



## STATE REPORT LOUISIANA

### 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?

Louisiana believes that every student, including English learners and students with disabilities, must receive on-grade level instruction through high-quality curriculum and instruction.

Should a student need additional support or intervention, the Louisiana Department of Education stresses that the instruction must be scaffolded so that the student continues to access on-grade level curriculum. The state views fundamental belief as the foundation underpinning their school improvement work and approach to equity — access to high quality teaching and a rigorous on-grade level curriculum.

This year, under the new accountability system the state will identify approximately half of the 1,300 schools in the state as needing some form of intervention — comprehensive, targeted or urgent support. That said, concern remains that the state has not done all it can to indicate through its accountability system when schools have underperforming groups of students, as schools with achievement gaps may receive a B overall grade.

Under the states unified “Super App”, which streamlines all federal programs into one comprehensive application, districts, regardless of identification status, must demonstrate that they are using a high quality curriculum in all grade levels and all teachers have been trained to teach the new curriculum. Louisiana also has established a minimum bar for approving district plans, which must include: the adoption of a high quality benchmark assessment, partnership with a preparation provider, and participation in the content leader program.

**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?

Louisiana has in place a strong vision for school improvement, with a focus on high-quality instruction and high-quality curricula. The application and approval process for districts identified as low-performing is

### TURNAROUND COMPONENT OVERVIEW

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

clear and aligned to the state’s theory of action. The rigor of the state’s approval process is evident in the fact that the state did not approve the majority of district plans submitted during the first round of review, opting instead to push districts to develop stronger improvement efforts.

The Direct Student Services allocation that the state is providing to districts in order to expand enrichment and advanced coursework opportunities for students K-12 is also a strength, even more so that the state provides guidance for how these funds might be used in underperforming schools. This is an indication that the state is using these funds as a lever to close opportunity gaps.

The School Redesign summit and purposeful connection of districts to one another and to potential third-party partners who could help advance their work is also a strong, innovative component of Louisiana’s efforts. Finally, including of out of school suspension as a criterion for targeted support and intervention is a smart tactic. This coupled with the fact that targeted status can put a school on the continuum toward comprehensive support and improvement is an incentive for districts to address exclusionary discipline practices.

**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?

Louisiana might consider strengthening the messaging around their school improvement work by clearly articulating a specific vision for persistently struggling schools that is distinct from their overarching work. There are nuances and contextual differences that may warrant defining a specific message. The state’s approach is quite prescriptive, which has its benefits, but may show diminishing returns in schools that are not improving.

## 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**

Louisiana’s vision for school improvement is coherent and focuses on four strategies: improving daily instruction for students by providing high-quality curricula; expanding professional development for educators; and improving the recruitment and retention of high-quality educators. From there, the state is focusing on empowering districts and providing autonomy for educators closest to the student.

Under the new ESSA aligned accountability system, the state will identify approximately half of the schools for either comprehensive intervention or urgent intervention. Schools identified for urgent support and intervention have at least one group of students whose performance is equivalent to an “F” rating for at least two years or the out-of-school suspension rate is twice that of the national average for three years. This year, over 730 schools will be identified comprising 56% of the schools in the state. Louisiana is mandating that any school, regardless of the identification status must submit a plan to the state describing how they will address the inequities and gaps within the schools. The state has also outlined that every student, even those that need significant support interventions, must continue to access the on-grade level curriculum in an inclusive setting.

**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**

Louisiana is awarding funding for school improvement through a competitive grant process. All districts with comprehensive support schools are required to submit plans for both approval and funding. In the first two rounds of the school redesign project, the state granted funds only to the districts they determined had the most coherent plans for improvement as measured by a state-created rubric, which focuses on curricula, professional development, and teacher workforce issues and is therefore directly in line with the state’s theory of action. Some districts received approval without any funding, and others were rejected and required to resubmit for approval and grant funding for interventions.

The state even gives guidance for how a district’s allocation for Direct Student Services — to ensure that students have enrichment, advanced coursework, and early post-secondary opportunities — is should be a prioritized for school improvement efforts. Additional information is needed to understand how the state will support districts who are not awarded competitive funds.

**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**

Louisiana has a very rigorous review process in place using its School Redesign rubric. The rubric includes seven domains — Needs Assessment; Budget: Core Academics; Educator Workforce; District Structures; Direct Student Supports; Supporting Subgroups of Diverse Learners. Each category is scored on a scale from 0–3 points. During the first round of review this year, the state received 32 district applications, and only 18 of them were approved with funding. The remaining applicants were invited to improve their proposals for the second round of funding. The second round of applications, 59 school systems applied and only 41 received approval and funding.

Louisiana has shown that they are serious about the quality of the plans, as 15 district plans were rejected for approval. These districts must work to better their plans and resubmit to the state. There is a question regarding the degree to which this process ensures that districts with the greatest need receive the resources to improve, but the state’s high standard for quality is very commendable.

**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

Louisiana established ambitious milestones for raising accountability standards over time using an A–F grading scale, and plans to reevaluate funding allocations after one year.

The application requires that districts define goals and metrics that will be reviewed annually during the application renewal process, and districts must adopt a standards-aligned benchmark assessment to provide interim indicators of student academic progress. These components, if implemented well, will help to ensure that outcomes are monitored with high quality, relevant data.

The extent to which the criteria for reevaluating funding and a district’s ability to hit its goals are aligned. However, state documents did not go so far as to say that a district that does not hit its goals will be denied funding during the subsequent year.

**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**

Louisiana requires districts to choose evidence-based interventions, describe the evidence level based on ESSA requirements, and link to the research that supports the intervention in their applications. The state encourages districts to partner with national organizations or vendors to implement their strategies effectively, and hosted a summit to, among other things, connect districts with qualified external partners.

The state also provides access to regional support managers that districts may contact for support in their improvement process, and created a website that includes resources about evidence-based interventions which district leaders can access.

**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

Louisiana’s school redesign summit was intended to train district leaders and staff to conduct needs assessments, and the state makes resources available during the process on their website.

Louisiana has articulated a clear delineation around the school improvement and intervention continuum. Districts get first opportunity to intervene, with annual progress monitoring by state. After the school is still rated an F after four consecutive years, the state will seek to apply a more rigorous intervention — up to and including the Recovery School District absorbing the schools. Louisiana has also highlighted examples of agreements for more rigorous interventions that are negotiated partnerships between the state and districts.

The state provides support and monitors progress through the assigned Regional Turnaround Support Manager. The department of education has three such positions supporting the regional networks of schools across the state. These defined roles should help identify and reduce barriers to school improvement by ensuring that the state and district know for what they are responsible. That said, while the state’s intention and plan is strong, a lot depends on the state’s own capacity and strength of implementation.

It is unclear from the materials available whether the state has a specific plan to support and monitor third party partners who engage in school improvement work. It appears that Louisiana has focused on vetting these partners and confirming their prior effectiveness as a test of future effectiveness.

**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

Louisiana has taken a strong position on public transparency, as its legislature passed ACT 555, a state law requiring every school identified for support to host a public review of school redesign plans. These plans are required to include school and student performance data as well as a timeline for achieving the proposed goals. As mentioned earlier, the state has offered technical assistance, statewide summits, and partner connections as resources to support districts in their school improvement work. Engagement is a prominent element within the revised school redesign application and within the monitoring protocols used by the district support staff when they conduct site visits. This allows the Louisiana Department of Education to track whether or not districts have met this provision of Act 555, though additional information is needed to determine the quality of the engagement efforts and the guidance offered to districts throughout plan implementation.

**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

There is no specific mention in the materials reviewed of a formal plan to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the school improvement efforts — either via an internal research and evaluation team or a third-party researcher. Louisiana indicates they will conduct an internal annual review process to evaluate the progress of district implementation of their plans. In addition, in their ESSA application, the state mentions the work that the Tulane University’s Education Research Alliance and Stanford University’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) regarding the efficacy of charter schools engaged in school turnaround work. Louisiana could consider how to leverage these partnerships to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the state’s efforts. The state also notes that more in the area of sustainability is forthcoming in its new “Super App,” but that information is not yet available.

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