ESSA Leverage Points

50-State Report on Promising Practices for Using Evidence to Improve Student Outcomes





January 2018



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available, then use what they find to get better results. We accomplish this goal by developing standards of excellence which highlight the government infrastructure necessary to be able to invest in what works, supporting policymakers committed to investing in what works, and enlisting champions committed to investing in what works.

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Executive Summary

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) gives states, school districts, and schools new flexibility to design K-12 education systems that reflect local needs and priorities. In exchange, ESSA encourages, and in some cases requires, the use of evidence-based approaches and continuous improvement to drive improved outcomes.

In May 2017, Results for America's <u>Evidence in Education Lab</u> team identified in its <u>Leverage Points</u> report 13 key opportunities for states to advance the use of evidence, evaluation, and continuous improvement through their implementation of ESSA. In July 2017, RFA published an initial analysis of the first 17 ESSA consolidated state plans submitted to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) that highlighted the extent to which these states propose to use the 13 leverage points to strengthen how they use evidence, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

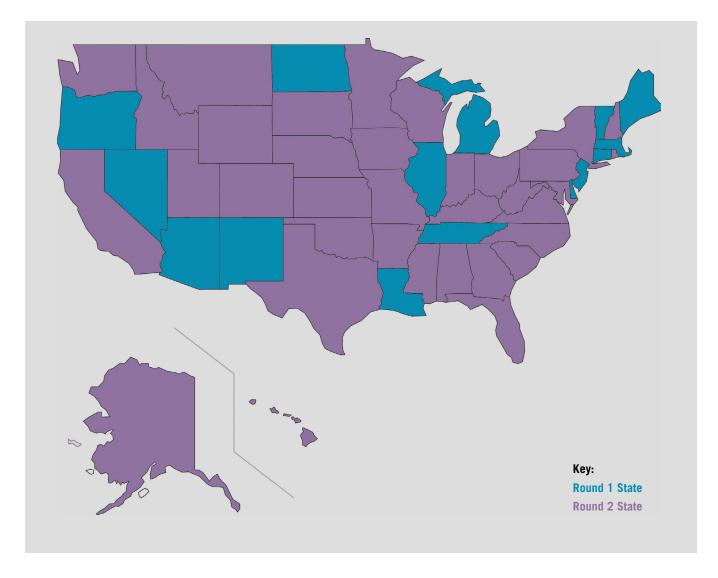
This January 2018 report builds on our review of the 17 state plans submitted to USED in May 2017, incorporating an analysis of the remaining 34 state plans submitted in September 2017.

Here are our main findings:

- Across all 51 state plans (50 states plus the District of Columbia), we identified 162 promising
 practices for building and using evidence to improve student outcomes; all but five states included at
 least one promising practice.
- Eleven states described in their plans the largest number of promising practices related to the 13 ESSA evidence leverage points: New Mexico (9), Minnesota (8), Connecticut (7), Delaware (7), Iowa (7), Rhode Island (7), Tennessee (7), Indiana (6), Massachusetts (6), Ohio (6), and Oklahoma (6).
- Only three states (Delaware, South Carolina, and Texas) described strong plans to prioritize the use of evidence and continuous improvement when exercising their authority to intervene in districts unable to improve their lowest-performing schools (Leverage Point 12); just nine states emphasized the use of evidence and continuous improvement in the design of their school improvement applications (Leverage Point 5); and only 14 states highlighted plans to base funding allocations at least in part on the proposed use of evidence (Leverage Point 4).
- No state fully articulated a clear vision for using and building evidence outside of Title I school
 improvement (e.g., in ESSA Title II and Title IV), although 17 states did include promising
 approaches to advancing evidence-based strategies under these titles.

In general, we were encouraged by the commitments these 51 states made to using evidence to drive improved student outcomes. However, for the majority of states, there were notable gaps that deserve further attention. In the report that follows, we summarize trends across states for each of 13 key opportunities in ESSA first identified in RFA's May 2017 <u>Leverage Points</u> report and spotlight those states with the most promising approaches.

ESSA Consolidated State Plan Submissions, by Round



Overview

State education agencies (referred to throughout this document simply as "states") are in the midst of making significant changes to their K-12 education systems in response to the new bipartisan federal education law (the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA), which was enacted in December 2015.

ESSA shifted the federal role in K-12 education from the more compliance-oriented framework of the No Child Left Behind Act to one that provides states, school districts, and schools more flexibility and authority to design their own education systems. At the same time, ESSA requires and encourages the use of evidence-based approaches and continuous improvement to help drive greater student success. But how exactly should states take advantage of this new opportunity?

In May 2017, Results for America, in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), published <u>Leverage Points</u>, a report highlighting 13 key opportunities for states to use the resources and increased authority provided by ESSA to strengthen how they, their local education agencies (LEAs), and their schools use evidence, evaluation, and continuous improvement to improve student outcomes.

In April and May 2017, 16 states and the District of Columbia submitted their ESSA consolidated state plans to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) for approval, with the remaining 34 states submitting their plans in September 2017. The plans outline how these states will carry out many of ESSA's requirements, including those related to evidence-based improvements.

Results for America's <u>Evidence in Education Lab</u> (Ed Lab) team has reviewed the 51 ESSA state plans to analyze the extent to which these states plan to take advantage of the 13 opportunities identified in the <u>Leverage Points</u> report. In this updated analysis of all state plans, we found the following:

- Of the 51 states, 46 included at least one promising practice for building and using evidence to improve student outcomes. In sum, we identified 162 promising practices across all 51 states.
- Eleven states described in their plans the largest number of promising practices related to the 13 ESSA evidence leverage points: New Mexico (9), Minnesota (8), Connecticut (7), Delaware (7), Iowa (7), Rhode Island (7), Tennessee (7), Indiana (6), Massachusetts (6), Ohio (6), and Oklahoma (6).
- Among these 11 states, many included plans to develop and implement the five ESSA evidence leverage points that RFA believes could have the greatest impact on the use of data and evidence by states, LEAs, and schools to improve student outcomes:
 - Nine states (CT, DE, IN, MA, MN, NM, OK, RI, and TN) committed to distributing school improvement funds at least in part on the basis of how their districts and schools plan to use evidence-based interventions (Leverage Point 4).
 - Seven states (CT, IN, MN, NM, OK, RI, and TN) described in detail plans to emphasize within their local school district applications for school improvement funds for the use of evidence and continuous improvement (Leverage Point 5).
 - Eight states (CT, IA, MA, MN, NM, OK, RI, and TN) described robust approaches to monitoring and evaluating the implementation of school improvement plans (Leverage Point 6).

- Seven states (DE, IN, IA, MN, OH, OK, and TN) prioritized high-quality needs assessments as a key component of the school improvement process (Leverage Point 8).
- Seven states (CT, DE, IN, IA, MN, NM, and RI) detailed strong plans for providing technical assistance on selecting evidence-based interventions to support schools identified for improvement (Leverage Point 9).

While our analysis revealed a good number of promising practices within the 51 state plans, there were some notable gaps:

- No state fully articulated a clear vision for using and building evidence outside of Title I school improvement (e.g., ESSA Title II and Title IV), although 17 states did include promising approaches to advancing evidence-based strategies under these titles (Leverage Point 13).
- Only three states described strong plans to prioritize the use of evidence and continuous improvement when exercising their authority to take action to initiate additional improvement in districts unable to improve their lowest-performing schools (Leverage Point 12).
- Only nine states emphasized the use of evidence and continuous improvement in the design of their LEA school improvement applications (Leverage Point 5).
- Just 14 states described plans to base funding allocations at least in part on the proposed use of evidence (Leverage Point 4).

In the charts that follow, we have highlighted promising practices that specific states have developed and are planning to implement related to each of the 13 ESSA evidence leverage points outlined in our original May 2017 report. For each leverage point, we note:

- What ESSA requires and why states should care
- The range of practices that states interested in taking a strong approach to using evidence, evaluation, and continuous improvement could take
- A summary of trends across the 51 state plans
- Brief descriptions of the most promising practices from these state plans
- Links to the state ESSA plans and specific page references for each strategy highlighted

Results for America is encouraged by the commitments states have made to date to leverage the opportunities in ESSA to use evidence, evaluation, and continuous improvement to improve outcomes for students. We were particularly pleased with the number of states that described plans not only to use evidence but to build it through rigorous evaluation of their efforts, particularly those related to school improvement, as well as the thoughtfulness with which a select group of states plan to support their LEAs' and schools' capacity to select and implement evidence-based interventions tied to their specific needs.

There is still work to be done to ensure that the promising practices described in this report are implemented effectively and to help every state understand how they could strengthen their approaches, particularly those that did not take advantage of the ESSA evidence opportunities or did so to a lesser degree. To support states and to encourage them to consider the full set of opportunities available through ESSA to better use evidence, evaluation, and continuous improvement, in December 2017, RFA launched its <u>State Education Fellowship</u>. The Fellowship brings together 19 state education leaders from nine leading states to accelerate

the use and generation of evidence in their agencies by collaboratively developing and implementing the best approaches to those ESSA leverage points promising to have the highest impact. Notably, the Fellowship is the first of its kind to bring senior programmatic leaders together with state directors of research and evaluation to work collaboratively to develop these approaches. The policies and plans developed by these leading states will be shared more broadly with all 51 states in an effort to strengthen states' collective commitments to data, evidence, and continuous improvement.

A Note about Our Analysis

Our analysis is based on the 51 ESSA consolidated state plans submitted to USED for review and approval, a process that is still under way. States will likely revise their plans up to and even after they receive approval, as they move into the implementation phase; this analysis reflects only the initial plans submitted by each state. Some states may be planning to develop and implement other promising practices in the ESSA evidence leverage points areas described below but chose not to describe those efforts in their consolidated state plans. In fact, of the 13 opportunities outlined, states were no longer required to explicitly address five of them (Leverage Points 1–5) as a result of the state plan template having been revised in April 2017, although we were pleased to see that many states nonetheless included plans related to these leverage points.

LEA Plan Process

Design a process for local ESSA plans that promotes the use of evidence and continuous improvement.

What ESSA Says

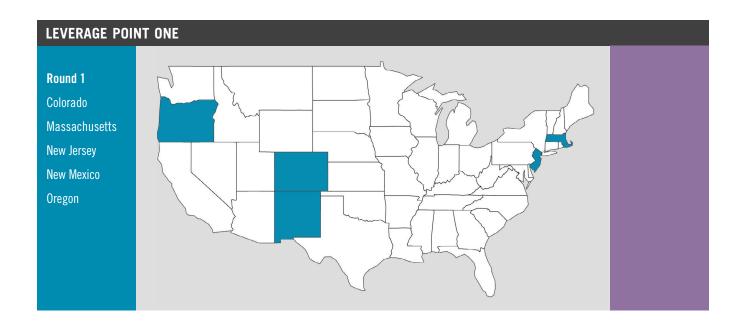
States must create local ESSA plan procedures in consultation with the governor and in collaboration with LEAs.

Why This Matters

States have an opportunity to send a strong signal to LEAs and schools about their theory of action through the LEA planning process. Those that believe in and are committed to using data-driven, evidence-based approaches to improve student outcomes can and should promote and model these beliefs through the rules and supports they put in place around LEA plan development, review, and approval.

What Leading States Could Do

- Create a local ESSA plan process that clarifies how the SEA will support LEAs in
 developing their plans and how the SEA will review and ultimately approve local
 plans, including criteria such as the degree to which each LEA's plan aligns with
 the LEA's particular needs and the SEA's priorities, as well as how the LEA would
 leverage needs assessments, data, and evidence to make the process a meaningful
 one that will drive effective use of ESSA funds.
- Design a local ESSA plan template (or list of required elements) that emphasizes the role that evidence, evaluation, and continuous improvement will play in the LEA's plan.
- Provide technical assistance and ongoing support for LEAs to help them develop local ESSA plans that prioritize the use of data and evidence to respond to local needs and engage in continuous improvement.
- Leverage the LEA plan review and approval process to shift the SEA/LEA relationship from one focused on compliance to one focused on collaboration and learning.



Five states articulated a clear and compelling vision for how the LEA plan process would take advantage of needs assessments, data, and evidence to make the planning process a meaningful one that will help LEAs make effective use of ESSA funds.

Promising State Practices

Key: Round 1 State Round 2 State

New Jersey will support LEAs in a comprehensive process to develop their plans, including assistance with conducting a needs assessment, selecting evidence-based practices, and planning for and evaluating implementation (pp. 33–35), and will regularly solicit and incorporate input from district- and school-level stakeholders into their LEA planning process.

<u>Massachusetts</u> will provide support to LEAs to embed continuous improvement and evaluation practices in their planning processes, with an emphasis on building evidence by conducting formal evaluations for approaches that are not yet supported by evidence that meets the top three levels of ESSA's tiered definition (pp. 38–39).

<u>Oregon</u> will base its selection of LEAs for state partnership and support on the results of a readiness screening protocol that assesses local context, analyzes reporting measures, and establishes priority areas for improvement. As part of this process, LEAs will conduct "evidence-based root cause analysis" in collaboration with a broad group of local stakeholders (p. 22).

Both <u>Colorado</u> (pp. 35–37) and <u>New Mexico</u> (pp. 51–52) plan to use a consolidated application for all LEAs and emphasize the use of evidence-based interventions and strategies that align with specific LEA and school needs in these applications.

Monitoring LEA Implementation

Leverage the monitoring function not only to measure compliance but also to support high-quality implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

What ESSA Says

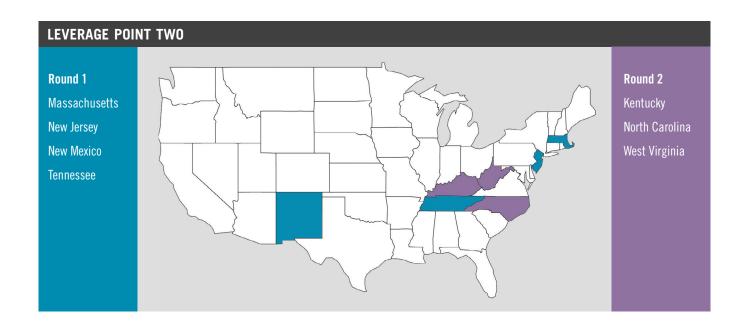
States must monitor LEA implementation of ESSA strategies described in their plans with a focus on ensuring compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements. (Note that states must also ensure the SEA itself is complying with ESSA.)

Why This Matters

When monitoring is only about checking the box for compliance, states miss a critical opportunity to learn from and alongside LEAs and schools about what is and is not working—and to support efforts to strengthen implementation in real time.

What Leading States Could Do

- Assess the quality of LEA implementation of ESSA strategies—with an emphasis on evidence-based strategies—by regularly collecting, reviewing, and rating qualitative and quantitative data.
- Describe a process to leverage administrative data and other data already collected to minimize additional data collection burdens.
- Build monitoring systems that include not only back-end auditing but also frontend efforts to inform staff of requirements in advance, identify potential issues, integrate with technical assistance and other support systems to address problems before they result in actual noncompliance, and support ongoing continuous improvement efforts.
- Differentiate monitoring based on LEA-specific factors (e.g., performance, history of noncompliance, size, federal allocation).



Seven states describe monitoring plans that do not resemble traditional, complianceoriented state monitoring functions. Rather, these leading states will engage in moreregular feedback cycles that build from comprehensive needs assessments and tie identified challenges to evidence-based solutions.

Promising State Practices

Key: Round 1 State

Round 2 State

Tennessee will employ a risk analysis instrument to differentiate its efforts to monitor LEA implementation and will engage in monitoring activities multiple times per year (pp. 176–80).

<u>Massachusetts</u>, through its Office of Planning and Research, will develop specific plans, benchmarks, and outcomes for key initiatives and monitor implementation to ensure that LEAs are on track (p. 38). The state also plans to support districts in conducting formal evaluations of implementation.

New Mexico describes a well-constructed system for monitoring LEA implementation with an emphasis on establishing clear metrics and feedback loops at the outset of implementation and regular progress checks along the way, with multiple opportunities to correct course as needed (pp. 47–48). The state is leveraging its existing administrative data, which is automatically submitted daily by LEAs and schools, to regularly monitor leading indicators and ensure real-time continuous improvement.

<u>New Jersey</u> will take advantage of its new chief intervention officer and integrated school performance reporting system to increase the scope and effectiveness of its LEA monitoring functions (pp. 35–38).

Kentucky leverages an online platform to streamline and make transparent LEA and school planning processes as well as to support an ongoing state monitoring process. Further, because the planning process begins with a review of the effectiveness of the prior year's plan, the state can ensure monitoring focuses on continuously improving each LEA's growth areas (p. 89).

<u>North Carolina</u>'s process streamlines monitoring by focusing on four strands common across multiple federal programs: stakeholder involvement; governance, administration, and funding; program quality; and accountability and reporting. The state's approach focuses on leveraging the monitoring function to build relationships and collaboratively solve problems (p. 129).

West Virginia's comprehensive system of monitoring and technical support leverages existing administrative as well as newly collected data to perform predictive analysis of identified schools' and districts' performance levels related to areas of programmatic strength and weaknesses (pp. 44–45); analytics are used to inform monthly monitoring meetings focused on implementation of the state's strategic plan as well as LEAs' plans (p. 82).

Continuous Improvement

Build state and local learning systems that promote the use of evidence and continuous improvement in policies and practices focused on improving student outcomes.

What ESSA Says

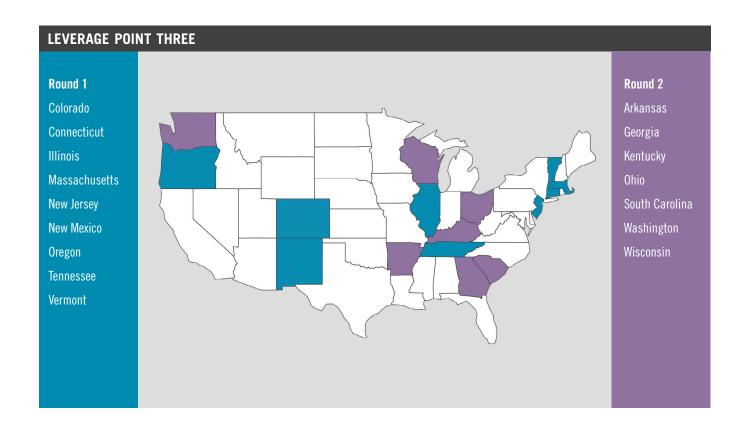
States must plan for periodic review and revision of SEA and LEA ESSA plans to reflect changes in strategies and programs. States must then submit significant changes to their plans for approval by the USED.

Why This Matters

Leaders at all levels should acknowledge that we rarely if ever get everything right the first time. By adopting a learning orientation, states can position themselves to learn from mistakes, improve as they go, and recognize promising practices that can be studied and scaled.

What Leading States Could Do

- Establish routines for continuous improvement that review ESSA plans more frequently than periodically.
- Adopt and adapt best practices for promoting continuous improvement, such as data collection, feedback loops, collection of information about implementation, methods of analysis to examine effectiveness and reflect on outcomes, and the identification of challenges and potential solutions.
- Differentiate continuous improvement based on both programmatic factors (e.g., size of investment, quality of implementation, impact to date) and LEA-specific factors (e.g., performance, history of noncompliance, size, federal allocation).



Sixteen states are embracing continuous improvement as a key component of their ESSA theory of action, although even among the strongest plans the focus is primarily on supporting continuous improvement at the district and school level, with little attention paid to how states themselves can engage in continuous improvement routines.

Promising State Practices

Key:

Round 1 State
Round 2 State

<u>Illinois</u> will foster continuous improvement by taking an internal look at its organization and reorienting its resources to ensure that the SEA can provide differentiated technical assistance to LEAs and programs that need capacity. The state will develop feedback loops with LEAs to forecast problems early and often and amend LEA plans if needed (pp. 51–53).

In <u>Vermont</u>, every school and LEA, regardless of status, is required to submit a continuous improvement plan and will receive assistance from the SEA in implementing high-quality improvement science cycles and identifying opportunities to leverage quality interventions (pp. 68–70). <u>Kentucky</u> is taking a similar approach (p. 89).

<u>Tennessee</u> plans to conduct evaluations of the fastest improving schools to continuously inform and strengthen implementation of interventions and supports for all schools in improvement status (pp. 117–24). Similarly, <u>Colorado</u> plans to evaluate the effectiveness of the statewide school improvement system and widely disseminate results to LEAs and schools (p. 71).

Connecticut developed a tiered system of support for districts that fosters continuous improvement by adjusting the frequency of progress monitoring and level of supports offered based on need and performance against goals and targets. The state is developing a rubric for LEA plan approval and ongoing monitoring and evaluation (pp. 20–26).

Massachusetts's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) will lead the state's efforts to monitor and continuously learn from and strengthen statewide and local ESSA implementation. The OPR developed and is supporting LEAs to use a model for district planning and implementation that has three basic steps: creating a plan, aligning systems to the plan, and implementing the plan (including evaluating and monitoring progress) (pp. 38–39).

New Jersey describes a plan to leverage its chief strategic alignment officer to regularly monitor and evaluate state and local implementation, with a focus on ensuring the state sees a high return on educational investments in the form of improved impact on schools and students (pp. 35–40).

Ohio is developing a suite of easily accessible tools and resources for its LEAs and schools as part of an overarching strategic approach to implementing an aligned, evidence-based system of continuous improvement. All LEAs will be placed into a statewide Continuum of Support that will dictate their access to differentiated supports such as on-site LEA- and/ or school-level performance reviews, development of data quality protocols, and access to Improvement Liaisons designed to provide at-risk LEAs with evidence-based school improvement coaching (p. 47).

<u>South Carolina</u> is instituting a new set of indicators of quality in the form of evidenceand research-based rubrics to inform statewide, programmatic, and local selfassessment of progress toward successful delivery of strategic initiatives. All LEAs, in addition to programmatic SEA leaders, will engage in these regular systems reviews informed by data collected and warehoused centrally (pp. 2–3).

Continuous improvement is at the core of several state plans. New Mexico is leveraging its existing statewide data system to provide increasingly frequent and automated reports that are made available to LEAs and schools and to identify areas of improvement and track progress (pp. 53–54). Wisconsin provides all schools with data systems and resources, including WISExplore, a data inquiry process that supports school districts in engaging in continuous improvement planning to better serve all students (p. 59). Arkansas is focusing on driving continuous improvement at the LEA level, which the state views as the primary lever of change; there is also an explicit commitment to continuously improve the state ESSA plan itself (p. 59). Finally, Georgia is shifting its approach as an SEA from a focus on compliance to a more balanced system oriented around its Systems for Continuous Improvement framework for solving problems through improvement cycles (p. 48).

<u>Oregon</u> will require all LEAs to create district-level continuous improvement plans and participate in an annual implementation and progress review. Oregon's annual review of district-level data will be used to develop and recommend adjustments to plans and certain interventions proactively, and reviews will be cross-office and aimed at building coherent support across the department (pp. 22–24).

<u>Washington</u>'s whole-agency tiered approach to continuous improvement is designed to position LEAs to request services of other LEAs and to learn from them through tiered supports such as affinity groups based on shared successes or challenges, networked improvement communities, and multidistrict research partnerships to explore, evaluate, and address common problems of practice (pp. 52–54).

Allocating School Improvement Funds

Incentivize the best use of evidence in allocating federal school improvement funds to LEAs.

What ESSA Says

States must allocate at least 95 percent of the state's school improvement set-aside to LEAs with schools identified for comprehensive and targeted school improvement to help fund their support and improvement plans, ensuring grants "are of sufficient size to enable [an LEA] to effectively implement selected strategies."

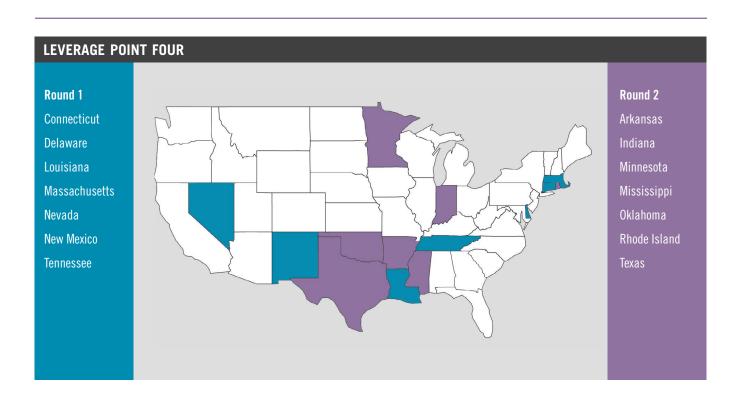
Why This Matters

Divvying up pots of money can be politically challenging, but given the stakes for students in these low-performing schools and the uneven track record of prior school improvement efforts, states should give careful thought as to how best to ensure these funds are used well.

What Leading States Could Do

Ensure funds go toward what works by:

- Awarding funds competitively based at least in part on whether the proposed use
 of evidence-based interventions is supported by the strongest level of evidence
 available.
- Awarding funds competitively as above but with additional preference points for plans that commit to strong systems of continuous improvement and/or propose to set aside program funds for evaluation.
- Award funds through a hybrid approach that provides smaller planning year grants via a formula and larger implementation grants via a competition.
- Base grant renewal decisions at least in part on the success in implementing evidence-based interventions.



Fourteen states allocated school improvement funds by conditioning grant awards at least in part on the basis of LEAs' and schools' plans to use evidence-based interventions and/or the strength of the evidence supporting their plans.

Promising State Practices

Key:

Round 1 State
Round 2 State

New Mexico plans to distribute school improvement funds via a competitive grant application, based in part on the districts' demonstration of alignment of resources to the state's school improvement strategies (leadership, differentiated support and accountability, talent management, and instructional infrastructure) (pp. 102–3).

<u>Delaware</u> plans to use a hybrid formula/competition approach to allocate school improvement funds. LEAs that apply for the competitive funds will be prioritized in part on their commitment to evidence-based strategies (p. 61). <u>Tennessee</u> (p. 119), <u>Connecticut</u> (p. 46), <u>Massachusetts</u> (p. 65), <u>Indiana</u> (pp. 54–55), <u>Oklahoma</u> (p. 82), and <u>Texas</u> (p. 68) are taking similar approaches.

Nevada plans to award school improvement funds competitively to CSI (comprehensive support and improvement) and TSI (targeted support and improvement) schools and will give priority to those that emphasize the analysis of data for decision making and that choose a state-approved school improvement strategy (p. 67).

Louisiana plans to award a significant portion of the 7 percent set-aside for school improvement to make competitive grants to districts with plans for school redesign supported by the strongest evidence and to districts that include in their plans a description of the monitoring process they will use. From among eligible applications, the state will prioritize those that propose to work with proven external providers with a track record of impact (p. 67). Like Louisiana, **Rhode Island** is reserving half of its 7 percent set-aside to make competitive grants to districts with strong plans for bold, evidence-based school redesign (pp. 47–50).

<u>Mississippi</u>'s CSI schools must reserve at least 20 percent of their normal schoolwide Title I allocation (in addition to any school improvement funds they receive) for interventions supported by the top three tiers of evidence (p. 35).

<u>Minnesota</u> will base its decision whether to renew school improvement grants each year in part on the results of program evaluations of how effectively LEAs and schools are using their school improvement funds (pp. 3–7 of the Title I, Part A: School Support section).*

<u>Arkansas</u> will allocate its funding via formula, but any remaining funds will, in part, be used for a competitive process to support, among other things, the extension or scaling of effective evidence-based interventions (p. 54).

^{*}Minnesota's ESSA plan restarts the page numbering at the beginning of each section. All page references in this report refer to the same section of the plan: Title I, Part A: School Support.

LEA Application for School Improvement Funds

Design LEA applications for school improvement funds to emphasize the use of evidence and continuous improvement.

Says

What ESSA States must describe their plan for developing a school improvement application that includes the elements required by ESSA, including how the LEA will develop and implement CSI (comprehensive support and improvement) plans and support TSI (targeted support and improvement) schools in doing so; how the LEA will monitor implementation; and the "rigorous review process" the LEA will use with potential external partners.

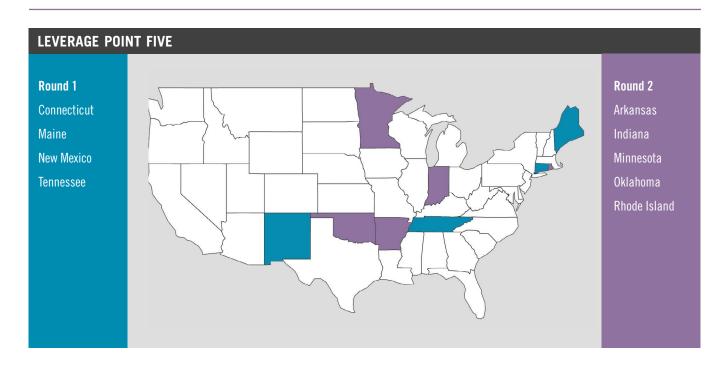
Why This Matters

Designing and reviewing applications for school improvement funds are a critical leverage point for states, especially those with strong traditions of local control that reduce those states' ability to drive change through other leverage points.

What Leading **States** Could Do

Advance the thoughtful use of evidence in school improvement by requiring LEAs to include additional elements in their applications, such as:

- For the selected interventions, supporting evidence that draws on research base and results of needs assessment.
- Description of plans to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, especially those supported by Level 4 evidence.
- A commitment to conducting an LEA-level needs assessment (in addition to the required school-level needs assessment) to identify gaps in LEA capacity to support implementation, collect data, and support use of evidence and continuous improvement.
- Plans to sustain funded activities after the grant period ends.



Nine states include sufficient detail on the design of their applications for school improvement funds and on how, through the application process, they will require and/or incentivize the use of evidence.

Promising State Practices

Key: Round 1 State Round 2 State New Mexico plans to require LEAs applying for school improvement funds to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment that includes data analysis, self-assessment to understand root causes, an action plan based on the results, and a system for monitoring and implementation that includes clear metrics, feedback, and observation to track progress (pp. 105–6). LEA applications will emphasize the use of evidence-based school improvement programs. Minnesota is taking a similar approach (pp. 6, 19).

Connecticut (pp. 42–47) and **Oklahoma** (p. 84) plan to create consolidated applications for LEAs to apply for school improvement funds that will emphasize continuous improvement and evidence-based strategies, as well as a rubric to evaluate and approve plans.

Tennessee plans to require all identified schools to complete a comprehensive needs assessment that asks districts to reflect on student achievement, implementation of professional development, the performance of subgroups, and the effectiveness of parent and community engagement. Based on these data points, the districts are to identify three to five priorities for planning that drive goals and action planning (p. 172). LEAs will submit plans for competitive funds which will be evaluated in part by the evidence base of cited strategies, with a competitive preference for schools that include research from ESSA's top three tiers.

Much like Tennessee, <u>Rhode Island</u> will require identified schools to connect their school improvement plan to the results of a comprehensive needs assessment and be informed by new LEA Community Advisory Boards. Plans must include interventions tied to identified needs that adhere to the top three tiers of evidence, clear annual and interim performance metrics for evaluating success, and a locally developed plan for monitoring and evaluating impact (p. 44).

Maine's LEA application for school improvement funds will require districts to demonstrate how they will identify research- and evidence-based interventions (supported by evidence from Tiers 1–3) aligned with individual needs of students and how the school will use a monitoring process for targeted interventions to ensure fidelity and effectiveness (pp. 23–24).

<u>Arkansas</u> will require all applications to align with the statewide theory of action focused on continuous cycles of inquiry. Applications must include, among other things, plans for progress monitoring, routines for continuous improvement, and sustainability plans wherever external partners are involved in supporting identified schools (p. 55).

<u>Indiana</u>'s application is aligned with the state's evidence-based school improvement framework and connects to the results of school-level needs assessments. The SEA will also facilitate strategic external partnerships, vetting providers for prior success and evaluating their impact on identified schools. A supplementary and aligned district-level application will be used with LEAs that are working with multiple schools (pp. 54–57).

Monitoring and Evaluating School Improvement

Use data and feedback loops to monitor and continuously improve implementation of school improvement plans and evaluate the impact on student outcomes.

What ESSA Says

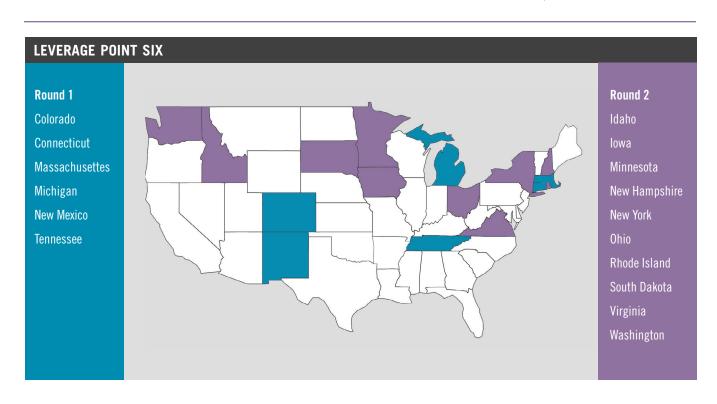
States must engage in "monitoring and evaluating the use of [school improvement] funds by local educational agencies" and allows states to use part of the (5%) state school improvement set-aside to carry out these responsibilities.

Why This Matters

As a field, there is still a lot to learn about what works to improve persistently underperforming schools. States, together with their districts and schools, can play a critical role in building the evidence base by regularly and rigorously evaluating the impact of their efforts.

What Leading States Could Do

- Monitor and evaluate LEA implementation as required but also compile and disseminate results on a regular basis so other LEAs and schools benefit from lessons learned.
- Include formative, forward-looking evaluations of implementation to complement summative, backward-looking impact evaluations and support LEAs in building their capacity to implement systems of continuous improvement.
- Differentiate monitoring and support based on need.
- Adopt a learning agenda by taking advantage of resources such as Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) and research-practice partnerships to rigorously examine the impact of interventions coupled with a robust continuous improvement process.
- Encourage, incentivize, or require LEAs to invest in low-cost but rigorous studies (e.g., randomized controlled trials [RCTs]) on the front end of their improvement efforts.



Sixteen states describe robust approaches to monitoring implementation of school improvement plans, including regular data reviews and differentiation based on school characteristics and need, although even among these sixteen, only four establish how they will evaluate the use of school improvement funds statewide as a mechanism to deepen understanding of what works and build the evidence base for school improvement.

Promising State Practices

Key:

Round 1 State Round 2 State <u>Michigan</u> plans to assign to all CSI schools a state-approved implementation facilitator who will monitor the implementation of the LEA's plan. LEAs will also participate in state-directed partnership meetings that will involve ongoing support for monitoring and evaluating evidence-based interventions (pp. 34–35).

<u>Tennessee</u> has established the Tennessee Education Research Alliance, a research-practice partnership with Vanderbilt University, to study the issue of supporting the use of evidence in low-performing schools (p. 131).

Using a state-developed rubric for ongoing evaluation and program review, **Connecticut** will conduct interim progress checks with increasing support to districts based on the results, which will result in increased interventions if goals and targets are not met (p. 23). Similarly, **Virginia** will conduct thrice-annual progress reviews and use results to inform next steps and, where relevant, the selection of new evidence-based interventions (pp. 28–29).

New Mexico developed a comprehensive and differentiated monitoring plan for both its CSI and TSI schools. For CSI schools, this will include state-led on-site visits twice annually, with joint state-district progress reviews in between (a monthly touchpoint), followed by a state-created status report for the district and principal. For TSI schools, the state will augment district-led monitoring of school improvement efforts, which will follow the same six-step process as CSI schools via desktop audits (pp. 103–6).

Massachusetts has a specific and well-established office, the Office of Planning and Research (OPR), that functions like a delivery unit, undertaking performance management work for key strategic projects, including school turnaround. The OPR is already in place, and it appears to be central to how Massachusetts will oversee implementation of ESSA as well as continue to conduct ongoing and rigorous evaluations of its key school improvement strategies, which to date have effectively helped to inform, refine, and strengthen school improvement efforts across the state (pp. 39–40).

<u>Colorado</u> plans to leverage its Unified Improvement Planning (UIP) process to shift from planning as an event to planning as a critical component of continuous improvement. In addition to consolidating plans and monitoring, the UIP process requires all schools and districts to publicly post and gather feedback on their plans. Colorado also commits to evaluating statewide efforts to improve low-performing schools, although they do not detail what this evaluation will entail and whether it will be an internal activity or external partnership (p. 93).

In <u>Idaho</u>, each improvement plan is monitored and evaluated by a State Technical Assistance Team (STAT) comprised of representatives from the SEA, state board of education, the LEA, and the particular school. Among other things, the STAT engages in iterative, data-driven continuous improvement cycles that combine progress monitoring of each school's improvement plan with adjustments to strategy. The process eventually will lead to evaluations of the strategies' effectiveness (p. 40).

<u>lowa</u> will ensure each identified school engages in a monthly action plan data review with school, LEA, and SEA staff focused on both implementation and outcome data related to the evidence-based interventions underway. Each summer all CSI schools will also participate in a progress monitoring institute to review successes and areas for growth (p. 64).

<u>Minnesota</u> has integrated a robust monitoring and evaluation system throughout its school improvement system at both the school level and the regional support center level. A new auditing process will streamline compliance reviews with improvement processes (pp. 2–6, 19).

Because <u>New Hampshire</u> expects its LEAs and schools will implement innovative strategies and/or interventions supported only by promising evidence, the state will require rigorous impact evaluations (p. 53).

New York will leverage its monitoring role and annual process for renewing grants by conducting additional needs assessments during each year of an improvement plan's implementation, with the goal of driving timely course corrections and technical assistance at the school and LEA levels (p. 84).

<u>Ohio</u>'s Improvement Process (OIP) will continue to be used as a framework to support LEAs and schools to develop, implement, and evaluate strategic improvement plans. The OIP will be coupled with enhanced SEA research capacity aimed at further supporting LEAs and schools in developing and carrying out performance monitoring—a marked shift from a previous emphasis on compliance monitoring. Ohio has a number of research partnerships in place, including a notable one with the Center for Education Policy Research's Proving Ground initiative, which is designed to help schools and LEAs implement quick, rigorous evaluations of interventions (p. 49).

Rhode Island's monitoring and evaluation plans extend to all LEAs, regardless of the status and quality of their school improvement efforts, and will include tri-annual monitoring meetings focused on assessing progress toward goals and mandatory involvement of new LEA Community Advisory Boards (p. 47).

<u>South Dakota</u> plans to support annual "data digs" in CSI and TSI schools focused on leveraging data collected through monitoring and program evaluation to "shed a strategic light" on trends and surface successes; the state will work with schools and LEAs to update plans in accordance to findings (p. 43).

Washington is establishing a cross-agency design team to review progress of identified schools relative to their submitted improvement plans, document access to the state's tiered technical assistance and professional learning, and examine the overall effectiveness of state-provided support. Washington also plans to publish case studies highlighting identified schools with demonstrable progress so that effective use of best practices and improved student outcomes can be implemented elsewhere (pp. 53–55).

Technical Assistance and Support System

Design a state technical assistance and support system for school improvement that promotes evidence-based decision making and continuous improvement.

What ESSA Says

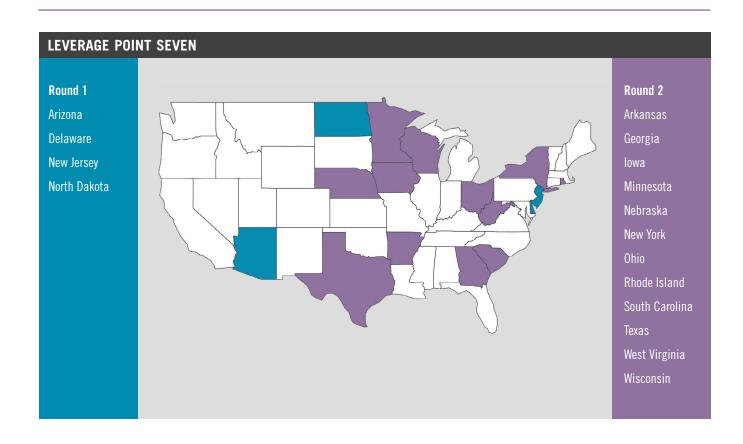
States must provide technical assistance to LEAs "serving a significant number" of CSI or TSI schools.

Why This Matters

For the vast majority of districts and schools, ESSA's focus on evidence-based interventions will be new, and states should prioritize building capacity to select, implement, and evaluate evidence-based interventions in their technical assistance plans.

What Leading States Could Do

- Provide statewide technical assistance for qualifying LEAs that includes support
 for developing and implementing comprehensive improvement plans, supporting
 schools in developing and implementing targeted improvement plans, and
 developing or using tools related to school-level needs assessments and the
 selection of evidence-based interventions. For more details and options for state
 leadership in these areas, see sections 8, 9, and 10 in <u>Leverage Points</u>.
- Use the results from evaluations to identify best practices and exemplars among LEAs and schools engaging in evidence-based practices.
- Audit (and revise as needed) existing technical assistance approaches, providers, and resources to ensure alignment with ESSA, particularly with the law's definition of evidence-based.



Sixteen states provide technical assistance specifically focused on implementing the key evidence-based provisions in ESSA.

Promising State Practices

Key:

Round 1 State
Round 2 State

Several states are designing multitiered systems of support that focus in part on supporting the thoughtful use of evidence, data, and continuous improvement. For example, North Dakota's system includes five components: assessment, data-driven decision making, multilevel evidence-based instruction, infrastructure and support mechanisms, and fidelity and evaluation. CSI and TSI schools will also be assigned a liaison from the state's School Improvement and Intervention Office, as well as a partner success manager through the School Improvement Network (p. 76). Similar approaches are planned in South Carolina (pp. 66–71) and Arkansas (pp. 54–58), which includes a focus on support at the LEA level.

<u>Georgia</u>'s approach includes a "toolbox" of "effective practices, processes, and supports" aligned with the state's improvement framework and intensive support (including partnerships) to help address equity gaps (pp. 48–51).

Arizona will provide robust and differentiated support for the development and implementation of LEA plans, including assistance with the evidence-based decision-making process, the use of high-quality data, the implementation of evidence-based LEA and school systems and structures, and midcourse adjustments (pp. 32–34).

New Jersey will provide differentiated technical assistance through a three-tiered structure: level 1 for all schools (available resources); level 2 for LEAs with TSI schools (opt-in); and level 3 for LEAs with CSI schools (mandatory). All levels include technical assistance on key points such as needs assessments, improvement planning, use of evidence-based interventions, and evaluation (pp. 84–86). lowa (pp. 63–65) is taking a similar approach.

Among the technical assistance offerings in <u>Delaware</u>, LEAs will receive on-site technical assistance, off-site networking sessions, embedded professional learning, virtual learning experiences, guidance documents, and templates to support needs assessment, improvement planning, and monitoring. Delaware will collaborate with LEAs and regional assistance centers to develop a resource hub with regionally implemented, evidence-based strategies (pp. 62–63).

Nebraska (pp. 57, 116) and New York (pp. 88–89) are using networked improvement communities or other cohort approaches to support implementation of similar evidence-based interventions and/or to connect LEAs or schools tackling similar problems with different evidence-based approaches. In the case of New York, the state will also differentiate its technical assistance over time depending on how each school is progressing during the implementation phase (pp. 71–72).

<u>Minnesota</u>'s comprehensive and differentiated approach to building capacity in LEAs and schools is deeply grounded in implementation science (using the five active implementation frameworks from the National Implementation Research Network [NIRN]); capacity building is supported by a system of Regional Centers of Excellence (pp. 7–9). <u>Wisconsin</u> is also working with NIRN to design a system of effective school improvement strategies based on implementation science (pp. 52–53).

<u>Ohio</u>'s state-supported Peer to Peer Improvement Network will encourage partnership and collaboration for educators across LEAs to develop and test solutions for common challenges. In addition to this network, Ohio is leveraging its 16 regional state support teams to examine LEA- and school-level data, assist LEAs in the development of needs assessments and the identification of evidence-based strategies to address those needs, and provide professional development and other supports (p. 63).

Rhode Island's School Improvement Resource Hub will serve as a central repository for state-offered technical assistance, including support for assembling a plan that includes a coherent suite of evidence-based school improvement strategies tied to local need, help to build and engage Community Advisory Boards, and match-making with vetted third-party providers with proven records of accomplishment (p. 44).

<u>Texas</u> will deploy a continuum of technical assistance that includes, based on need, access to a resource library and toolkits for school improvement activities, access to a statewide Center for School Improvement, partnership with vetted school improvement and/or transformation partners, and resources to strengthen parent and community engagement. Notably, Texas emphasizes its Lone Star Governance training program, designed to build local school board capacity to effectively support and oversee implementation of local school improvement plans (p. 30).

<u>West Virginia</u> is organizing school networks around each of the statewide accountability indicators with a specific focus on providing LEAs with evidence-based interventions; the state is also requiring CSI and TSI schools to be matched with a mentoring "statistical neighbor" to share strategies and experiences that promote improvement (p. 48).

Technical Assistance on Needs Assessment

Ensure LEAs and schools conduct high-quality needs assessments that drive the thoughtful use of evidence in improvement plans.

What ESSA Says

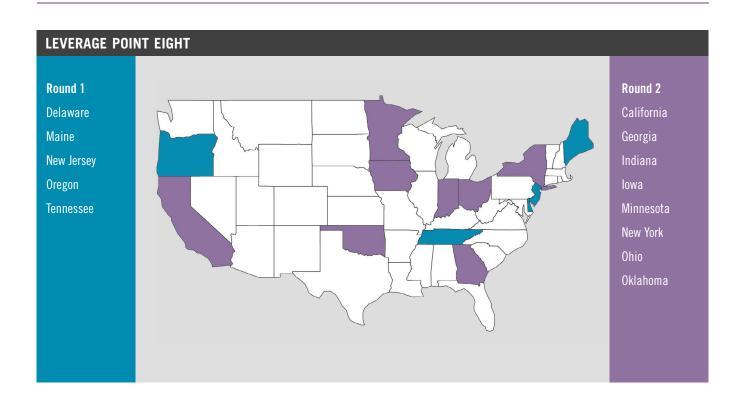
States must ensure LEAs conduct their own school-level needs assessment in every identified CSI school, using monitoring/auditing to ensure compliance.

Why This Matters

A well-designed and executed needs assessment lays the foundation for a strong improvement plan with interventions that are not only evidence-based but have been proven effective for similar students and under similar circumstances.

What Leading States Could Do

- Create or adopt a model needs assessment that the SEA then requires LEAs
 to use or offers to LEAs as an option. The model should include a process for
 engaging stakeholders, deeply examining student academic performance, and
 identifying students' and schools' unmet needs; at the district's discretion, it
 should include performance on locally selected measures.
- Require that school improvement plans and, more specifically, selected evidencebased interventions tie directly to the needs assessment results.
- Encourage the inclusion of measures supported by research that demonstrates that they are meaningful, measurable, and malleable (e.g., chronic absenteeism versus average daily attendance).
- Create a complementary LEA-level needs assessment.



Thirteen states described strong plans to leverage the needs assessment process to ensure the development of improvement plans that are truly responsive to the challenges facing particular schools.

Promising State Practices

Key: Round 1 State Round 2 State In <u>Tennessee</u>, as part of the planning process all districts complete a needs assessment that asks districts to reflect on student achievement, implementation of professional development, the performance of subgroups, and the effectiveness of parent and community engagement. Districts then identify three to five priorities for planning that drive goals and action planning (p. 172).

In <u>Maine</u>, all CSI and TSI schools will receive a school improvement coach to facilitate a needs assessment and improvement plan (p. 45).

<u>New Jersey</u> will create needs assessment resources, templates, and, for CSI schools, intensive coaching on conducting high-quality needs assessments, including differentiated needs assessments for CSI and TSI settings (pp. 82–86).

Delaware plans to provide direct support to LEAs and schools in conducting needs assessments that involve community members in new and more inclusive ways and, as part of that support, will develop templates and guides for connecting the results to well-matched evidence-based practices (pp. 63–64). **Indiana** (pp. 53–54), **Iowa** (pp. 63–65), and **Minnesota** (pp. 6, 13–14) are taking similar approaches. **California**'s approach shares these elements but focuses more on support for LEA-designed assessments (pp. 48–49).

<u>Oregon</u> is investing deeply in building the capacity of their districts to support local school improvement efforts by, among other things: (1) requiring LEAs selected for partnership with the state to undergo a "readiness and screening protocol" which assesses local context, analyzes local reporting measures, and develops priority improvement areas; (2) conducting evidence-based root-cause analyses through broad stakeholder engagement; and (3) supporting the development of statewide syntheses of evidence-based practices (pp. 57–59).

<u>Georgia</u>'s new comprehensive needs assessment streamlines what has in the past been a duplicative process under different federal programs. The new approach is tightly aligned to the state's overall school improvement approach and also includes an LEA-level version of the assessment (p. 47).

New York's well-established Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE) will inform the development of CSI and TSI improvement plans and support improvement efforts throughout implementation via an annual progress needs assessment. The DTSDE on-site program reviews not only gather qualitative data for these assessments but also result in timely, actionable feedback and technical assistance (pp. 75–79, 87).

Districts in <u>Ohio</u> with CSI and TSI schools will, in addition to undergoing school-level needs assessments, participate in a comprehensive LEA-level review that more deeply analyzes system functions and is designed to help LEAs and their schools improve performance by analyzing current practices against effective evidence- and research-based interventions (p. 51).

<u>Oklahoma</u> will require CSI and TSI schools to complete a state-developed needs assessment tool and process based on a set of research-based indicators identified through a multiyear study of both high- and low-achieving schools across the state (pp. 78–79).

Technical Assistance on Selecting Interventions

Support LEAs and schools in maximizing the thoughtful use of evidence to increase the likelihood of improving student outcomes.

What ESSA Says

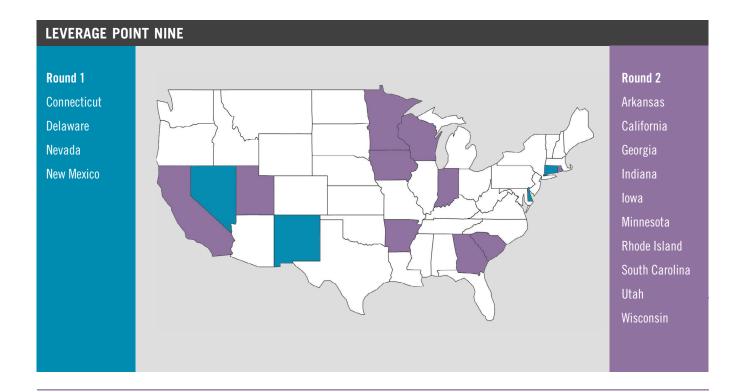
States must provide sufficient guidance to LEAs such that all CSI and TSI plans include at least one evidence-based intervention and that all CSI and TSI plans supported by federal school improvement grants include at least one intervention supported by the top three levels of evidence.

Why This Matters

By broadening the definition of *evidence-based practices*, ESSA provides more flexibility on how policy and programming decisions are made while preserving the value of research-based practices. With that flexibility comes responsibility by states to ensure district and school leaders have access to and select approaches that are shown to work best and are tied to local needs.

What Leading States Could Do

- Encourage (or require) the selection of interventions that are supported by
 evidence from a sample population or setting that overlaps with the population
 or setting of the school to be served and by the strongest level of evidence that is
 available and appropriate.
- Establish a protocol for selecting evidence-based interventions. Support LEAs (for CSI) and schools (for TSI) in following the protocol to ensure their selections rely on the strongest available evidence and best meet the specific needs and context of the school in question.
- Support better decision making by fostering networks of LEAs (or schools) or by providing regionally based support through SEA support teams or other intermediaries.
- Ensure LEAs and schools are aware of and have access to existing databases, clearinghouses, and guidance documents that outline processes for reviewing and selecting interventions on the basis of their evidence and relevance to local context and need.
- Develop a list of vetted, evidence-based interventions that is dynamic and informed by ongoing research and evaluation locally and nationally.



Fourteen states provide more sophisticated supports that, among other things, will help ensure a tight connection between the results of the needs assessment and the identification of strategies.

Promising State Practices

Key:

Round 1 State

Round 2 State

<u>Delaware</u> has designed a system of supports to advance evidence-based strategies in low-performing schools, including assisting LEAs with identifying resources from national databases such as the What Works Clearinghouse. The state will also collaborate with LEAs and regional assistance centers to develop a resource hub that aggregates regionally implemented, evidence-based strategies (pp. 62–63).

New Mexico will require CSI and TSI schools to use programs with strong, moderate, or promising levels of evidence and will provide detailed definitions of these levels (p. 105). New Mexico also places an emphasis on selecting interventions that fit with the local context and need and will have regular touchpoints to analyze the impact of selected interventions. Arkansas (pp. 56–58), lowa (pp. 63–65), and Wisconsin (p. 52) are taking similar approaches. Minnesota's approach also emphasizes selecting interventions with the strongest available evidence appropriate to the particular context (pp. 16, 19).

Connecticut is creating guidance and providing support for selecting and implementing evidence-based interventions in six key areas: early learning; school climate; student, family, and community engagement; academics; English language proficiency; and on-track to graduation. This guidance and accompanying resources are intended to be dynamic rather than static and will be updated annually (pp. 44-45). The state is smartly leveraging external support partners such as the U.S. Department of Education–funded State Support Network to help develop its guidance and tools.

Nevada plans to establish and provide technical assistance based on a statewide definition of evidence-based practice and develop a list of state-approved, evidence-based service providers; in addition, the state is taking a strong role in coordinating professional development activities designed to disseminate information about and build local capacity to identify and implement evidence-based practices (pp. 37–38).

<u>California</u> will provide resources, clearinghouses, and guidance to help LEAs make thoughtful choices of evidence-based interventions, with an emphasis on ensuring the selected strategies meet the specific needs and context of the school (p. 49).

<u>Georgia</u> will provide support to LEAs and schools to select appropriate evidence-based interventions that satisfy the following four requirements: research-based, data-informed, responsive to the community, and supportive of the professionalization of educators. The state will provide technical assistance through regional service centers and encourage LEAs and schools to use existing repositories and clearinghouses (p. 80).

For LEAs with high numbers of CSI schools, <u>Indiana</u> will promote thoughtful selections by connecting them with potential partners with a demonstrated track record of success, facilitating site visits to see their interventions in action, and aligning improvement plans to an evidence-based framework (p. 55).

Rhode Island's School Improvement Resource Hub will include a repository of evidence-based strategies; tools and resources to help schools and districts select, implement, and sustain best-fit strategies; and access to preapproved evidence-based school support partners, including LEAs with track records of success (p. 44).

South Carolina has designed a catalog of state-approved evidence-based practices and interventions from which identified schools are required to select based on their tiered level of need and support. Schools and districts will receive support in finding, implementing, and monitoring evidence-based interventions by Transformation Coaches, but the amount and frequency of support—as well as the required level of evidence for interventions—will vary based on the assigned tier (p. 71).

<u>Utah</u>'s newly created cross-department collaborative team on school improvement is tasked with gathering information about and vetting resources on evidence-based practices for inclusion in a state-developed online repository that all districts and schools will access during the school improvement planning and implementation process (pp. 43–45).

Technical Assistance on Lists of Interventions

Design and implement any state-approved lists of evidence-based interventions to ground improvement plans in the best available evidence tailored to local needs and context.

What ESSA Says

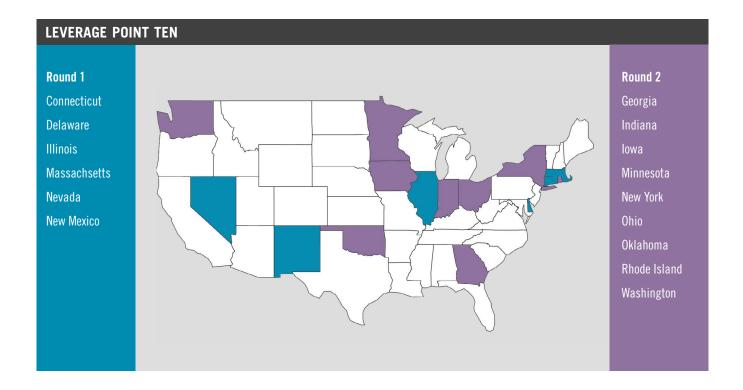
ESSA does not explicitly address a state-approved list of interventions but permits states to "take action to initiate additional improvement" in LEAs with either significant numbers of TSI schools or non-improving CSI schools and allows states to "establish alternative evidence-based State determined strategies that can be used by local educational agencies to assist" CSI schools. In other words, states are permitted to create a list but are not required to.

Why This Matters

States can significantly reduce the burden on LEAs and schools to locate and select evidence-based interventions that match their local context and need by ensuring they have access to comprehensive and well-curated lists from which to choose.

Why Leading States Could Do

- Rather than creating a list, focus on providing effective technical assistance with how to select evidence-based interventions (see Leverage Point 9) and take advantage of existing databases, clearinghouses, and guidance documents that outline processes for reviewing and selecting interventions on the basis of their evidence and relevance to local context and need.
- Create a hybrid list that includes interventions from an existing external list
 and additional interventions identified by the SEA. Consider opportunities to
 inventory and evaluate the evidence base supporting current interventions
 being implemented at the state level and use the results to inform the list.
- Collaborate with other states to develop a list that leverages collective resources and capacity and results in a more comprehensive set of interventions from which LEAs and schools can or must choose.
- If an optional list is created using any of the above approaches, establish
 incentives for LEAs and schools to select interventions on the list. For
 example, the SEA may be able to provide implementation support,
 communities of practice, or even discounted prices for state-approved
 interventions.
- Ensure that lists are coupled with support to help select evidence-based interventions that will best meet local needs.



Fifteen states have strong plans to ensure that their LEAs and schools have access to lists or other repositories of evidence-based interventions.

Promising State Practices

Key:

Round 1 State Round 2 State Nevada will include a menu of evidence-based, prioritized interventions in its LEA application for school improvement funds. If a district selects from this menu, the state will expedite its review of their application; if a district includes an intervention or strategy that is not from the menu, it will be more deeply reviewed. The state has coupled this menu with training for school leaders on how to identify evidence-based interventions tied to local need and challenges and how to connect with some of the external partners that provide support that meets the ESSA standard for evidence-based practices (pp. 35–38).

In <u>Illinois</u> CSI schools are required to use IL EMPOWER, a state-developed system of approved partners who provide interventions and services, when selecting interventions and partners to include in their school improvement plans. Provider partners are approved in part on the basis of their evidence of success and their supports and services fall within three "foundational drivers of improvement": governance and management, curriculum and instruction, and culture and climate. To complement IL EMPOWER, the state is also compiling a list of resources to support districts and schools in selecting evidence-based practices and providers (pp. 104–6).

<u>Massachusetts</u> developed a list of evidence-based approaches based on prior work in the state on school improvement that has had a demonstrated impact on student outcomes. The list of approaches was developed with an emphasis on the strongest available evidence from Tiers 1 and 2 (pp. 65–66).

Rather than develop a static list, <u>Delaware</u> will collaborate with LEAs and regional assistance centers to develop a resource hub with regionally implemented, evidence-based strategies and will focus on identifying evidence-based strategies in four key statewide priority areas (pp. 62–63).

New Mexico (p. 106), Minnesota (p. 14), New York (p. 85), Oklahoma (p. 82), Rhode Island (p. 44) and Iowa (pp. 64–65) will develop and post nonexhaustive, state-approved lists of evidence-based interventions from which LEAs and schools may choose. Improvement plans with interventions not on the state-approved lists must include demonstrations that the selected interventions meet ESSA's evidence requirements.

Connecticut will create evidence-based guidance in six key areas that LEAs can use to select evidence-based interventions that meet their needs (see Leverage Point 9 for more detail). The state will also create a rubric for evaluating additional, LEA-proposed evidence-based interventions (pp. 44–45).

In constructing its own list of state-approved evidence-based interventions, Indiana will illustrate how and where particular interventions have been successfully implemented within the state (pp. 56–57). Furthermore, Indiana, Georgia (pp. 80–81), and Washington (pp. 60–61) also have explicit plans to review and update their lists regularly as the evidence base grows, including both refinements of existing evidence-based interventions and new evidence of effectiveness for innovative but previously untested approaches.

<u>Ohio</u> is creating an online clearinghouse that will provide LEAs and schools with a menu of evidence-based strategies and programs as well as a framework for approval of evidence-based strategies from which they may select (they are not required to do so). The state also encourages LEAs and schools to engage in ongoing efforts to generate rigorous evidence in support of locally developed interventions (independently or in partnership with researchers) as well as to look to other sources as long as they meet the requirement of the state's evidence-based framework (pp. 48–52).

Non-Exiting Schools

Promote more and/or more thoughtful use of evidence as part of the SEA's "more rigorous action" for schools that do not exit improvement status.

What ESSA Says

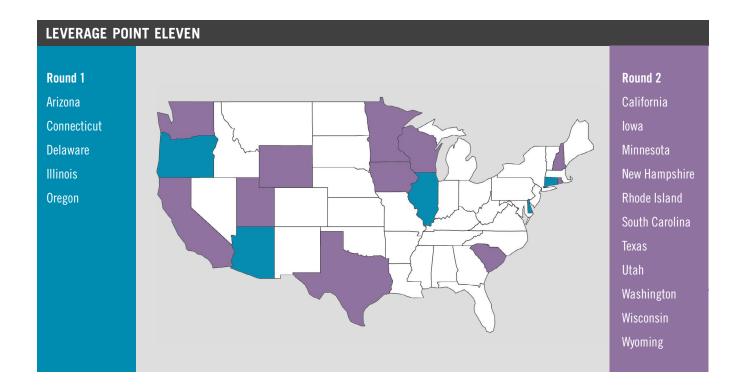
States must take more rigorous actions for non-exiting CSI schools, and districts must take additional actions for non-exiting TSI schools. The law on its own does not necessarily require that these actions relate to the use of evidence.

Why This Matters

The same principles of evidence-based school improvement apply to—and are perhaps even more critical in the context of—persistently underperforming schools. Although the first cohorts of non-exiting schools are multiple years away, all states have an early opportunity to reflect on past school improvement efforts and define their plans for additional, evidence-based support for their most struggling schools.

Why Leading States Could Do

- Define a more rigorous state-determined action for non-exiting CSI schools (or additional action for non-exiting TSI schools) to include a new needs assessment followed by amending the improvement plan to address the reasons the school did not exit improvement status, the results of the new needs assessment, and any concerns with the fidelity or intensity of how interventions were being implemented in the school.
- Further require (or encourage) the amended plan to include additional interventions that are selected by the SEA or required to be selected from a list of evidence-based interventions, are supported by the top two levels of evidence (strong or moderate), and are, to the extent practicable, supported by evidence from a sample population or setting that overlaps with the population or setting of the school.
- Identify one or more evidence-based interventions that will be implemented across the board in all non-exiting CSI schools.
- Establish a "heavy touch" state-led process to ensure the amended CSI plans include one or more evidence-based interventions that are supported by strong or moderate evidence and that respond to the results of the new school-level needs assessment.
- Establish communities of practice that bring together school and LEA leaders to exchange ideas, observe implementation, and give and receive feedback; curate and disseminate lessons learned from LEAs and schools that are beating the odds; provide technical assistance to establish or strengthen continuous improvement routines; or place special emphasis on building LEA capacity.



Sixteen states described an approach for intervening in persistently struggling schools that leverages needs assessments, continuous improvement, and/or rigorous evidence-based interventions.

Promising State Practices

Key: Round 1 State Round 2 State In <u>Arizona</u>, CSI schools that have not exited improvement status after four years will receive intensified supports, including an in-depth needs assessment, a rigorous root-cause analysis, and assistance in identifying new evidence-based interventions that have been successful with similar populations and in similar settings. The school will also write a new plan and receive increased monitoring and support visits (p. 31).

In <u>Illinois</u>, schools that fail to meet exit criteria will receive support in choosing more rigorous and contextually appropriate evidence-based practices. Additionally, CSI schools that fail to meet exit criteria will partner with one of the state's approved partners and will receive support in establishing a stronger monitoring system (pp. 106–7).

As part of its exit criteria, <u>Oregon</u> requires that schools establish improved evidence-based systems and when progress stalls in a school, Oregon will take immediate action to redirect the use of funds toward more evidence-based interventions and conduct a new needs assessment (pp. 59–60).

Delaware will work closely and collaboratively with non-exiting schools and their districts to conduct a new, externally facilitated needs assessment; the results will be combined with deep data analyses and stakeholder input to develop a new school and district improvement plan that includes interventions which have demonstrated impact previously as well as new evidence-based interventions. The plans will also include an evaluation component and support to conduct ongoing reviews of implementation and impact (pp. 63–64). **California** (p. 45) and **Minnesota** (pp. 1–2) are taking similar approaches.

In **Connecticut**, any school identified for comprehensive support failing to meet the state's exit criteria within three years will be required to implement more rigorous, evidence-based interventions with high statistical probability of success in three key statewide priority areas (p. 45).

Rhode Island will require CSI and TSI schools that fail to meet exit criteria to undergo formal school redesign, through which they will choose from one of five evidence-based models. Model selection will be grounded in data and an in-depth analysis of the limitations of previous school improvement efforts (pp. 42–43). Similarly, in Oklahoma (p. 92), Texas (p. 29), and Utah (p. 43), schools that do not exit improvement status will be required to undergo a new comprehensive needs assessment and then select from a more-limited set of state-determined evidence-based interventions tailored to local needs and capacity.

In <u>Washington</u> (pp. 52–53) and <u>New Hampshire</u> (p. 51), non-exiting schools will be required to undergo a new comprehensive needs assessment and use the results to amend their improvement plans to (1) address reasons for failing to meet exit criteria, including whether interventions were implemented with fidelity and quality; (2) continue addressing any previously identified or new resource inequities; and (3) include additional evidence-based interventions supported by strong or moderate levels of evidence. Similarly, <u>South Carolina</u> (p. 70) and <u>Wyoming</u> (p. 26) will require CSI schools that fail to meet exit criteria to amend their improvement plans to include evidence-based interventions supported by moderate or strong evidence.

<u>lowa</u> will require non-exiting schools to implement a state-approved evidencebased intervention and align its state-supported professional learning resources toward the successful implementation of those interventions (p. 62).

<u>Wisconsin</u> will employ a team trained in implementation science to conduct an external program evaluation to identify why current improvement strategies are not working for non-exiting CSI schools. This evaluation will then inform a school-specific, customized improvement plan with new requirements and the identification of additional supports needed for successful implementation (pp. 49–50).

Additional Action for Certain LEAs

Prioritize evidence use and continuous improvement when exercising extraordinary state authorities to intervene in LEAs unable to improve their lowest-performing schools.

What ESSA Says

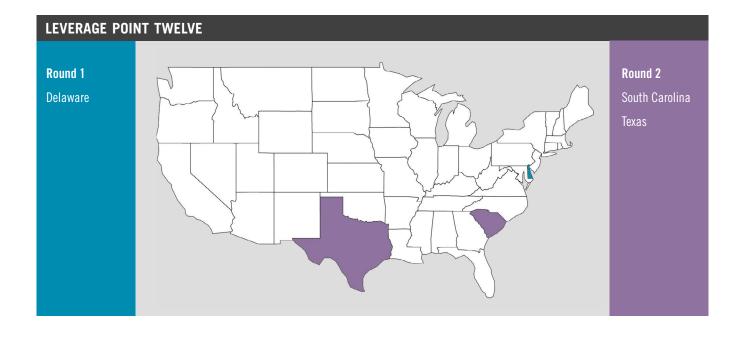
States are permitted—but not required—to "take action to initiate additional improvement" in districts with a "significant number" of CSI schools that do not meet the state's exit criteria or in districts with a "significant number" of TSI schools.

Why This Matters

LEAs are a linchpin in local school improvement efforts, ensuring schools have adequate support and are being held accountable for better results. But in districts with large concentrations of low-performing schools or even a handful of persistently struggling schools, the state can play an important role in building LEA capacity to improve schools or, in some cases, provide direct support to schools. In either case, the support should draw on the strongest possible evidence and rigorously evaluate its efforts to ensure rapid and sustainable impact.

Why Leading States Could Do

- Establish one across-the-board intervention, supported by strong or moderate evidence, for any LEA designated for additional action.
- Use the results of an LEA-level needs assessment to differentiate additional actions to best match the context, needs, and assets of the students, schools, and LEAs involved. States can create a continuum of evidencebased actions from which the best fit is selected.
- Invest in rigorous implementation and impact evaluations of these additional actions to build the evidence base for how to improve persistently low-performing schools and build the capacity of their LEAs.



Three states described strong plans to intervene and invest heavily in building the capacity of LEAs with large concentrations of identified schools to use evidence and continuous improvement to more effectively and rapidly help their schools improve.

Promising State Practices

Key:

Round 1 State
Round 2 State

In <u>Delaware</u>, LEAs with a significant number of identified schools will work in collaboration with the state to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment at both the district and school levels that will take into consideration previous improvement efforts, current school conditions, and the leadership capacity and competency at the school and district levels. This qualitative needs assessment will be combined with a quantitative data analysis related to accountability measures, school profile data, educator equity data, financial risk assessments, program analysis, community input, and additional LEA data. The state will work with external partners to develop evaluation systems and collaborate with the LEA and the school(s) to examine the findings of the needs assessment and develop an actionable improvement plan based on those findings (pp. 63–65).

In <u>South Carolina</u>, an SEA-appointed support liaison will be paired with LEAs serving a significant number or percentage of identified schools to help carry out technical assistance activities such as systems-level capacity reviews, plan reviews and revisions, evaluations of implementation and impact of plan strategies, and guidance resources on selecting and monitoring implementation of evidence-based practices (pp. 72–73).

Texas plans to deploy a continuum of assistance to LEAs serving a significant number or percentage of schools identified for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement that includes a resource library and toolkits for school improvement and transformation activities, more advanced supports such as access to a statewide Center for School Improvement and Center for School Transformation, vetted professional service providers, and vetted school improvement partners (organizations with a specialty and track record in different aspects of school improvement and school transformation) or school transformation partners (p. 30).

Evidence-Based Allowable Uses

Advance the use of evidence-based approaches via the allowable uses of Title II and Title IV funds.

What ESSA Says

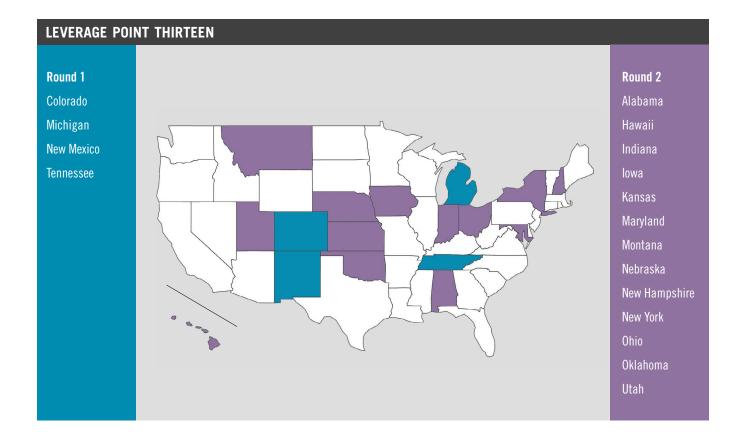
States must review LEA plans and monitor expenditures to ensure LEAs use federal funds on evidence-based activities where required by law. For those allowable uses conditioned on the availability of supporting evidence, states must determine whether evidence is "reasonably available."

Why This Matters

There is no silver bullet for improving the quality of teachers and school leaders or ensuring students have access to safe and healthy schools, a well-rounded education, and technology for learning. Driving available resources toward the most effective and innovative approaches in these areas and continuously evaluating their impact locally will increase the likelihood that districts and schools implement coherent approaches that are backed by evidence rather than random acts of improvement.

Why Leading States Could Do

- Adopt an existing or create a new state-approved list of evidence-based activities for some or all of the evidence-based allowable uses. Leverage the lists to explain transparently why evidence for a particular use is reasonably available.
- Prioritize the use of evidence in any distribution of state-level set-aside funding (e.g., 3% of Title II for leadership, 3% of Title I for direct student services, or state activities under Title IV).
- Create a research-practice partnership with a university partner or other
 research organization (e.g., RELs) that can both support the SEA in making
 well-informed determinations and help construct a statewide learning
 agenda to identify gaps in the evidence base and seek to fill them.



Perhaps in part due to the narrowness of the consolidated state plan template, no state took full advantage of this leverage point to articulate a comprehensive vision for using and building evidence via the allowable use provisions in Title II and Title IV. However, the 17 states below all included promising approaches to advancing evidence-based strategies in these (and other) titles.

Promising State Practices

Key:

Round 1 State
Round 2 State

• Title II: Both New Mexico (p. 113) and Tennessee (pp. 247–48) plan to use the 3 percent set-aside to support innovative teacher and school leader preparation programs that utilize evidence-based practices to ensure novice educators are fully prepared to teach on day one. Indiana will require that LEAs provide an evidence-based rationale for the design of their professional development systems and evaluate their system's effectiveness (p. 69), while Colorado will employ evidence-based professional development through a state set-aside that will, among other things, leverage existing data to evaluate the impact of teacher recruitment/retention strategies and conduct a third-party evaluation of the state's Quality Teacher Recruitment Grant Program (pp. 74, 79, 84, 98–99).

- Title IV: Nebraska will require that LEAs include in their Title IV, Part A grant applications a clear description of the evidence-based interventions they will use and will prioritize awards for LEAs that make the best use of funds to implement evidence-based activities (pp. 175–85). Both Montana (pp. 68–78) and Oklahoma (pp. 180–82) will award Title IV funds in part to promote evidence-based practices; Oklahoma will maintain a list of evidence-based resources for supporting the use of instructional technology. In their plans for Safe and Healthy Schools, Michigan (p. 55) and Utah (p. 55) both emphasize the use of evidence-based practices and professional development. Finally, three states are prioritizing the use of evidence in LEA applications for 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds: Alabama (p. 53), Kansas (p. 82), and Hawaii (p. 113).
- Other Titles: To reduce disproportionate rates of access to high-quality educators, New Hampshire will require that schools and LEAs select an intervention supported by strong, moderate, or promising evidence that is relevant to local needs (pp. 55–56). Meanwhile, Maryland (p. 46), New York (p. 117), and Ohio (p. 63) prioritize the use of evidence to improve school transitions through repositories of evidence-based transition strategies and technical assistance to make thoughtful selections that meet local needs and context. Finally, lowa will create a clearinghouse of evidence-based strategies to promote a well-rounded education for LEAs to use in their ESSA plans across titles, based on their local context and needs (p. 4).



This policy brief is part of Results for America's Invest in What Works Policy Series, which provides ideas and supporting research to policymakers to drive public funds toward evidence-based, results-driven solutions.