



## STATE REPORT INDIANA

### 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?

Indiana’s theory of action includes an equity focus. However, the state school improvement application process does not specifically call attention to many of the areas identified in the state’s ESSA plan. For example, Indiana’s ESSA plan identified inequality in educator equity differences. The school improvement plans do not address this area.

Indiana should be more specific about how the state expects districts to address the needs of particular groups of students, and how it will help districts identify these focus areas. The state does not include subgroups in its accountability system, and this raises concerns of a lack of commitment to subgroup accountability, support, and 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?

Indiana’s use of the 5 Essentials Elements and the state’s articulated theory of action are well developed, thoughtful, and research based. They require adherence to moderate-to-high standards of evidence for interventions while simultaneously recognizing that some school-specific customization will likely be necessary, and the rubric is extremely robust.

The state has committed to greater coordination across state agencies and worked to identify areas in which they can streamline practice and centralize resources in order to free up districts and schools to focus on the school improvement work. The state is also encouraging districts with more than four identified schools to apply as a district, which will further support shared learning and economies of scale.

**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?

### TURNAROUND COMPONENT OVERVIEW

Coherent and Aligned Vision for Improving Outcomes . . . . .	<b>Strong</b>
Strategic Use of Funding and Alignment of Resources . . . . .	<b>Adequate</b>
Rigorous Review Process . . . . .	<b>Needs Improvement</b>
Continuous Improvement, Monitoring and Evaluation . . . . .	<b>Adequate</b>
Evidence-Based Interventions . . . . .	<b>Adequate</b>
Capacity Building and Autonomy . . . . .	<b>Strong</b>
Engagement . . . . .	<b>Needs Improvement</b>
Sustainability . . . . .	<b>Needs Improvement</b>

Indiana’s standards for allocation of competitive funds for implementation are unclear and potentially too subjective — more information on the how the qualitative and quantitative indicators will be used in funding decisions would be helpful and the inclusion of a readiness or needs assessment could help districts better use the funds. Interventions must meet one of the top 3 levels for strength of evidence, and Indiana allows for customization of interventions beyond that, rather than requiring a more rigorous use of the comprehensive needs assessment.

The state should address sustainability and continuous improvement in the early stages. The state appears to be organizing itself in a way to sustain the efforts and to have a coherent and aligned strategy to support school improvement. It would benefit school improvement efforts across the state if the work to redesign the state education office occurred across districts as well. Districts could benefit from the approach the state has undertaken to create a structure to support school improvement.

Indiana’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

Indiana appears to be incorporating the University of Chicago’s 5 Essentials as the driving force for the school improvement process, which is intuitive and based in research. That said, the state’s updated school improvement grant application and guidance do not reference or incorporate references to the 5 Essentials or seem to encourage districts and schools to use it as a framework for improvement. The state also references the Universal Design for Learning and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support on its school improvement webpage, but it is unclear how those are further incorporated as well. On the other hand, Indiana has created a guidance document that crosswalks the components of the state’s comprehensive needs assessment tool with the relevant areas in the grant application.

The state appears to have developed a set of practices at both the planning and implementation stages that prioritize streamlining. For example, Indiana has created several school improvement grant applications — for planning, implementation, and single or multiple schools — that districts can select from based on their situation.

**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

Indiana will provide planning grant funds to first year comprehensive support and improvement schools, and will subsequently award implementation grants after districts complete their plans. Districts must apply for both grants, which will be awarded on a competitive basis. In addition, districts that can demonstrate that they have sufficiently planned for school improvement already may skip the planning stage entirely and move straight to their implementation grant, which may cut down on repetitive processes and wasted funds. The state appears to be using the planning grant application as a readiness assessment that must be completed to satisfaction before distributing planning grants in order to help districts and schools maximize the funds for improvement.

The state will use one of several rubrics — each of which match one of the options districts have in applying for school improvement funds — to determine which districts and schools receive competitive funding. The rubric appears to combine compliance and quality, and because there is no description of how competitive funds are awarded it is unclear whether districts and schools that have effectively targeted their proposed interventions to their determined areas of need will necessarily be awarded funds over schools and districts that have simply completed their application thoroughly.

The state has also committed in its ESSA plan to greater coordination across education agencies, such as with the Indiana STEM Council, Department of Child Services, and Interstate Migrant Education Council, in order to streamline interventions across educator effectiveness, school improvement, and monitoring. This is a very promising practice which could be implemented by more states. Indiana is encouraging district-wide applications for districts with four or more comprehensive support and improvement schools, and applications include a comprehensive needs assessment requirement. These efforts are intended to increase efficiencies and manage costs while still requiring appropriate interventions for each school.

**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

Indiana has a set of well-developed, evidence-based rubrics that extensively covers key areas of school improvement. The state describes that only reviewers external to the state education agency will score the grant applications. However, there is not enough information regarding how the state will apply the rubric to applications in order to determine the highest need while also factoring in the quality of the plans, not just completeness.

**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

Indiana uses a continuous improvement process that begins with a comprehensive needs assessment and includes monitoring at the district level. Districts will be expected to use templates developed by the state to monitor school improvement plans. At the state level, however, there is not much information describing how quantitative and qualitative information will be combined to understand and make decisions based on a school’s needs and progress.

That said, the state has mapped out how it will support comprehensive support schools and districts based on the number of years a school has been identified. This information seems to take into account how the state’s role changes in improvement depending on time elapsed, but not necessarily the progress a school is making. Available information suggests that schools will share their plan with the state, but it is unclear what the state will do with that information, how they will intervene if the plan is unacceptable, and ways they will support for effective implementation. Indiana’s approach could be strengthened if there was detail describing how the state will help the district in response to its plan.

**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

Indiana meets the letter of the law in its use of evidence-based interventions, and improvement plans must use only identified interventions that meet the top 3 tiers of evidence (strong, moderate, and promising) with the possibility of school-specific “purposeful” customization. The state does provide some guidance regarding suggested evidence-based interventions with the resource hub on its school improvement webpage. Interestingly, the resource hub is aligned to the 5 Essentials, but other existing school improvement documents are not. However, the comprehensive needs assessment and school improvement grant application reference the evidence tiers and not the 5 Essentials. In addition, the tool that crosswalks the needs assessment with the plan template does not mention evidence-based interventions. These factors make the support that the state provides less coherent than it could be.

The state held a provider fair to assist districts in identifying providers who offer evidence based practices. This is a promising practice for the state and would be very useful for districts who often don’t have the capacity to analyze differences between providers. A question remains regarding the extent to which Indiana vets participating vendors for quality.

**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

Indiana is clearly committed to streamlining and improving how it builds district capacity and supports districts and schools in implementing its school improvement process. The state has done extensive work to build a library of resources and implementation tools for schools and districts that will support building-level improvement, and is providing exemplar completed needs assessments to guide schools and districts, which is a strong approach Indiana’s plans for the provision of technical assistance, online course offerings that walk local staff through the school improvement process, and commitment to supporting local partnerships with community partners all suggest that schools and districts should be able to assume leadership and ownership of school improvement efforts beyond the terms of their improvement period. One promising practice is that the state has provided several workshops with follow up coaching for their districts on how to implement the framework and more information about the framework.

More publicly available information regarding how the state plans to actively engage the field with information would be helpful, but Indiana appears to be off to a promising start.

**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

Indiana’s school improvement applications require that a planning or school improvement team be formed, which must include representatives from the community. In addition, the state requires that improvement grant applications include SMART goals for ongoing stakeholder engagement, along with strategies to reach them. Family engagement and supportive school environments are two of Indiana’s

5 Essentials for improvement, and the state has provided resources related to these elements on their resource hub. It is evident that engagement is of interest to the state, but again the state can do more to link the 5 Essentials with the relevant components in the school improvement grant application.

**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

At the state level, Indiana appears to have sustainability plans and practices under development. Indiana has articulated a commitment to increasing coordination within the state department in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness across divisions, which will improve sustainability at the state level. Indiana also plans to centralize key supports for schools and districts, which also increases the likelihood of sustained efforts, as these resources not depend on disparate areas within the bureaucracy to maintain.

The state’s school improvement grant application prompts districts to think about sustainability, including requiring a SMART goal for sustaining improvement and asking questions related to sustainable budgeting. In addition, Indiana specifically directs districts to consider how non-Title I funds can be leveraged after it stops receiving 1003a funds for a school. This could be improved if the state provided districts with guidance related to how existing state funding streams might apply to frequently used school improvement activities or strategies.

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