



Education Policy Experts Release New Independent Analysis of Florida's Efforts to Date to Improve Low-Performing Schools

Florida's hands-off approach considered high risk

Embargoed until: November 15, 12:01AM (Eastern)

Contact: Ashley Inman Zanchelli
ainman@forstudentsuccess.org

States have a responsibility and opportunity to create systems to meaningfully address underperforming schools in order to provide all students a strong, equitable education. States have chosen their own approaches to identify and use federal funds to support and turn around their lowest-performing schools, and today, HCM Strategists, in partnership with the Collaborative for Student Success (CSS), released the results of an independent peer review analysis of current school improvement efforts in 17 states. The report highlights best practices being used in these states and identifies areas for improvement. "[Check State Plans: From Promise to Practice](#)," is a continuation of the "Check State Plans" reviews released last year and looks at how states are approaching the allocation of federal funding targeted for school improvement efforts and activities. Moreover, this analysis looks at how well states are providing resources and supports to their districts to target schools that are most in need.

Seventeen states, including Florida, were chosen to be reviewed in this initial round because they had the most publicly-available information at the start of the peer review process. When considering the full set of eight indicators, evaluators determined that four states embraced a strong state role to drive reform, five states are partnering with districts, and eight states are relying heavily on district leaders to improve the results with some oversight and support from the state.

Florida received a "Weak" rating in 6 out of 8 categories: vision, funding, rigorous review process, monitoring, capacity building, and sustainability. The peer reviewers were concerned that the state is taking too limited a role in leading or supporting school improvement efforts. Other states are partnering with districts to ensure they are supported in addressing chronic underperformance, and Florida is taking a more compliance-oriented approach. While the peer reviewers recognize that empowering local leaders is a core component of successful school turnaround, they raised a concern that too much autonomy, without sufficient state supports, may not help the students and schools in most need. Overall, peers believe that 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 result, districts and schools are less likely to focus on these populations as they plan and implement school improvement strategies. Find more information on the next page.

"Figuring out how to close achievement gaps between our country's highest and continuously lowest performing schools is one of the greatest equity issues of our time," said Jim Cowen, Executive Director of the Collaborative for Student Success. "The federal government provided one billion dollars and significant freedom to state leaders to drive bold, innovative change for their most challenged schools. It's important that states are stepping up to the challenge and being thoughtful and inventive in how they realize results."



“Promise to Practice is intended to inform policy makers of what is happening across states and serve as an advocacy tool to help state education leaders leverage both their newfound flexibility and their federal funds to drive meaningful school improvement,” explained HCM’s Elizabeth Ross, lead author of the report.

The Collaborative and HCM recruited independent peer reviewers that included former state chiefs, members of the civil rights and disability communities, and education experts from around the country. The panel included individuals with dedicated expertise in school improvement at the state, district, and local levels.

Peer reviewers analyzed several state specific documents including a state’s application for districts to receive federal school improvement funding, application scoring rubric, state school improvement guidance and supporting materials and an independent survey, conducted by Education First, that was commissioned to support this work. Evidence was reviewed and critiqued across 8 different categories: vision, funding, rigorous review process, continuous improvement and monitoring, capacity building and autonomy, engagement, and sustainability. Each was rated as: exemplary, strong, adequate, needs improvement, or weak.

“As with our peer review of state’s ESSA plans, this new independent analysis done by experts aims to highlight best practices across those states that are implementing strong school improvement systems, as well as show states where they can improve in order to provide the best education possible for our students,” concluded Cowen.

To read more about the qualifications of the peer reviewers see [here](#) and the process see [here](#).

To read the full report and national press release visit the “Check State Plans: From Promise to Practice” website at <http://promisetopractice.org>.

###

About the Collaborative for Student Success:

The Collaborative for Student Success is a non-profit advocacy organization that works to defend high standards, high-quality assessments, and strong systems of accountability, to ensure that all kids are prepared for college or career. Through capacity-building efforts with in-state organizations and collaboration with national partners, we promote fact-based public discourse and fight to advance policies that promote best practices and ensure equitable outcomes for all students.

Florida’s Analysis:

Excerpts below are taken verbatim from the HCM peer review analysis.

To read the entire HCM review for Florida’s school improvement plan click [here](#).

To read the HCM national report click [here](#).

Strengths:



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.

Where the Plan Can Improve:

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.