



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

*NY praised for partnering with schools and districts, but hands-off approach considered high risk*

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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 New York, 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.

New York received a "Strong" rating in 5 out of 8 categories: vision, continuous monitoring, evidence-based interventions, capacity building, and engagement; and a "Needs Improvement" in sustainability. Overall, peer reviewers praised New York for its high-quality school improvement framework and needs assessment. The state has also invested considerable resources into creating documents to help parents and community members understand the changes under ESSA. Find more information 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, and education experts from around the



country. The panel 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.

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.

### **New York's Analysis:**

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

To read the entire HCM review for New York's school improvement plan click [here](#).

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

### **Strengths:**

According to its ESSA plan, New York is building upon successful past practices in school improvement. School improvement will be approached as something the state will do in partnership with schools and districts, rather than imposing something on them. The state has an extensive needs assessment and adds state supports for turnaround. The state also aims to move school improvement to be focused at the local level and articulates the expectation of family and community engagement, in particular culturally and linguistically diverse families, in the school improvement process.

New York asks for extensive data analysis from its districts and schools in building school improvement plans, and requires that districts and school link the strategies they have chosen for school improvement to the evidence that led them to take that course of action. The state's



Diagnostic Tool for School and District Readiness (DTSDE) is quite strong, and most of the state's school improvement materials are aligned to it.

The state has also invested considerable resources into creating documents to help parents and community members what to expect in the ESSA era.

### **Where the Plan Can Improve:**

While New York provides a comprehensive school improvement strategy outlined in its ESSA plan, it does not have a clearly stated theory of action on across its school improvement documents. The state's DTSDE school improvement framework is high quality but it is not reflected its current school improvement application. While feedback from the state was helpful in understanding its current status and progress implementing its ESSA plan, there remains room for improvement by highlighting one clear theory of action throughout New York's school improvement materials.

New York has given districts and schools greater autonomy and flexibility while grounding its turnaround efforts using collaboration, partnership and support, assuming that this will help schools improve and address achievement gaps. However, there may not be enough accountability from the state, such as milestones that are monitored, to track schools before they need to go into takeover by the state. Because plans set one year targets only, districts and schools in improvement may perceive a moving target.