



STATE REPORT FLORIDA

OVERALL APPROACH

Equity: How well does the state’s approach to school improvement include focused attention on supporting underserved students and closing the achievement gap? Does the state require LEAs to maintain an equity focus in their school improvement plans, activities and resource allocations?

Florida has demonstrated a lack of commitment to closing achievement gaps by not addressing subgroup performance or English learner proficiency in the state’s accountability system. As a consequence, the state’s school improvement guidance and application do not ask districts and schools to consider equity-focused strategies for these and other historically disadvantaged students. In fact, the application appears to be only a pass-through mechanism for districts and schools to receive improvement funds, without a rigorous state review of the plan and proposed strategies within it.

Florida’s accountability system references the use of the lowest 25% performance supergroup, but does not address actual underperformance in student subgroups at all, even among targeted support schools, which is required by law, and therefore quarterly progress monitoring visits examine disaggregated data but do not disaggregate by any student characteristics. States should explicitly include equity as a goal of the school improvement process and be more specific about how they expect districts and schools to address the needs of subgroups of students when developing and implementing school improvement plans. States should also ensure that subgroup performance is considered for all indicators in their accountability systems and weighted appropriately to determine which schools are identified for improvement.

Strengths: How is the state thoughtfully leveraging ESSA’s flexibility to put in place the necessary policies and procedures that create an enabling environment for effective and sustained school improvement, and that consider state/local lessons learned from past efforts? What parts of the state’s turnaround strategy or guidance to LEAs were strongest or exemplary?

Florida’s use of the University of Chicago’s 5 Essentials to guide its theory of action is a solid approach. The 5 Essentials are research-based and can result in high standards for interventions in districts and schools. This program includes student survey administration, training and coaching for educators around the results, and an eye for school improvement beyond test scores. The 5 Essentials should help Florida districts identify and address problems related to school success.

TURNAROUND COMPONENT OVERVIEW

Coherent and Aligned Vision for Improving Outcomes	Weak
Strategic Use of Funding and Alignment of Resources	Weak
Rigorous Review Process	Weak
Continuous Improvement, Monitoring and Evaluation	Weak
Evidence-Based Interventions	N/A
Capacity Building and Autonomy	Weak
Engagement	N/A
Sustainability	Weak

Improvements: How can the state improve its turnaround efforts? What parts of the state’s strategy or guidance to LEAs were unclear? What risks and challenges might the state face with its current approach?

Florida should start by aligning its school improvement materials to the state’s theory of action for school improvement. Without drawing a clear thread from the theory of action through the entire process, it will be difficult to engage schools, districts, and communities in that process. The 5 Essentials should be incorporated into the state’s theory of action and receive buy-in from the community in order to be effective. The state should also revise its accountability system to include student subgroups and English learner proficiency.

Florida’s use of dual accountability system raises issues with school improvement implementation as it can cause confusion about which schools are being identified and how to prioritize efforts.

TURNAROUND COMPONENTS

Coherent and Aligned Vision for Improving Outcomes: How well does the state articulate a coherent vision or theory of action that drives their school improvement efforts? Is this vision aligned with the state’s accountability system and goals for closing the achievement gap?

N/A **Weak** Needs Improvement Adequate Strong Exemplary

Florida’s Bureau of School Improvement, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, and the 5 Essentials all have separate theories of action. While any one theory of action would serve the purpose of defining the work, more than one creates confusion. It could be that one of these theories of action truly is the guide for the work, but because there is no thread drawn from the theory of action throughout the state’s school improvement materials, that is unknown.

While the 5 Essentials survey may be a valuable tool for schools to use as part of a system of supports for school improvement, it is not clear that Florida has piloted or evaluated the types of data and potential impacts from utilization of this data may have in their state. If this is the first use of this tool, it would be difficult to rely upon it to truly drive a vision for school improvement specific to the needs of the schools in the state. Florida’s exclusion of subgroup performance or English learner proficiency indicators in the state accountability system undermines its ability to address achievement gaps.

Strategic Use of Funding and Alignment of Resources: Is the state allocating funding in a way that is strategic and maximizes resources? Are LEAs expected to prioritize improvement efforts that address the underlying performance issues?

N/A **Weak** Needs Improvement Adequate Strong Exemplary

Florida awards funding on a per-pupil basis, which may be an adequate model, but the funding allotted does not appear to be enough to support any significant school improvement. The state appears to not be awarding funding based on need, which will almost certainly result in schools and districts with the furthest to go not receiving the necessary support. States utilizing formula grants may bear a slightly higher burden to help districts develop creative ways to allocate resources across programs to fulfill their goals. Without more clarity regarding the number of schools that will be designated, it is hard to know whether the resources available to struggling school will be sufficient.

Schools with graduation rates below 67% will receive such a small amount of funding — \$50,000 at most — and it is hard to see how this will lead to improvement. While not all states are making the decision to provide additional funding to comprehensive schools identified for low graduation rates, and it is good that Florida has decided to do this, it is unclear what actual initiatives could be enacted or initiated with such a low amount of additional funding.

It was not apparent that there were additional supports beyond funding from the state to assist schools in school improvement. There also does not appear to be clear examples for recommended uses of funding. A recent state-hosted webinar included a list of non-allowable uses of funds as did the ESSA plan. However, this list seemed aimed at avoiding misuse of funds rather than prioritizing. The description in Florida’s ESSA plan of the state’s planning meetings, mentions that field teams will monitor the use of funds, but no details about this monitoring are included.

Rigorous Review Process: Is the state applying rigorous criteria and review processes to ensure resources will be used to support effective school improvement efforts? Is the state prioritizing funding to LEAs who demonstrate the greatest need for school improvement funding (including LEAs with a high percentage of CSI and TSI schools) and the strongest commitment to school improvement?

N/A **Weak** Needs Improvement Adequate Strong Exemplary

Florida seems to have a review process, but the documents available appear to be created during the ESEA waiver process and identify schools for Priority and Focus. It is unclear from the documents available if the state has revised its review process to incorporate or accommodate new flexibilities and responsibilities under ESSA. The review process does not appear to connect to the identified vision or funding model, and the planning tool seems to indicate a compliance mindset instead of a commitment to rigorous standards and review of school improvement efforts.

Continuous Improvement, Monitoring and Evaluation: Does the state have a robust, data-driven process to monitor LEAs’ implementation of the school improvement plans within their district? Did the state establish clear milestones to ensure improvement over time, and within four years?

N/A **Weak** Needs Improvement Adequate Strong Exemplary

Florida makes reference to continuous improvement and monitoring but provides little detail as to how this will occur. Much of this seems to be a district-only responsibility. Desktop monitoring by reviewing a sample of school plans and deliverables is mentioned, which seems inadequate, especially since the application contains no prompts for districts and schools to consider historical achievement data, set targets, or choose strategies based on their needs. It seems that the state is not concerned with districts and schools digging into their needs with a comprehensive needs assessment or thinking critically about the strategies to address those needs. The planning tool provided seems to be compliance-oriented and minimal. Florida’s ESSA plan mentions quarterly monitoring visits which seem also to be support visits. It may be difficult for these visits to successfully incorporate both monitoring and support at the same time. However, the activities of the quarterly monitoring visits are not described.

Evidence-Based Interventions: To what extent is the state mandating LEAs use evidence-based strategies in their improvement efforts? Does the state provide guidance and supports to LEAs to help them identify and implement the most effective strategies based upon their needs?

N/A Weak Needs Improvement Adequate Strong Exemplary

Aside from the use of “evidence-based” as an adjective to describe activities like interventions and strategies, none of Florida’s documents focus on evidence-based interventions. The state does not appear to require districts to link the strategies proposed with the evidence requirements within ESSA in their application, nor does the state provide guidance to their districts on the types of evidence based procedures they should use given the results of the needs assessment. Continuing from the review of their monitoring practices it is unclear that they plan to require or monitor the use of programs, let alone require that schools implement evidence-based programs and strategies.

Capacity Building and Autonomy: How well does the state articulate, delineate or set parameters around which interventions and responsibilities belong to the state, LEA and/or school? Does the state provide support or guidance to help LEAs identify and reduce barriers to school improvement? Does the state have a framework or process to support and monitor outside entities who partner with the state, LEAs or schools in school improvement efforts?

N/A **Weak** Needs Improvement Adequate Strong Exemplary

The details around Florida’s supports for districts and schools, such as the 5 Essentials and field visits, are minimal and do not show how they will help districts build capacity. It was unclear the extent to which the state is communicating with districts about the methods and strategies they can utilize to remove barriers to reform, including revamping or extending the school day, providing more supports for teachers. It was also unclear whether Florida is working with district leaders to support and monitor outside entities who partner with the district on their improvement outcomes. Florida also does not articulate the different roles of the state, district, and school in choosing, implementing, or sustaining interventions for school improvement over time.

Engagement: Does the state require LEAs to engage with stakeholders such as parents and community members in the development and implementation of their school improvement plans? Does the state provide sufficient guidance and resources to LEAs to effectively do so, helping them foster local buy-in and promote sustainability?

N/A Weak Needs Improvement Adequate Strong Exemplary

Florida does not mention engagement or collaboration with districts or schools in the development of their school improvement process. Given the inclusion of using the 5 Essentials survey, it should be necessary to have cultivated school and district buy-in. Additionally, there is nothing in the school improvement plan rubric that emphasizes or requires parent and community engagement in the development of school improvement plans.

Sustainability: Does the state have a plan in place to review the school improvement efforts statewide and evaluate the impact and effectiveness? Does the state have a process in place to support LEAs and schools by enhancing their capacity to maintain their improvement efforts upon exiting identification and intervention?

N/A **Weak** Needs Improvement Adequate Strong Exemplary

Florida appears focused on compliance for school improvement. While the state identified its exit criteria, there is no process in place to help schools maintain success once they exit improvement status. There are compliance routines in place for documentation of funding, but a lack of focus on building leadership or instructional capacity for ensuring new practices are successfully embedded into the school culture.

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