



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

*NV praised for its competitive process for allocating funds, strong application and rubric*

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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 Nevada, 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.

Nevada received a "Strong" rating in 5 out of 8 categories: vision, funding, continuous improvement and monitoring, evidence-based interventions and capacity building; and received an "Adequate" rating in all other categories. The panel of experts believe that Nevada is using a "Partnership Approach" with districts, trying to walk the line acting as both a coach and a referee. States taking this approach generally work to enhance district capacity for school improvement and to make decisions that will serve all students. The peer reviewers praised Nevada, in particular, for their competitive process for allocating funds for school improvement, saying that it seems clear and rooted in both plan completeness and quality, not completeness alone. Peers also noted that the state's school improvement application is high quality, with a rubric that incorporates details on sustainability and progress monitoring. Read more 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, 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.

### **Nevada’s Analysis:**

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

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

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

### **Strengths:**

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.

**Where the Plan Can Improve:**

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.