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'Check State Plans' Provides Analysis of States' Vision for Education, Identifies Best Practices

New site identifies how states can go beyond compliance to define path to success for all students

WASHINGTON (June 27, 2017) – The Collaborative for Student Success, in partnership with Bellwether Education Partners, today released an analysis by leading education experts, identifying best practices in the 17 state accountability plans that were submitted in April and May 2017 to the U.S. Department of Education. The findings of the review can be found on the Collaborative for Student Success' new site, **CheckStatePlans.org**, which provides in-depth information on how these plans advance educational opportunities in bold and innovative ways for *all* students, and where some fall short.

Following an independent peer review of state accountability plans, **CheckStatePlans.org** highlights best practices in eight of nine categories, as well as an analysis of each state's plan, detailing the strengths and weaknesses of what each state submitted for formal approval under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The site serves as a resource, not only for states and stakeholders as they continue to improve upon their already-submitted plans, but also for states submitting plans during the September window.

"We're very encouraged by the response this first-ever independent review has generated from education policymakers in the states – both in terms of their willingness to cooperate with the initial analysis, and with respect to the overwhelming interest in the final product," said Jim Cowen, executive director of the Collaborative for Student Success. "In identifying the strengths and weaknesses of accountability plans that were submitted earlier this year to the U.S. Department of Education, we've been able to create what is effectively a best practices clearinghouse designed to help states move beyond mere compliance with the federal law. This analysis is an invaluable resource to every state, regardless of whether it is one of the 17 that has already submitted a plan, or one of the 34 that will submit a plan in the coming months, because it provides actionable information."

More than 30 peer reviewers, who represented bipartisan viewpoints and are former state policymakers, members of the civil rights and disability communities, and education experts, lent their expertise to this process. Following a rubric aligned to the federal peer review process, the reviewers candidly assessed each state plan in the context of their years of expertise in the field. Find out more about our peer reviewers here.

"States have the opportunity to take bold and innovative action and change the course of education for their students," said Tony Bennett, former Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction. "As reviewers, we were looking for more than states simply checking the box on their accountability plan. We were looking for states to articulate a serious plan of action."

Overall, **CheckStatePlans.org** highlights some promising practices:
- **All 17 states included a measure of year-to-year student growth.** Rather than using static determinations about where they are at a given point in time, states are giving schools credit for how much progress their students make over time.

- **States are broadening their accountability systems**. Most states are moving beyond just reading and math, adding science and a more accurate measure of student attendance, not to mention indicators measuring physical education, art, and school climate.
- **More states included some indicator of college- and career-readiness**. At the high school level, more states are attempting to ascertain whether students are taking positive steps to succeed beyond K-12 by looking to see if students are "on track" and at multiple college- and career-ready measures, including college enrollment.

"With only 21 percent of 4th grade Latino students reading at grade level nationally, nothing is more important than ensuring that states have ambitious goals and real plans to address the great need in our community to raise academic performance," said Gini Pupo-Walker, senior director of education policy and strategic growth at Conexión Américas. "States are now redefining success for their students and schools, and parents and other key stakeholders have a say and role in working with states to improve outcomes and opportunities for our young people. This analysis will equip the field to take action."

CheckStatePlans.org outlines a clear need for greater detail within state plans. As states continue to improve on their plans, they must incorporate information about how their systems would work in practice, giving stakeholders important insight into how their vision will play out in their state. Reviewers encouraged states to specifically focus on the following areas:

- **Addressing low-performing subgroups of students:** While five of the 17 first-round states incorporated subgroup performance directly into each school's rating system, only a few states provided data showing what their definitions would mean in practice.
- **Standards within norm-referenced accountability systems:** In norm-referenced accountability systems, states are only holding schools accountable for their place in *relative* ranking to other schools instead of a consistent high bar of success. States should take care to ensure that those systems do not ignore information on whether or not students are on track to succeed in college and careers.
- **School improvement strategies:** With the exceptions of New Mexico and Tennessee, states have not yet adequately addressed how they plan to use federal funds to help increase student achievement, increase options for students, or intervene in chronically low-performing schools.

Find out more about how each state plan measured up by visiting CheckStatePlans.org.

About the Collaborative for Student Success:
The Collaborative for Student Success is a non-profit organization working to improve public education through a commitment to high standards for all students. The Collaborative believes that state, district and local efforts to implement rigorous, comparable education standards and meaningful assessments are an important and necessary step to ensure all students are prepared to succeed in life after high school—whether that be college or a career.

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Spotlight on Best Practices

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Recognizing that states must move beyond mere compliance with the federal process, the following are highlights from each category where one or more states stood out, providing best practices that other states can – and should – look to as examples:

- **Goals:** Louisiana's goals are ambitious, attainable and backed by clear data. The state is proposing to sustain its recent gains and annually increase its proficiency rates. Louisiana has set the same final target for all groups of students but it expects faster progress for groups that are starting further behind.
- **Standards & Assessments:** New Jersey, New Mexico and Vermont all received top marks for strong commitments to college and career ready standards and high-quality aligned assessments in Math and English Language Arts.
- **Indicators:** New Mexico proposed a high-quality list of meaningful indicators, including the growth of the lowest-performing students, extended-year graduation rates, chronic absenteeism, and a new college-readiness indicator.
- **Academic Progress:** Arizona and Tennessee affirmed their commitment to both growth and proficiency. Arizona's plan places a strong weight on student achievement and growth by combining a clear measure of student achievement with two different measures of student growth. Tennessee's plan balanced the need to look at growth and proficiency by including targets for both for every school in the state.
- **Identifying Schools:** Louisiana's A-F school rating system provides stakeholders with a single, clear, summative rating to understand school performance and demonstrates how it will identify close to 17% of its schools for comprehensive support and improvement, well above the 5% required under federal law.
- **Supporting Schools:** New Mexico and Tennessee are committed to using data and research to support schools. New Mexico clearly states what action must be taken in schools that fail to improve three years after being initially identified for comprehensive support and improvement. Tennessee proposes a school improvement strategy with multiple tiers of support and multiple state authorities to drive improvement in the lowest-performing schools and districts, as well as a plan to award federal school-improvement funds to those districts committed to interventions with the strongest evidence base.
- **Exiting Improvement Status:** Nevada puts in place rigorous exit criteria that make it difficult for a school to exit comprehensive or targeted improvement status without demonstrating significant improvement over time.
- **Continuous Improvement:** New Mexico outlines a number of ways it has and will continue to engage stakeholders on key aspects of its implementation efforts. For example, it will be adding science as an indicator in its accountability system in response to stakeholder feedback, and it will continue to gather input as it considers adding an "Opportunity-to-Learn" survey to its accountability system in future years. New Mexico's "Return Tour" will give stakeholders the opportunity to interact with the state about the final plan and its implementation.