structures and resource constraints? Does it make sense to use existing support mechanisms or to alter or create new structures?

Factors to consider:

- The role of state officials in providing support.
- The use (or creation) of regional school improvement offices.
- Identifying a strategic mix of service providers—distinguished educators, external technical assistance organizations, state officials, or some combination.
- The type and level of training that is needed for individuals to work effectively with underperforming districts and schools.
- Strategies to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of chosen deployment strategies.

**Level of support:** Given a state's capacity and the number (and relative need) of districts and schools identified for improvement, how and where should the state target support and services so as to maximize the use of resources and to leverage improvement?

Factors to consider:

- District-level support and school-level support—The advantages and disadvantages of working at each (or both) level(s).
- Developing entry points and strategies that are feasible now and in the near future—How to craft approaches that are flexible and adaptable to changing numbers of identified districts and schools.
- Progressively moving toward a *district capacity building* model, due to an increasingly limited capacity to work with individual schools. However, there is limited research or examples of effective ways that SEAs can effectively build the capacity of LEAs to work with schools.

**Intensity of support:** What is the intensity (e.g., resources, frequency and quantity of services) and scale of support efforts needed to effectively promote improvement in districts and schools?

Factors to consider:

- Developing a continuum of support strategies using a tiered categorization of districts and schools and differentiated support based on need, identification status and state capacity.



- Identifying preventative and sustaining strategies—How will the state support districts and schools that have never been on, or have made it off the improvement list?
- Consideration of situations where existing supports are insufficient to leverage improvement and therefore require supports of a different kind, such as sanctions (e.g., state takeover, use of EMOs, replacement of staff) or at a larger scale, as seen in systems-based approaches (e.g., empowerment zones, Mayoral control, large-scale district reform).

**Content of support:** What types of support, technical assistance, professional development, and information do underperforming schools need and how can the state best provide this support?

Factors to consider:

- Effectively coordinating and targeting federal and state programs (e.g., Reading First, Mathematics Initiative) with other SEA supports—developing a strategic map of targeted and statewide supports and professional development that address the needs of underperforming districts and schools.
- Linking state support with the central issues impacting district and school performance (e.g., a lack of teacher knowledge and application of state content standards, use of curricula and classroom units not aligned with state standards, managing classroom behavior, instructional strategies for ELLs, monitoring of school improvement plans, principal leadership).

**Implementation of support activities:** What types of tools, frameworks, or processes best support planning and implementation of school improvement efforts in underperforming districts and schools?

Factors to consider:

- Using/providing/requiring a framework for school improvement (e.g., principles or characteristics of effective schools) to guide discussion and planning.
- Having schools complete multiple school improvement plans or a single (or consolidated) plan and the impact that this process can have on improvement efforts.
- Aligning planning templates with a framework for school improvement?
- What are the best practices and tools that the SEA or LEA uses to support school improvement?

**Sanctions and Incentives:** How can states best create an effective and productive sense of urgency to motivate districts and schools to take action? Specifically, what strategic mix (or configuration) of sanctions and incentives is most effective?

Factors to consider:

- Communication of accountability status.
- Labeling of accountability status.
- Extent to which the state holds schools and districts accountable – what to emphasize.
- Use of incentives to support improvement efforts.

#### **Additional Contextual Factors**

- State laws, policies and regulations that impact implementation of NCLB.
- Power and authority (e.g., role of the Governor, the state board of education, teacher and administrative unions, local school board authority, city mayors).



## Overview

### Design Elements of Statewide Systems of Support

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#### **How can state education agencies improve underperforming districts and schools?**

- How is the state organized to provide support?
  - How does the state provide support to districts/schools and what are the criteria for selecting and using different support strategies at different levels (e.g., districts, schools) and at varying levels of intensity?
  - What is the process used by schools (and districts) involved in planning for school improvement? Is it based on a framework?
  - What best practices and tools are used by the SEA or LEA to support school improvement?
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**Overarching Goal:** To close the achievement gap and build the capacity of schools to engage in inclusive, continuous and sustainable improvement.

#### **Design Elements of Statewide Systems of Support**

**Structure and organization of State Department of Education:** How can a state education agency create the conditions (e.g., the configuration of state education offices and ways of working together) that enable and lead to leveraging of state resources and the provision of effective and useful support to identified districts and schools?

**Provision (or Deployment) of support:** How can a state most effectively provide service to targeted districts and schools, given existing technical assistance structures and resource constraints? Does it make sense to use existing support mechanisms or to alter or create new structures?

**Level of support:** Given a state's capacity and the number (and relative need) of districts and schools identified for improvement, how and where should the state target support and services so as to maximize the use of resources in order to leverage improvement?

**Intensity of support:** What is the intensity (e.g., resources, frequency and quantity of services) and scale of support efforts needed to effectively promote improvement in districts and schools?

**Content of support:** What types of support, technical assistance, professional development, and information do underperforming schools need and how can the state best provide this support?

**Implementation of support activities:** What types of tools, frameworks, or processes best support planning and implementation of school improvement efforts in underperforming districts and schools?

**Sanctions and incentives:** How can states best create an effective and productive sense of urgency to motivate districts and schools to take action? Specifically, what strategic mix (or configuration) of sanctions and incentives is most effective?

#### **Additional contextual factors influencing the design of state systems of support**

- State laws, policies and regulations that impact implementation of NCLB.
- Power and authority (e.g., role of the Governor, the state board of education, teacher and administrative unions, local school board authority, city mayors).



## References

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### **The Education Alliance at Brown University**

The Education Alliance's Leadership Capacity Building Program provides support and technical assistance to states and districts towards the development of aligned and cohesive systems of support for districts and schools. Through the Education Alliance's Leadership Capacity Building Program, The Education Alliance offers a number of opportunities and resources for states, districts, and schools working toward inclusive and sustainable school improvement. For additional information, please visit The Education Alliance's District and School Improvement Web site ([www.alliance.brown.edu/improvement](http://www.alliance.brown.edu/improvement)) or the Leadership Capacity Building Web site ([www.alliance.brown.edu/projects/csrqi](http://www.alliance.brown.edu/projects/csrqi)).

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### **Contact Information**

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