



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

*Bipartisan peer review finds three different approaches to school improvement across 17 states, identifies best practices and recommendations to close achievement gaps*

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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 seventeen states 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. The national 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 states are providing resources and supports to their districts to target schools that are most in need.

In the report, peer reviewers recommended promising practices to aide states in their school improvement efforts. One trend that emerged from the analysis is that states embraced one of three overall approaches: The State Leadership Approach, the Partnership Approach, and the District Leadership Approach; which, if executed with a clear vision, strong supports and the ability to monitor effectiveness, each have the potential to successfully improve low-performing schools. Four states (LA, MA, NM, TN) have taken on an approach to school improvement that embraces a strong state role to drive reform, five states (CT, ID, MN, ND, NV) are partnering with districts and taking on both a coaching and monitoring role, and eight states (AZ CO, GA, FL, IL, IN, NY, TX) are relying heavily on district leaders to turn around schools. The reviewers also noted that, while school improvement work is supposed to be a lever to improve equity in education systems, less than half of those reviewed promote equity as a clear focus or require districts to show how they're planning to address historic inequities in their schools.

"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, English language and disability communities, and education experts from around the country. The network also 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.

In addition to the full report, the 17 individual state peer review reports identify each state’s strengths, assess their commitment to equity, and share how the state performed against a rubric of levers to successfully improve schools.

To read the full report and learn more about this work, visit the “Check State Plans: From Promise to Practice” website [here](#).

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

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**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.