



## STATE REPORT NEVADA

### 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?

Equity appears to be more of an implicit goal instead of explicit in Nevada’s theory of action and school improvement materials, specifically in reference to how the state addresses closing achievement gaps and making school improvement grants competitive in order to reach the schools with the most need. Ensuring students can access effective educators could also be linked more to equity. 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?

Nevada’s school improvement documents and resources are strong in several areas. The state’s competitive process for allocating funds for school improvement seems clear and rooted in both plan completeness and quality, not completeness alone. From the description in the state’s materials, the review process appears more than perfunctory. The school improvement application is also high quality, with a rubric that incorporates some often-sidelined aspects of ESSA implementation, including sustainability and progress monitoring. The expectation that districts and schools will set multi-year targets, aligned with ESSA exit criteria, will aid with both support and accountability roles at the state level.

Nevada’s theory of action includes clear and concise guidance of state expectations for districts and schools and specific statewide strategic focuses. The state’s support materials around evidence-based practices seems useful. In addition, the Achievement District option seems to be an appropriately-used high-touch strategy that will be potentially useful to learn from.

### TURNAROUND COMPONENT OVERVIEW

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

**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?

While it prompts districts to think about sustainability, Nevada could do a better job having a state-level approach to support schools after they exit comprehensive or targeted status so they are not identified again. Nevada could also better explain how it will support schools that are not designated as comprehensive or targeted or do not receive funding as part of the grant competition but still need substantial support and assistance.

Nevada would do well to emphasize the importance of parent and community engagement in the school improvement grant application. It should also better explain how different programs (state and federal) can be leveraged to help with school improvement. The state should conduct a deeper review of prior practices to see which improvement strategies are still effective and viable under ESSA.

## 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

Nevada articulates a clear and concise vision for school improvement. Not only does the state’s theory of action name specific, high-priority outcomes that Nevada wants to achieve, it also describes specific actions for both the state and districts. For example, Nevada calls out a state role for differentiating funding based on student need, whereas it describes recruiting and retaining effective educators as a district role. Regarding outcomes, few states so far have been as specific as naming third grade reading proficiency as a desired outcome for example, and such clarity should benefit the field.

The state’s theory of action does not include equity as a focus, however. There are references to strategies that can be used to advance an equity agenda, such as recruiting and retaining excellent educators and engaging parents and communities. However, these strategies are not framed as a tool to advance equity in the theory of action. Doing so would make Nevada’s approach here exemplary.

**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

Nevada runs a competitive grant program for both comprehensive and targeted schools that encourages districts to submit plans that are high quality, not just complete. The state’s school improvement application describes that funding will be awarded based upon strategic alignment to state priorities, need, the selection of evidence-based interventions based on ESSA’s tiers, and whether monitoring and evaluation components are included. Meanwhile, the application rubric and metrics are clear and include decent alignment to Nevada’s school improvement theory of action. For example, districts and schools review historical data and set targets for the next 5 years that are aligned to the state’s exit criteria.

The drop down boxes in the state’s application prompt districts to select the programs to which they are allocating resources against an overall goal, provides the opportunities for districts to be very deliberate and strategic, but also opens the possibility to think about how funds can be utilized creatively in different areas to address improvement needs. This seems to be a promising way to ensure that funding will go to the schools with the greatest need and commitment to school improvement.

Additional guidance to districts in how to strategically utilize funding from different sources to address the overall goal of school improvement could help reduce potential confusion for districts over how to or when they can use the various funding streams available to them. 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

Nevada has a clear rubric that orients districts to effectively plan their school improvement efforts. For example, districts and schools must not only select achievement goals, but goals for each of the next five years in order to track progress over time. The state also expects timelines for implementation, a process for measuring progress on 90-day cycles, and plans for sustainability. In all, Nevada’s rubric asks for a commendable level of detail from district and school plans. Combining this with the fact that the state will award funding competitively based on plan quality and level of need, it seems likely that Nevada will be able to focus on schools that demonstrate the greatest need and commitment to school improvement.

In the guidance documents, the state also includes some detail about the process through which applications will be scored, which is helpful to the field. From the description included there, it appears that more than one expert at the state will review each plan, which would be another strong practice.

The state’s rubric references Focus and Priority schools as needing support, therefore it was unclear to the peers the extent to which the rubric was updated to reflect current flexibilities under ESSA. While continuing to utilize processes that have resulted in successful school improvement is certainly a good practice, it is unclear how successful the school improvement processes were previously to support their continued use.

**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

Nevada has clear exit criteria, establishes annual reviews for comprehensive schools to review data and progress, and requires improvement plans to be carried out in three years via a performance contract with the state, including annual targets for five years. In addition, these targets must be aligned with exit criteria, which is uncommon among state requirements for district plans so far.

The state also describes clear, rigorous options for schools if they fail to improve, although there is concern over how different these interventions are from pre-ESSA interventions. Some attention should be paid about verification of self-reporting by districts, and it would be useful to know the extent to which Nevada’s ESSA-era more rigorous interventions are informed by lessons learned.

**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

Nevada provides a list of approved evidenced-based practices, curricula, providers, programs materials and professional development for districts and schools to use. In its theory of action, the state says that one of its roles will be to “ensure alignment and effective use of existing and new programs and resources across the state,” which is encouraging. It will also assist schools in identifying appropriate interventions to meet school needs. The state will also help districts and schools implement those interventions through professional development and other supports.

It is not clear to what degree the state will be offering support to districts and schools in selecting evidence-based interventions. Nevada expects to see alignment between interventions and needs, but aside from providing a list of approved programs, other supports are not well described.

**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

In its theory of action, Nevada clearly delineates what the state, districts, and schools are responsible for in school improvement and allows for districts to have autonomy while maintaining accountability for them, providing assistance, and ensuring the use of evidence-based practices. The state has developed promising resources to guide for districts and schools to understand the school improvement process, such as it application rubric and evidence-based intervention list. The option for districts to join the state Achievement District is a high-touch and potentially effective approach, embracing some of the state level flexibilities assigned through ESSA. Nevada’s Achievement District is different than similar approaches in other states in that it is not made up of just districts assigned that designation.

From the documents provided, it is unclear exactly how external providers are monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis, which keeps this category from an exemplary rating.

**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

Engagement is specified in Nevada’s ESSA plan, guidance, and in the District Performance Plan template. While the state has indicated that some level of stakeholder engagement is required, the expectation described in the state’s application is thin. It is unclear if level of engagement required is enough on an ongoing basis to shift the status quo or if parent and community involvement is included as a part of regular stakeholder engagement efforts. The theory of action indicates that districts and schools will communicate information about the designation and plan process, but it is unclear if the stakeholder engagement is a two-way dialogue that helps develop the plan.

**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

Nevada’s approach to school improvement goes well beyond simply meeting the minimal requirements of ESSA respect to monitoring, supports, and evidence based practices. It is unclear if the supports in place will enhance the capacity to avoid repeated re-designation once they exit comprehensive or targeted designation. Nevertheless, Nevada’s school improvement application does prompt districts and school to be forward-thinking about sustainability.

The state’s use of the Achievement District may be able to help move the needle, but it is not yet clear what Nevada intends to do with these processes if expected outcomes are not reached.

# # #