



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

LA praised for coherent vision and prioritizing resources to districts that demonstrate a commitment to real improvement

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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 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 Louisiana, 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.

Louisiana received an "Exemplary" rating (the highest rating, and only given to two states) in 4 out of 8 categories: vision, funding, rigorous review and evidence-based interventions, and a "Strong" rating in another 3 categories: continuous improvement and monitoring, capacity building, and engaging stakeholders. The panel of experts believe that Louisiana is using a "State Leadership Approach" by striving to provide consistent messaging around school improvement, and using competitive funding to prioritize resources to districts that demonstrate a commitment to real improvement. Overall, peer reviewers praised Louisiana for making school improvement a priority in the state by ensuring students have access to a high-quality curriculum, and for having one of the most comprehensive school improvement strategies overall. These strengths will make it more likely that districts and schools will make sustained, long-term improvement.

"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 as well as 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>.

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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.

Louisiana’s Analysis:

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

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

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

Strengths:

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 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.

Where the Plan Can Improve:

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.