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Regional Educational Laboratory At Education Development Center, Inc.

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March 2009

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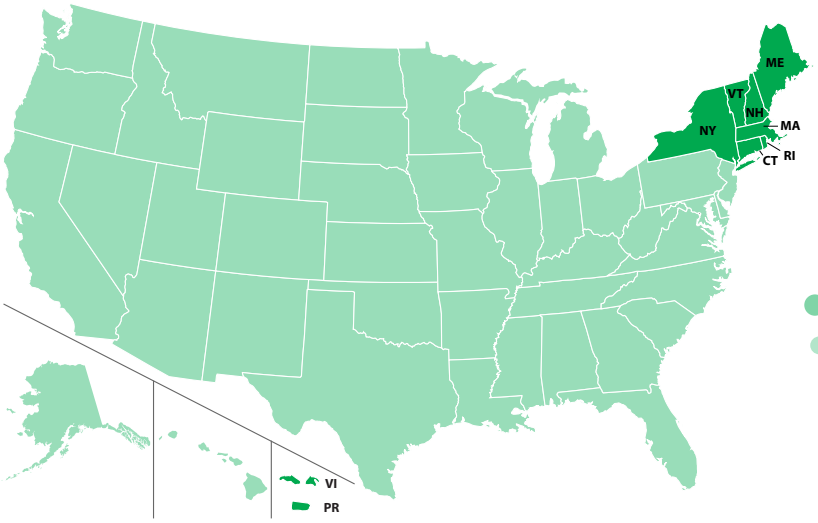

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Summary

REL 2009–No. 068

How eight state education agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region identify and support low-performing schools and districts

This report describes and analyzes how eight state education agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region—those of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, and Vermont—identify and support low-performing schools and districts under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Focusing on direct state supports and interventions, the report finds that the eight agencies have created supports and rationales to put federally defined accountability principles into practice in response to their specific contexts, local needs, and capacities.

This report responds to a request from four jurisdictions in the Northeast and Islands Region (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island). Focusing on direct supports and interventions, it describes and analyzes supports by state education agencies to low-performing schools and districts in eight of the region's jurisdictions: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

Under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 state education agencies must:

- Set student achievement standards.
- Build an accountability system for tracking student progress.
- Clearly define proficiency targets in reading and mathematics, spurring schools to show adequate yearly progress toward the goal of academic proficiency for all students by 2014.

Each state must provide a system of intensive, sustained support for Title I schools and districts that have failed to make adequate yearly progress for two or more successive years.

The NCLB Act suggests a range of supports to low-performing schools and districts, including school support teams, school reform support organizations, and distinguished educators with demonstrated success improving academic achievement. Yet the law gives states flexibility in tailoring interventions, requiring only that all supports be "systematic, intensive, and able to be sustained" (NCLB 2002).

Data collection for this report began in July 2007 and was completed in April 2008. A research team interviewed senior state education agency officials responsible for state

interventions, conducted focus groups with staff and consultants who work directly with schools and districts, and examined materials and documents made public by the state education agencies. The team's work was guided by three research questions:

1. What criteria do state education agencies use to identify schools and districts as low-performing, and how many schools and districts are placed in each category under the NCLB Act?

2. What services—and other supports and interventions—do state education agencies use with low-performing schools and districts?

3. What rationales do state education agency staff give for their approaches to school and district improvement?

The report finds that state education agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region have different ways to put the federally defined accountability principles into practice. One jurisdiction's adequate yearly progress might not be another's. Assessments and subsequent definitions of proficiency differ by state education agency, except in the three states—New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont—that use the New England Common Assessment Program.

The proportions of schools that were identified as low-performing for 2007/08 ranged considerably across the eight state education agencies, from 11 percent in Vermont to more than 50 percent in Puerto Rico. Similarly, districts identified as low-performing for 2007/08 ranged from 0 percent in Maine to 28 percent in Rhode Island. However, one statistic was consistent across the eight state education agencies: each agency had more schools newly identified as low-performing for 2007/08 than losing that designation.

State education agencies have set different paces for schools and districts to progress toward the NCLB Act's main goal, academic proficiency for all students by 2014. Some agencies set lower starting points and smaller improvement targets for the earlier years, then set larger targets for later years. Others set targets for performance that grow more steadily, in more consistent increments.

The minimum number of students that constitutes a subgroup for adequate yearly progress determinations ranges widely, from 11 in New Hampshire to 45 in Rhode Island. And state education agencies have different ways to aggregate grade spans when determining adequate yearly progress at the district level: some aggregate in two spans (elementary plus middle; high), and some in three (elementary; middle; high). Furthermore, each state education agency sets its own requirements, declaring how many grade spans must meet adequate yearly progress for a whole district to show adequate yearly progress.

Within the parameters set by the NCLB Act, state education agencies have the flexibility to identify schools and districts for support and to decide on interventions. They must also decide how to focus direct assistance—whether at the school or the district level, whether for schools under corrective action (failed to make adequate yearly progress for four successive years) or for schools in another category.

Maine, Puerto Rico, and Vermont directly support low-performing schools. But Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island focus state support on the low-performing districts with the greatest need. Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont have intervened with schools before the corrective action stage. New Hampshire and New York directly support both low-performing schools and low-performing districts.

Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont have supported both Title I and non–Title I schools that are low-performing—even though the NCLB Act does not require direct state interventions with non–Title I schools, and no federal funds are specifically designated for this purpose. Schools and districts in Massachusetts, New York, Puerto Rico, and Rhode Island have also been identified for intervention through state education agency accountability systems that predate the act.

From July through November 2007—the months when the researchers interviewed state education agency staff—all eight agencies studied in the Northeast and Islands Region had intervention systems for schools or districts. This report is a snapshot of interventions during those months. Interventions are constantly being revised as contexts change, as thinking changes, and as numbers of schools and districts change. However, the report finds that during that time each state education agency provided services including:

- Tools, templates, and consultation on an initial school or district assessment and on developing improvement plans.

- Consultation after initial planning—anything from telephoning local administrators to assigning weekly on-site service providers for each school or district.

- Professional development—for example, in-school workshops and cross-school institutes on leadership, data work, and instructional strategies in literacy or mathematics.

In the interviews state education agency staff were asked to offer rationales for various approaches to school improvement, including goals. Four agencies—Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island—had prepared documents that accounted for their intervention strategies. The depth and breadth of such documentation varied by state.

Connecticut and Massachusetts had each developed a one-page "theory of action." The Connecticut theory of action asserts that state support of district-level systems—especially systems to strengthen instruction—should bring sustained improvement in instruction and learning. It also asserts that the state must provide strong guidance, with clear accountability to help districts decide what systems need improvement and how they should work. Districts must develop and sustain stronger systems and leaders.

The Massachusetts theory of action begins with the premise that districts are responsible for monitoring and supporting low-performing schools—the state's role being to provide resources and targeted assistance and to monitor performance. The state's approach has evolved to include collaborating with districts to improve district capacity and infrastructure.

New York has documents explaining its NCLB interventions in relation to its preexisting school accountability system, with specific protocols for regional partner engagement with schools. New York's intervention approach is based on the premise that customized supports requested by school and district leaders, when accompanied by monitoring, should close achievement gaps among student subgroups. Protocols for when and how to engage with schools are given to Regional School Support Centers, which work with a range of partners and service providers to tailor supports. For schools and districts that fail to improve, the quantity and intensity of supports and monitoring increase over time.

Rhode Island has a functionality framework describing how to implement and sustain change. Rhode Island's intervention approach begins with the premise that, to make low-performing schools improve, the state education agency and the local education agencies (districts) must build partnerships and reciprocal accountability. Districts must develop and implement supports to help schools build capacity, including leadership development, effective professional development, and greater emphasis on involving families. The state must do the same for districts.

This report presents the voices and perspectives of state education agency administrators. Officials in the eight agencies studied take different approaches to the common goal of ensuring that all students achieve. Yet they share common concerns about balancing the tension between state and local decisionmaking, managing limited financial and human capacity for intervention, and ensuring coherence among various interventions.

The state education agency officials' voices and perspectives point to the need for continued learning about building school and district capacity to improve student achievement, and about the role of state education agencies in supporting that goal.

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This report describes and analyzes how eight state education agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region—those of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, and Vermont—identify and support low-performing schools and districts under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Focusing on direct state supports and interventions, the report finds that the eight agencies have created supports and rationales to put federally defined accountability principles into practice in response to their specific contexts, local needs, and capacities.

WHY THIS STUDY?

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 imposed three related demands on state education agencies:

- To set student achievement standards.
- To build an accountability system for tracking student progress.
- To clearly define proficiency targets in reading and mathematics, spurring schools to show adequate yearly progress toward the goal of academic proficiency for all students by 2014.

(Definitions of key terms appear in box 1 and, more fully, in appendix A.)

Under the NCLB Act each state must provide a system of intensive and sustained support for Title I schools and districts that have failed to make adequate yearly progress for two or more successive years. The law specifically requires a progressive series of interventions, with supports including school support teams, educators with demonstrated success improving academic achievement, and outside school improvement organizations. The act requires further that interventions be "systematic, intensive, and able to be sustained" and that Title I programs—whether schoolwide or targeted—"use effective methods and instructional strategies that are grounded in scientifically based research." (For more information on the federal requirements see appendix B.)

To meet NCLB guidelines—by testing more and by creating systems of accountability for student performance—state education agencies must develop new relationships with schools and districts. Required interventions with districts and schools are more intensive and focused than before NCLB (Reville, Norton, and Heffernan 2007; Sunderman and Orfield 2006). Yet each jurisdiction has latitude in designing intervention plans for its context—taking into account, among other factors, the jurisdiction's resources, its demographics,

BOX 1
Definitions of key terms

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Signed into law in January 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. The act is built on four principles: accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research.

Accountability system. Under a state's accountability system the state sets academic standards for what every child should know and be able to do at different grade levels. It measures student academic achievement through state-administered assessments. And it reports school-level and district-level test results to the public.

Adequate yearly progress. Defined by each state as the minimum improvement that schools and districts must achieve in a year, adequate yearly progress is measured at both the school and district levels by the performance of students—in aggregate and by subgroup—in relation to performance targets set for the year. (Subgroups include students with disabilities, limited English proficiency students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, and economically disadvantaged students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.)

Low-performing. In this report low-performing schools are schools placed in one of three categories under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001:

- *In need of improvement* (failed to make adequate yearly progress for at least two successive years).
- *Corrective action* (failed to make adequate yearly progress for four successive years).
- *Restructuring* (failed to make adequate yearly progress for five or more successive years).

Similarly, in this report low-performing districts are districts placed in one of two categories under the act: *in need of improvement* (failed to make adequate yearly progress for at least two successive years) and *corrective action* (failed to make adequate yearly progress for four successive years). To lose the designation *low-performing,* a school or district must show adequate yearly progress for two successive years. NCLB requires state intervention only with schools and districts that receive Title I funds.

Proficiency. A defined level of performance on an assessment. Each state education agency defines the criteria of proficiency on its state assessments. Proficiency criteria thus vary by state, as do the assessments.

and the benchmarks set in its state-specific accountability systems.

This report responds to a request from four jurisdictions in the Northeast and Islands Region (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island). It describes and analyzes state systems of support to low-performing schools and districts in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, and Vermont.[1] The report emphasizes chronically low-performing schools and districts—those that are now under corrective action or restructuring, having failed to make adequate yearly progress benchmarks for four or more successive years. (In this report low-performing means that a school or district, having failed to meet adequate yearly progress under the NCLB Act for two or more successive years, is designated as in need of improvement, under corrective action, or under restructuring; see box 1.)

Over 2003–05, in the years after the NCLB Act was passed, some state education agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region found it difficult—as they began developing or implementing corrective action plans for low-performing schools—to shift priorities, align resources and policies, centralize control for interventions, and embrace and enact adaptive change. As "state and district leaders . . . necessarily evolved from compliance monitors to active supporters of school improvement," the need for multiple interventions created complex challenges for both state education agencies and districts (Education Alliance at Brown University 2005).

During meetings in 2006, senior officials from the Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode

Island state education agencies identified a need to learn more about what other states were doing and how different approaches work. Such knowledge could inform the next round of state intervention strategies. In January 2007 the New England Comprehensive Center held a conference for state education agency teams on state approaches to intervention with low-performing schools. Five New England states sent teams of 2–10 senior officials, indicating interest in the topic. A focus group at the conference revealed that regional state education agencies were struggling with their next phase of intervention, trying to establish the right relationship with schools and districts and to identify rules and expectations. Participants showed interest in knowing more about how other states were approaching the task, in exploring various rationales for intervention approaches, and in learning from research that could inform their strategies.

The report focuses on direct supports and interventions by state education agencies. The NCLB Act does not require state education agencies to intervene with non–Title I schools and districts. Nor do any federal funds specifically support direct state education agency interventions with non–Title I schools. The final responsibility for supporting non–Title I schools lies with the districts and states.

The eight state education agency jurisdictions studied for this report vary in size, income, resources, population distribution, and numbers of schools identified as low-performing. For example:

- New York has nearly 3 million students, Vermont fewer than 100,000.
- In Puerto Rico 98 percent of schools receive Title I funding; in Rhode Island, 41 percent.
- Almost 45 percent of students in New York are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, compared with 17 percent in New Hampshire.

(More detailed demographic information for this report is available through www.relnei.org.)

Over 2003–05 some state education agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region found it difficult—as they began developing or implementing corrective action plans for low-performing schools—to shift priorities, align resources and policies, centralize control for interventions, and embrace and enact adaptive change

The eight state education agencies historically have had different approaches to building school and district capacity. The New England states share a strong tradition of local control. New York has a complicated structure to support school improvement, with many actors and agencies. And Puerto Rico has a Department of Education that functions as both a state education agency and a local education agency—engaging with schools more directly than any of the other state agencies does.

Three research questions guided the collection and analysis of data for this descriptive report:

1. What criteria do state education agencies use to identify schools and districts as low-performing, and how many schools and districts are placed in each category under the NCLB Act?

2. What services—and other supports and interventions—do state education agencies use with low-performing schools and districts?

3. What rationales do state education agency staff give for their approaches to school and district improvement?

The report's findings, which emerge from these three questions, describe the different needs and approaches of each jurisdiction on the basis of research conducted in 2007–08. (Research methods are summarized in box 2 and detailed in appendix C. Brief summaries of the interventions of the eight jurisdictions are in appendix D. More detailed state profiles—together with other supplemental materials that summarize state legislation addressing NCLB interventions with schools and districts—are available at www.relnei.org.)

BOX 2

Research methods

The study sample comprised state education agencies in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, and Vermont.[1] The researchers used qualitative research methods (more fully described in appendix C). There were four sources of data:

- Publicly available information on state and federal web sites, including reports and descriptions of education policies and interventions.
- Other internal state education agency documents, not publicly available, that agency respondents provided.
- Interviews with officials at each state education agency, including lead administrators and officials responsible for state accountability policies.
- Focus groups comprising staff who implement interventions with low-performing schools.

Data collection was iterative, with each stage informing the next. A document review, which allowed researchers to draft an initial profile for each jurisdiction, informed the writing of targeted questions for the lead administrator at each state education agency. Interview and focus group protocols were tailored for each jurisdiction. The interviews with state education agency administrators informed the questions written for other interviews and focus groups.

The data were analyzed in two stages, profile development and cross-site analysis. To fill information gaps the project team conducted follow-up interviews—either in person or by phone—with lead administrators and senior policy officials. And, to check for accuracy, the researchers shared a draft profile for each jurisdiction with that jurisdiction's lead administrator. The researchers also used Internet search engines to explore themes that, according to preliminary analysis, might be relevant to more than one site.

This report has three main limitations:

- The researchers relied heavily on each state education agency's lead administrator, not only to provide information in interviews but also to identify other interview participants and to review the researchers' draft reports—possibly biasing the report. Furthermore, in three jurisdictions the lead administrators also participated in the focus groups, possibly influencing the contributions of other focus group participants.
- The report describes interventions solely from the perspective of the administrators and staff members who have shaped them. The perspectives of other people—for example, educators in schools and districts provided with interventions—were not solicited.
- The researchers were not able to systematically investigate the funding of interventions. Nor were they able to comprehensively survey broader state education agency systems of support, which are to be distinguished from supports and interventions to low-performing schools.

Note.

1. Although the Northeast and Islands Region also includes the Virgin Islands, that state education agency withdrew from participation because at the time it lacked a commissioner, which complicated data collection. Virgin Islands administrators have requested information on the findings to inform their future intervention planning.

IDENTIFICATION CRITERIA FOR LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

This section describes:

- Differences in how the jurisdictions identify low-performing schools and districts.
- How the state education agencies and the U.S. Department of Education have negotiated changes in accountability systems.
- The numbers of districts and schools that each jurisdiction identified for 2007/08 as low-performing.

Differences in how state education agencies define and calculate adequate yearly progress to identify low-performing schools and districts

Variables defined at the state level—including assessments, performance levels that represent proficient work, the pace and measurement of required student improvement, the minimum number of students that constitute a subgroup, the method to calculate graduation rate, and the choice of confidence intervals—contribute to adequate yearly progress determinations. The NCLB Act requires that states establish accountability systems to track school and district progress toward the national goal of 100 percent proficiency by 2014 (see appendix B). Each state education agency must define and document policies for school and district accountability in a Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook, which is submitted to the U.S. Department of Education for approval.

Differences in policy for any of the 10 accountability principles under the NCLB Act can lead to differences in the numbers of schools and districts that jurisdictions identify as low-performing. For example, definitions of adequate yearly progress can vary across these five factors (among others):

- Assessments and definitions of proficiency.
- Targets for school and district progress.
- The use of the percent proficient method or the performance index method to calculate annual measurable objectives.
- The minimum number of students constituting a subgroup for adequate yearly progress determinations.
- Aggregating grade spans to calculate district adequate yearly progress—and defining how many of the resulting grade-span clusters must meet adequate yearly progress for a district to show adequate yearly progress.

Differences in policy for any of the 10 accountability principles under the NCLB Act can lead to differences in the numbers of schools and districts that jurisdictions identify as low-performing

Assessments and subsequent definitions of proficiency differ by state education agency. Although states share a national goal of academic proficiency for all students by the year 2014 (as specified in the NCLB Act), the design of assessments and proficiency criteria differs by state. Student performance on state assessments can be compared among states only for three states in the Northeast and Islands Region—New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont—that have joined forces to create a shared assessment, the New England Common Assessment Program.

Similarly, state education agencies have set different paces for schools and districts to progress toward academic proficiency for all students by 2014. Some agencies set lower starting points and smaller improvement targets for the earlier years under the NCLB Act, then set larger targets for later years. But others set targets for performance that grow more steadily, in more consistent increments. An example is mathematics performance targets for elementary students (table 1). Connecticut established a starting point in 2001/02 of proficient performance by 65 percent of students, and increased its annual measurable objectives by 8 or 9 percentage points at three-year intervals until reaching the 100 percent target in 2013/14. But Maine established a starting point in 2001/02 of proficient performance by 12 percent of students—and did not increase annual measurable objectives until 2004/05, when the objective increased by 9 percentage points to 21 percent proficient performance. After another three years, beginning in 2007/08, Maine's annual measurable objectives increase by 11 or 12 percentage points annually until reaching the 100 percent target in 2013/14.

Starting points for performance within each jurisdiction differ by content area and grade level. However, each jurisdiction's approach to

TABLE 1

Annual measurable objectives for determining adequate yearly progress in elementary mathematics, by state education agency (percent proficient performance except where otherwise noted)

School year	Connecticut	Maine	New Hampshire	Puerto Rico	Rhode Island	Massachusetts (CPI)[a]	New York (PI)[b]	Vermont (IP)[c]
2001/02	65	12	na	na	na	na	na	na
2002/03	65	12	na	37	na	61	na	na
2003/04	65	12	na	37	62	61	na	na
2004/05	74	21	na	54	68	69	na	na
2005/06	74	21	76	54	68	69	na	390
2006/07	74	21	76	54	68	77	86	390
2007/08	82	32	82	69	75	77	102	427
2008/09	82	43	82	69	75	84	119	427
2009/10	82	55	88	69	75	84	135	427
2010/11	91	66	88	85	81	92	152	463
2011/12	91	77	94	85	87	92	168	463
2012/13	91	89	94	85	94	100	184	463
2013/14	100	100	100	100	100	100	200	500

na is not applicable (some state education agencies lack data for some years because of the dates when their annual measurable objectives were approved or revised).

Note: Proficiency is measured by performance on each state's elementary mathematics assessment. Five state education agencies—Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Puerto Rico, and Rhode Island—calculate annual measurable objectives using the percent proficient method. Each of the other three states—Massachusetts, New York, and Vermont—determines its annual measurable objectives using a performance index method.

a. CPI is Massachusetts's Composite Performance Index.

b. PI is New York's Performance Index.

c. IP is Vermont's Index Points.

Source: U.S. Department of Education 2007a.

increasing annual measurable objectives tends to be consistent across content areas and grade levels: either there are fairly even increases in annual measurable objectives, or there are smaller increases in annual measurable objectives followed by larger increases as 2014 approaches. For example, Connecticut in 2002/03 established a starting point of proficient performance for high school reading by 62 percent of students, and then increased the annual measurable objective by 9 or 10 percentage points at two- or three-year intervals until reaching the 100 percent target in 2013/14. But Maine in 2001/02 established a starting point of proficient performance for high school reading by 44 percent of students, with the annual measurable objective remaining the same until 2004/05—when it increased by 6 percentage points, to 50 percent proficient performance. At the next three-year interval, beginning in 2007/08, Maine's annual measurable objectives increased by 7 or 8 percentage points annually until reaching the 100 percent target in 2013/14.

Five of the eight jurisdictions studied—Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Puerto Rico, and Rhode Island—calculate annual measurable objectives using a percent proficient method (beginning with a certain percentage of students who have scored proficient and then setting annual percentage targets to reach proficiency for 100 percent of students by 2014). The other three—Massachusetts, New York, and Vermont—use a performance index method (giving schools credit for improving achievement by including the percentage of students whose performance has improved, regardless of whether their performance is proficient).

Massachusetts's Composite Performance Index is a 100-point index based on performance on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System and on the MCAS Alternate Assessment. Each student earns 100, 75, 50, 25, or 0 points, and scores are averaged to determine school aggregate and subgroup performance. New York's Performance Index is similar, but operates on a 200-point scale. Vermont's Index Points are based on a 500-point scale. Students scoring in the top two categories on the Vermont state test receive 500 points, those scoring in the next category below receive 375 points, and those scoring in the lowest category receive either 250 or 125 points, based on scaled scores within that category (U.S. Department of Education 2007a). Although these three performance index systems vary in point totals, for each system the highest available points at the school or subgroup level indicate 100 percent of students scoring at or above proficiency.

The minimum number of students that constitutes a subgroup for adequate yearly progress determinations varies, from 11 in New Hampshire to 45 in Rhode Island (table 2). Larger subgroup sizes can mean that a given school or district must meet NCLB targets for fewer subgroups, and in turn that fewer schools within a given sample might fail to make adequate yearly progress.

State education agencies have different ways to aggregate grade spans when calculating adequate yearly progress at the district level (the district grade-span groupings for each state are shown in table 3). Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont cluster students into two grade spans. But Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island cluster students into three grade spans. Each state education agency also has its own requirements declaring how many grade spans must meet adequate yearly progress for a whole district to show adequate yearly progress. In Connecticut a district must make adequate yearly progress in

TABLE 2

Minimum number of students required for a disaggregated subgroup to contribute to adequate yearly progress determinations, by state education agency

State education agency	Minimum NCLB subgroup size (students)
Connecticut	20
Maine	20
Massachusetts	40[a]
New Hampshire	11
New York	30
Puerto Rico	30
Rhode Island	45
Vermont	40

a. Minimum subgroup size must also be either at least 5 percent of the aggregate or 200.

Source: U.S. Department of Education 2007a.

TABLE 3

Grade-level performance required to meet school district adequate yearly progress

State education agency	Grade-span groupings for districts	Minimum number of grade-span groupings that must make adequate yearly progress for a district to make adequate yearly progress
Connecticut	1. Elementary plus middle 2. High	2 of 2
Maine	1. Elementary 2. Middle 3. High	1 of 3
Massachusetts	1. Elementary 2. Middle 3. High	1 of 3
New Hampshire	1. Elementary plus middle 2. High	1 of 2
New York	1. Elementary plus middle 2. High	1 of 2
Rhode Island	1. Elementary 2. Middle 3. High	2 of 3
Vermont	1. Elementary plus middle 2. High	1 of 2

Note: Puerto Rico comprises just one district.

Source: U.S. Department of Education 2007a.

Larger subgroup sizes can mean that a given school or district must meet NCLB targets for fewer subgroups

both of its two grade spans. But Rhode Island requires districts to make adequate yearly progress in at least two of three grade spans. The other states require districts to make adequate yearly progress in at least one grade span. (Of the eight jurisdictions, only Connecticut requires that each grade span, including high school, contribute to district adequate yearly progress determinations. In Maine and Massachusetts a district can make adequate yearly progress based on performance by any one of three grade spans.)

The NCLB Act requires—across state education agencies—that districts make adequate yearly progress, in the aggregate and for all subgroups, in both mathematics and English language arts.

Since student groups for district adequate yearly progress are defined at the district level (not by individual schools), a district without any schools designated as low-performing can still be identified as low-performing. For example, a given district might not contain a school with a large enough subgroup population—such as English language learner students in grade 4—to count toward school adequate yearly progress. Yet the district might contain enough English language learner students in grade 4 to contribute to district adequate yearly progress calculations. In Rhode Island a district can be identified as low-performing if 40 percent or more of its schools are low-performing (U.S. Department of Education 2007a).

Identification criteria and changes to accountability systems over 2001–07

All eight jurisdictions have been working continually since 2001 to define and refine their accountability plans. Over 2001–07 four of the state education agencies studied—Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New York—submitted revisions of their accountability plans to the U.S. Department of Education between four and seven times. Each of the other four agencies—Connecticut, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, and Vermont—submitted revisions twice.

By mid-2003 each state education agency had received initial U.S. Department of Education approval. Since then each agency has revised its plans, either at its own discretion or at the prompting of the department, which reviews the changes that states propose in their Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbooks and outlines its determinations in decision letters to the states. (The status of each state's accountability plan in December 2007 is shown in table 4.)

Various situations can require state education agencies to revise and resubmit their accountability plans. For example:

- In May 2005 the U.S. Department of Education issued guidance about including students with disabilities, listing options from which state education agencies could select.
- Maine proposed the use of local assessments and instituted a new high school assessment in spring 2006. In fall 2005 New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont introduced the New England Common Assessment Program for elementary schools; the high school assessment followed in fall 2007.

TABLE 4
Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook revisions, 2001–07

State education agency	Revision proposals submitted	Decision letters received from the U.S. Department of Education
Connecticut	2	5
Maine	5	6
Massachusetts	4	5
New Hampshire	7	5
New York	6	6
Puerto Rico	2	4
Rhode Island	2	4
Vermont	2	3

Source: U.S. Department of Education 2007a.

Other situations that have required resubmitted accountability plans include revised definitions or calculations for graduation rates or participation rates in the state assessment, revised definitions for district-level adequate yearly progress, revised timing for adequate yearly progress determinations, and revised methods for calculating adequate yearly progress.

U.S. Department of Education decision letters can reject proposed changes if the changes are not consistent with the NCLB Act. For example, Massachusetts proposed using scores on the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment to generate index points showing student progress toward English language proficiency—intending to include English language learner students in adequate yearly progress determinations, as required under the act. The U.S. Department of Education responded that the "amendment is not aligned with the statute and regulations and is therefore not approved" (U.S. Department of Education 2007b).

Decisions on proposed revisions can be delayed pending further investigation. Both Connecticut and New Hampshire have requested that growth-based accountability models contribute to adequate yearly progress. The NCLB Act does not yet include a provision for such growth models, but the U.S. Department of Education has funded a pilot that began for 2005/06 in North Carolina and Tennessee and that, by June 2008, had expanded to include pilots in 11 states.

Numbers of schools and districts identified as low-performing

Across the United States 25 percent of schools and 29 percent of school districts did not make adequate yearly progress for 2004/05. The proportion of schools and districts identified as low-performing ranged from 1 percent of schools in Kansas to 49 percent of schools in Hawaii. And the percentage of Title I schools identified as low-performing ranged from 2 percent in both Iowa and Nebraska to 68 percent in Florida (U.S. Department of Education 2007d).

Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont—each identified between 8 percent and 20 percent of their districts as low-performing for academic year 2007/08. Rhode Island identified 28 percent. Maine identified none

Of the eight Northeast and Islands Region jurisdictions studied, five—Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont—each identified between 8 percent and 20 percent of their districts as low-performing for academic year 2007/08. Rhode Island identified 28 percent. Maine identified none (table 5). Puerto Rico constitutes a single district.

In New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont the greatest number of low-performing districts in 2007/08 was in the first year of identification—that is, newly designated as in need of improvement (table 6). In Connecticut and Massachusetts the greatest number of low-performing districts was in the second year under corrective action. (A year's data show how many districts were in each low-performing category for that year—but such data do not permit comparisons with earlier years. Some districts might have lost their designations. Others might have remained in the same category after meeting adequate yearly progress for just one year.)

The percentage of schools identified as low-performing in academic year 2007/08 varied, from 11 percent in Vermont to 50 percent in Puerto Rico (table 7). Across the United States about 13 percent of schools were identified as low-performing in academic year 2004/05 (U.S. Department of Education 2007d).

The NCLB Act requires a system of sustained support and intervention for Title I schools and districts that have failed to make adequate yearly progress targets for two or more successive years—but not for non–Title I schools. So, the identification of a Title I school or district as low-performing requires interventions that are not required for a non–Title I school. Title I schools were more than two-thirds of low-performing

TABLE 5

School districts identified as low-performing and school districts losing the low-performing designation, by state education agency, 2007/08

Status	Connecticut	Maine	Massachusetts	New Hampshire	New York	Puerto Rico[a]	Rhode Island	Vermont
Number of low-performing districts	29	0	47	32	69	na	10	31
Percentage of districts identified as low-performing	17	0	12	20	8	na	28	9
Number of districts losing the low-performing designation	1	0	86	7	2	na	0	na
Percentage of districts losing the low-performing designation	0.6	0	22	4	0.2	na	0	na
Total number of districts	171	290	389	162	853	1	36	363

na is not applicable.

a. Puerto Rico's state education agency also functions as the local education agency. Puerto Rico has just one district.

Source: Connecticut State Department of Education 2007; Maine Department of Education 2007; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2007a; New Hampshire Department of Education 2007; New York State Education Department 2007b; New York State Education Department 2008; Puerto Rico Department of Education, n.d.; Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2007a; Vermont Department of Education 2007.

TABLE 6

School districts identified as low-performing, by status and state education agency, 2007/08 (percent)

Low-performing district	Connecticut	Maine	Massachusetts	New Hampshire	New York	Puerto Rico[a]	Rhode Island	Vermont
In need of improvement (year 1)	7	0	6	75	26	na	50	74
In need of improvement (year 2)	0	0	17	19	17	na	0	6
Corrective action (year 1)	31	0	34	6	16	na	10	19
Corrective action (year 2)	62	0	42	0	20	na	30	0
Corrective action (year 3)	0	0	0	0	16	na	10	0
Corrective action (year 4)	0	0	0	0	4	na	0	0

na is not applicable (see note a below).

a. Puerto Rico's state education agency also functions as the local education agency. Puerto Rico has just one district.

Source: Connecticut State Department of Education 2007; Maine Department of Education 2007; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2007a; New Hampshire Department of Education 2007; New York State Education Department 2007a; New York State Education Department 2007b; New York State Education Department 2008; Puerto Rico Department of Education, n.d.; Rhode Island Department of Education 2007a; Vermont Department of Education 2007.

schools for 2007/08 in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Puerto Rico, and Vermont; about half in New Hampshire and Rhode Island; and less than a quarter in Maine (see table 7).

Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Puerto Rico, and Rhode Island identified schools for intervention before the NCLB Act was passed. In those jurisdictions schools can have a much longer history of being under corrective action than in other jurisdictions (where such identifications began in response to the act). In 2007/08 New York had schools in the fifth year of restructuring (table 8). Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Puerto Rico had schools in the

TABLE 7

Public schools and Title I schools identified as low-performing, by state education agency, 2007/08

Status	Connecticut	Maine	Massachusetts	New Hampshire	New York	Puerto Rico	Rhode Island	Vermont
Number of low-performing schools	247	94	674	136	744	749	43	41
Total number of public schools	1,111	634	1,822	468	4,061	1,505	319	363
Percentage of public schools identified as low-performing	22	15	37	29	18	50	13	11
Total number of Title I schools	490	500	1054	227	3188	749	146	220
Number of Title I schools identified as low-performing	165	21	463	66	581	1494	22	30
Percentage of Title I schools identified as low-performing	34	4	44	29	18	50	15	14
Title I schools identified as low-performing, as a percentage of low-performing schools	67	22	69	49	78	100	51	73

Source: Connecticut State Department of Education 2007; Maine Department of Education 2007; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2007a; New Hampshire Department of Education 2007; New York State Education Department 2007b; New York State Education Department 2008; Puerto Rico Department of Education, n.d.; Rhode Island Department of Education 2007b; Rhode Island Department of Education 2007c; Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2007d; Vermont Department of Education 2007.

TABLE 8

Schools identified as low-performing, by status and state education agency, 2007/08 (percent)

Low-performing school status	Connecticut	Maine	Massachusetts	New Hampshire	New York	Puerto Rico	Rhode Island[a]	Vermont
In need of improvement (year 1)	33	30	27	49	28	14	37	51
In need of improvement (year 2)	15	43	27	32	16	20	25	17
Corrective action	13	16	17	19	13	24	0	32
Restructuring (year 1)	35	11	20	0	11	31	21	0
Restructuring (year 2)	1	0	4	0	12	7	6	0
Restructuring (year 3)	1	0	1	0	6	3	11	0
Restructuring (year 4)	2	0	2	0	8	1	0	0
Restructuring (year 5)	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0

Note: Numbers for New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont are based on fall 2006 assessment data. Numbers for Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, and Puerto Rico are based on 2007 state assessment data.

a. For Rhode Island, percentages for all designations under NCLB do not total 100 percent because designation data are unavailable for four high schools in that state that have made adequate yearly progress for one year.

Source: Connecticut State Department of Education 2007; Maine Department of Education 2007; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2007a; New Hampshire Department of Education 2007; New York State Education Department 2007b; New York State Education Department 2008. Puerto Rico Department of Education, n.d.; Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2007b; Rhode Island Department of Education 2007c; Rhode Island Department of Education 2007d; Vermont Department of Education 2007.

fourth year of restructuring. And Rhode Island had schools in the third year of restructuring. In contrast, neither New Hampshire nor Vermont had any schools under restructuring in 2007/08.

Each state education agency had more schools in 2007/08 that were newly identified as low-performing than were losing their designation as low-performing (table 9). New York had nearly

TABLE 9

Schools losing the low-performing designation and newly identified as low-performing, by status and state education agency, 2007/08

Status	Connecticut	Maine	Massachusetts	New Hampshire	New York	Puerto Rico	Rhode Island	Vermont
Number of public schools in jurisdiction	1,111	634	1,822	468	4,061	1,505	319	363
Number of schools losing the low-performing designation	7	9	17	5	115	51	na	0
Percentage of schools losing the low-performing designation	0.6	1.4	0.9	1.1	2.8	3.4	na	0.0
Number of schools newly identified as low-performing	83	28	183	67	208	105	16	21
Percentage of schools newly identified as low-performing	7.5	4.4	10.0	14.3	5.1	7.0	5.0	5.8
Ratio of schools newly designated as low-performing to schools losing the low-performing designation	11.9	3.1	10.8	13.4	1.8	2.1	na	na

na is not available.

Source: Connecticut State Department of Education 2007; Maine Department of Education 2007; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2007a; New Hampshire Department of Education 2007; New York State Education Department 2007b; New York State Education Department 2008; Puerto Rico Department of Education, n.d.; Rhode Island Department of Education 2007b; Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2007c; Rhode Island Department of Education 2007d; Vermont Department of Education 2007.

twice as many schools newly identified as in need of improvement (208) for 2007/08 as lost their low-performing designation that year (115). Puerto Rico had a similar pattern (51 losing the designation, 105 newly identified). The other jurisdictions studied had even greater numbers of schools newly identified as low-performing compared with schools losing the designation for 2007/08: Connecticut (7 losing the designation, 83 newly identified), Maine (9 losing the designation, 28 newly identified), Massachusetts (17 losing the designation, 183 newly identified), New Hampshire (5 losing the designation, 67 newly identified), and Vermont (0 losing the designation, 21 newly identified).

The NCLB Act requires a statewide system of support, with priority given to Title I schools and districts that have failed to make adequate yearly progress for the longest time. But the law gives state education agencies flexibility in targeting and delivering that support. Although the tables above show the numbers and percentages of schools identified as low-performing, many factors can determine which of those schools and districts receive priority for state education agency intervention (as opposed to district intervention).

SUPPORTS AND INTERVENTIONS BY STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES FOR LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

State education agencies have flexibility, both in identifying which schools and districts to assist and in deciding how to intervene with those schools and districts—though their work must be based on NCLB guidelines (see appendix A). This section explains who receives services in the eight jurisdictions studied, what those services are, and how state education agencies organize the provision of services.

All eight state education agencies had intervention systems in place for schools and districts at the time of the interviews with agency staff,

July–November 2007. (State education agency interventions are summarized in appendix D. In addition, state profiles and supplementary materials on state legislation—available at www.relnei.org—offer more detail on each jurisdiction's interventions, with brief descriptions of how those interventions are affected by state laws.)

Recipients of direct state education agency assistance

Each state education agency can decide how to focus direct assistance—whether at the school or district level, and whether at the corrective action stage or at another stage. Each state education agency can decide whether to include non–Title I schools. And each state education agency can decide whether to use additional identification criteria beyond those specified by the NCLB Act.

The NCLB Act requires that all state education agencies set up statewide systems of support that provide technical assistance to low-performing schools, giving highest priority to schools identified for corrective action. However, the law does not mandate direct intervention by state education agencies with every school that is under corrective action or restructuring. By default, therefore, districts and the federal government are responsible for improving their schools with Title I funding. Schools without direct state education agency assistance might work toward improvement either independently or with their districts.

Under NCLB guidelines, therefore, each state education agency has the final say in which schools will receive its supports (for further details see appendix B). Each designation for low-performing schools and districts under the NCLB Act—in need of improvement, corrective action, or restructuring—can call for a different bundle of supports and interventions, both across and within the jurisdictions of the state education agencies.

Maine, Puerto Rico, and Vermont were directly assisting low-performing schools at the time of this study. Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island were focusing interventions on the low-performing districts with the greatest need. New Hampshire and New York were directly assisting both low-performing schools and low-performing districts.

Maine, Puerto Rico, and Vermont were directly assisting low-performing schools; Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, low-performing districts with the greatest need; and New Hampshire and New York, both low-performing schools and low-performing districts

All the state education agencies initially worked with schools, not districts. Yet in 2007/08 all but Maine and Puerto Rico had identified districts that qualified for intervention. Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island had identified districts that were in greatest need and were focusing interventions on those districts, while providing limited support to schools. Vermont was continuing to focus its interventions on schools, while communicating and coordinating with districts. New York was focusing most of its efforts on its five largest districts and on three others that are the most persistently low-performing, while working with individual schools. (Maine did not have low-performing districts during the data collection period. Puerto Rico is a single district. Both Maine and Puerto Rico were focusing their state education agency interventions on schools in 2007/08.)

Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont were intervening with schools before the corrective action stage in 2007/08—aiming to help schools designated as in need of improvement quickly improve. State education agency staff in New Hampshire reviewed and evaluated the improvement plans of schools and districts designated as in need of improvement. In 2006 Vermont convened "first-checkmark" schools—schools not meeting adequate yearly progress targets for the first time—and focused several sessions on the conditions needed for improvement. Vermont planned to continue this process in years with a critical mass of first-checkmark schools. And schools in Maine consulted with distinguished educators at the ends

Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont were providing supports to non–Title I low-performing schools in different ways

of the first and second years in which the schools were designated as in need of improvement. At the end of the first year the distinguished educators suggested ways to address problems. At the end of the second year they provided data analysis and planning services. A Maine administrator noted, "We can [do this] because we have relatively few schools in the status. If the numbers really grow, that may change."

State education agencies in New York and Puerto Rico were not working directly with newly identified schools. In New York, the largest state education agency in the region, one administrator regretted that capacity constraints had compelled the agency to adopt a policy of not intervening with such schools: "We do not currently have the capacity to go beyond statutory requirements." Instead, responsibility for schools newly designated as in need of improvement was left with the districts. (Puerto Rico had 50 percent of its 1,500 schools designated as low-performing and chose 100 of those schools to receive direct assistance.)

Under the NCLB Act states must intervene with low-performing schools and districts only if such schools and districts receive Title I funds. Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont were providing supports to non–Title I low-performing schools in 2007/08. Each of those three states was extending services to non–Title I schools in different ways. New Hampshire was the most assertive: with a focus on equity across all public schools, New Hampshire law explicitly required, and provided funding for, support to low-performing non–Title I schools. Connecticut and Vermont both allowed non–Title I schools to participate, at their own expense or with separate funding, in professional development offered for Title I low-performing schools and districts. Connecticut allowed participation by schools outside of its targeted 12 districts whenever such schools could be accommodated. Vermont allowed non–Title I schools to participate in some professional development events. (Supplemental materials on interventions for non–Title I schools and districts are available at www.relnei.org.)

In four jurisdictions—Massachusetts, New York, Puerto Rico, and Rhode Island—schools and districts were identified for intervention through state education agency accountability systems that predated the NCLB Act. For example, in Massachusetts, which has identified and intervened with schools and districts in need for many years, the Governor's Office of Educational Quality and Accountability coexisted with the current NCLB-related intervention system until 2007. And New York has criteria to identify schools performing below state standards through the state's policy for school accountability, Schools Under Registration Review, in place since 1989. Schools so identified overlap with schools identified as low-performing under the act—but the two lists are not identical, nor are interventions under the two systems. Puerto Rico has a history of identifying low-performing schools for special projects. Rhode Island had a school accountability policy before the act that did not impose sanctions or require interventions. After the act was passed, administrators in Rhode Island added new criteria to identify schools for intervention. The new criteria included disproportionate numbers of students in special education, failure or low performance by English language learner students on the state assessment, and low adherence to new graduation requirements. Rhode Island's process resulted in the identification of two additional districts for intervention.

State supports—planning assistance, ongoing consultation, and targeted professional development

Data analysis showed that each state education agency was providing various supports, including planning assistance, ongoing consultation, regional networks, and targeted professional development. Each state education agency had organized school or district support teams to provide professional development and technical assistance in accordance with NCLB guidelines. Each state education agency was providing what Mintrop and

Trujillo (2004) call a "bundle of strategies." The supports required by the NCLB Act and provided by the state education agencies were those that districts across the country find most useful: planning assistance, professional development, assistance in using data to improve instruction, and a focus on curriculum and instruction (Center on Education Policy 2007; Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy at MassINC 2005; U.S. Department of Education 2007c).

Supports and interventions from state education agencies generally fell into three broad categories (table 10):

- *Support to launch the intervention.* Related to startup, these activities included needs assessment, planning support, and site-specific consultations.
- *Continuing consultation and communication.* Beyond initial planning, state education agency service providers were giving individual support and holding group forums for dialogue, feedback, consultation, and skill-building.
- *Topic-specific professional development.* The kinds of professional development provided by state education agencies were varied: they might be school-based or district-based, might be provided away from the school premises, and might be provided for just one or two schools or available to multiple schools and districts.

Each state education agency provided templates, tools, and consultation to help schools or districts with assessment and with developing improvement plans. The NCLB Act requires that schools and districts, in their improvement plans, present data to document particular needs. All the state education agencies studied were providing tools or templates for assessment data as well as for consultation and review. For example, Massachusetts asked districts to document strategies they had already tried and to analyze why those strategies had not worked. Puerto Rico required its vendors to work with school teams in collaborative assessments.

Two state education agencies, Connecticut and New Hampshire, used a structured assessment process to ensure that improvement plans were

TABLE 10

Supports provided to low-performing schools or districts, by state education agency, 2007/08

	Support to launch the intervention		Continuing consultation and communication		Topic-specific professional development				
State education agency	Assessment of school or district	Improvement plan development	Site-specific consultation	Convening school or district leaders	Leadership	Data work	English language arts	Mathematics	Instructional strategies
Connecticut	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Maine	×	×	×			×		×	×
Massachusetts	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
New Hampshire	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
New York[a]	×	×	×	Varies by region	X	x	×	×	×
Puerto Rico	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Rhode Island	×	×	×	×	×	×	Varies by district	Varies by district	Varies by district
Vermont	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×

a. New York's general strategy is to support schools, not districts, although New York has targeted eight districts for supports.

Source: Authors' compilation based on interviews and focus groups 2007.

Six state education agencies convened education leaders or leadership teams as an explicit strategy to develop personal connections and relationships between the state education agency and the schools or districts, to build learning communities among schools and districts, and to spur shared involvement in local initiatives

aligned with data-determined needs. Connecticut required districts under corrective action to participate in the Cambridge Education Instructional and Financial Assessment, an external district assessment based on a school inspection model used in England. A team of trained state education agency staff did intensive five-day reviews examining all aspects of a district's operation and support for learning. The team then gave feedback to the district, to help it develop or refine its improvement plan. According to a Connecticut respondent, "Before, districts developed their plans according to what they wanted to do, were interested in doing, or had the resources to do. We want the detailed assessment to identify priorities and needs." New Hampshire required that districts and schools do root cause analyses of problems identified by test score data. Trained facilitators supported each root cause analysis, and local districts could use their funds to hire such a facilitator.

Distinguished educators and state education agency staff were providing assistance to school and district teams as they developed or refined their improvement plans. Connecticut assigned state education agency teams to help each of its 12 focus districts develop improvement plans informed by the district assessment process. In Maine distinguished educators provided on-site consultation during plan development. Districts in Massachusetts assessed their own past efforts to help low-performing schools improve and analyzed those efforts. Massachusetts state education agency staff then used the results of the self-assessments to help district planning teams. In New York five Regional School Support Centers had protocols that specified how much and what kind of planning assistance their staff should provide. Vermont state education agency administrators were assigned to individual schools as liaisons for support planning.

Each state education agency continued to provide consultation after initial planning, from occasional telephone calls to weekly on-site assistance. The number and nature of consultations with low-performing schools and districts varied: contact could be by telephone, email, or a site visit. Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island assigned staff and consultants to work with specific districts on site throughout the year, coaching leaders, providing training, and working with faculty. Puerto Rico's outside partners provided intensive, ongoing on-site assistance to school leaders, faculty, parents, and student groups throughout the first 18 months of intervention. After some initial visits Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont staff were more likely to communicate with school leaders by phone and on email, in part because of the rural locations of many schools and districts identified as low-performing.

Six state education agencies convened education leaders or leadership teams as an explicit strategy to develop personal connections and relationships between the state education agency and the schools or districts, to build learning communities among schools and districts, and to spur shared involvement in local initiatives. Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island convened superintendent networks for professional development, community-building, and communication. In New Hampshire and Puerto Rico an important strategy was summer institutes for school improvement teams. Such institutes lasted several days and gave leadership teams professional development, with time for team planning and support for sharing among teams. Another example of a state-sponsored event that gathered leaders across district boundaries was Vermont's Principal Learning Community (described below) .

Each state education agency offered topic-specific professional development. State education agencies offered a range of professional development services led by their own staff, by consultants, or by outside partners. The topics included leadership development, data work (general data analysis or formative assessment), instructional strategies,

and content-area professional development in literacy or mathematics.

Leadership development, offered by seven of eight state education agencies (see table 10), was the only topic commonly offered in the jurisdictions studied that was not specifically mentioned in the NCLB Act's list of professional development content areas. Leadership development focused on individual leaders—usually principals or superintendents—or on school or district leadership teams. Its organization varied. A cohort of leaders might meet during the school year; institutes might convene teams for several days; or mentors, coaches, or facilitators might be provided to work with school or district leaders over time. Massachusetts required principals of chronically low-performing schools to be trained through the National Institute for School Leadership, according to the lead administrator. Vermont required leaders of schools newly identified as in need of improvement to participate in state-organized principal learning communities, an ongoing series of collegial professional development activities. In Connecticut superintendents and principals received advice and support from retired administrators who were successful and respected. In Puerto Rico principals received ongoing coaching from service providers—and such leadership support was being extended to include some regional administrators, teachers, parents, and students. New York and Rhode Island have also provided leadership coaching to principals and district administrative teams.

Each state education agency was helping local educators learn more about data work—that is, about analyzing data (general data analysis) and about using data to inform and refine improvement plans and to drive instructional strategies (formative assessment). And states were providing professional development in using multiple measures to assess student, school, and district needs. Vermont—with its state policy to develop local assessment systems—offered several professional development services on using multiple measures. Maine was conducting pilot professional development on formative assessment.

All state education agencies were providing content-area professional development in literacy or mathematics—to improve instruction, curriculum, or content knowledge

All state education agencies were providing teachers with opportunities to learn instructional techniques, such as differentiated instruction and interdisciplinary instruction—or to help them learn strategies for addressing instructional needs in specific populations, such as English language learner students and students with disabilities.

All state education agencies were providing content-area professional development in literacy or mathematics—to improve instruction, curriculum, or content knowledge. Puerto Rico, for example, required professional development service providers to offer literacy workshops to teachers in its targeted schools. Maine, hoping to bring staff from rural schools together, was experimenting with piloting webinars (Internet seminars) for professional development on specific topics.

Some states required staff to participate in professional development. Other states made participation optional.

Ongoing revision of state systems of intervention

State education agencies often adjust the services they offer and revise how they organize them to support schools or districts. Each state education agency was either planning changes in strategy or had just begun a new course of action at the time of the site visits.

Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island had begun to shift their interventions from school-level to district-level in 2005. Connecticut, which had assigned state education agency staff to district intervention teams in spring 2007, began training at the state education agency for a new district assessment approach in fall 2007. New

Four state education agencies prepared documents giving rationales for their intervention strategies

Hampshire was discussing a shift toward working primarily with districts, rather than with both districts and schools, in fall 2007. And at the same time Maine administrators had started planning how to make their interventions more systematic. Puerto Rico and New York were rethinking their overall support systems, as contracts with major service providers were to expire within the next two years. Vermont just enacted its first state policy with requirements for all low-performing schools.

Changes outside a state education agency can require state education agencies to modify their intervention systems. For example, in 2007 New York passed Chapter 57 of the state laws to make district funding formulas more equitable across the state. Chapter 57 requires districts eligible for additional funds to submit a Contract for Excellence identifying state-approved, research-based programs that will be used to improve achievement for students in greatest need (New York State Assembly 2007). Low-performing schools that receive the additional funds are expected to align the efforts funded through the contract with efforts funded through other sources. (For more information on New York interventions and related policies see the state profiles for this report, available at www.relnei.org.) With such complex new requirements, it becomes the responsibility of state education agency staff to clarify how the new law should be interpreted in relation to existing national and state NCLB requirements and how school or district services and requirements must be realigned.

RATIONALES FOR STATE EDUCATION AGENCY APPROACHES TO SCHOOL AND DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT

This section describes the responses of state education agency staff who were asked to give their rationales for approaches to school improvement.[2] Respondents at each state education agency could describe their goals and explain the reasons for the strategies they had chosen. (For a summary of state education agency interventions and their rationales see appendix D.)

Documented theories or logic models for state approaches

Four state education agencies had prepared documents giving rationales for their intervention strategies. The depth and breadth of such documentation varied by state. Connecticut and Massachusetts had each developed a one-page "theory of action," and Rhode Island had a functionality framework describing how to implement and sustain change. New York had documentation explaining its NCLB interventions in relation to its pre-existing school accountability system, including specific protocols for regional partner engagement with schools.

Connecticut designed its theory of action to accompany a new state education agency organization, with close coordination between the bureaus of school improvement and accountability. According to the theory, "If we assist a school district in strengthening and aligning its organizational systems over time, particularly those closest to the instructional core at the school level, then student learning will incrementally and notably improve, with reasonable probability that such improvement will be sustained" (Connecticut State Department of Education n.d.). An official identified the following question as central to the state's work: "What supports are in the [district] central office to provide assistance to schools?"

In June 2007 Massachusetts publicized what was then the state's current approach to interventions through a concept paper sent to a stakeholders' group. The concept paper presented the department's broad framework for a state system of support. It described the state's current work as a shift in emphasis: "Our approach to helping schools and districts improve has evolved from identifying problems to working collaboratively to strengthen district capacity and build district infrastructure to support standards-based classroom instruction" (Massachusetts Department of Elementary

and Secondary Education 2007b). In January 2008 Massachusetts state officials presented a theory of action for work connected with the NCLB Act to the state board of education (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2008). Starting with the premise that "districts are responsible for oversight and support to schools that fail to meet school performance targets," the theory of action went on to define the state's roles in providing resources and technical assistance, in monitoring performance, and in intervening where necessary. The definition left room for the state education agency to participate actively at the district and school levels: "When necessary, the state directs the district to take specific actions to improve school results. . . . If a district fails to take appropriate action, the state assumes or reassigns governance of chronically low-performing schools."

Rhode Island developed a "functionality framework" with a systemic approach to implementing and sustaining change. The framework specified accountability and responsibilities for each level of the education system (state, district, school, teacher). The department was working on a logic model to go with it. According to a Rhode Island senior agency official, the state "started with one theory: 'It's all about what happens in the classroom; therefore, we should only be working with schools'"—but the state then "changed to another [theory] that said, 'Now it's all about the central office. . . .' [We] realized if we're not on the same page with the district, our good efforts could be completely wiped out." Another official asked about focusing: "How does the state give districts a tool box to effectively manage their individual schools?"

New York had the most detailed documentation on its rationale—partly because the state had developed a school accountability model in 1989 with its Schools Under Registration Review process, which used state examinations to identify schools that were performing farthest below state standards, and which has led to school closings. After the NCLB Act was passed the New York State Education Department documented a rationale for NCLB processes and interventions alongside the existing state accountability system, to illustrate their similarities and differences, their overlaps and divergences. Department administrators developed graphic models showing the steps of each intervention and how they were activated by different triggers for schools and districts. In 2003 seven Regional School Support Centers were created—to give technical assistance and support to schools and priority districts identified as low-performing under the act and to coordinate other partners and services that could help schools and districts improve. The Regional School Support Centers are expected to customize the design and delivery of their services so that they best serve the individual needs of schools and districts. The rationale for their creation was that causal analysis, planning, and professional development were essential, and that each Regional School Support Center could be expected to know best how to work with the schools and districts in its region.

New York had the most detailed documentation on its rationale—partly because the state had developed a school accountability model in 1989 with its Schools Under Registration Review process

Officials at the four state education agencies without formal documentation—Maine, New Hampshire, Puerto Rico, and Vermont—articulated their rationales in interviews, or they provided documents to illustrate the principles underlying their agencies' approaches. For example, in Puerto Rico, vendors who responded to a request for proposals requiring a collaborative approach with schools pointed to the request for proposals in describing their approaches to the work. Maine state education agency staff who work with schools were able in an interview to identify short-term outcomes and links between and among activities (though they had not written anything before the interview). New Hampshire state education agency officials had begun working with the New England Comprehensive Center to develop a "theory of change." Vermont officials stated that schools should shape their own improvements and that the state education agency should support them in

In each jurisdiction the choices of state education agencies are shaped by local traditions about when to give schools latitude, when to prescribe actions, and when to negotiate

developing local assessments and leadership.

Rationales for intervention at the district or school level

Connecticut and Massachusetts have documentation identifying the district as the proper focus for state improvement efforts. Rhode Island's functionality framework and logic model also focus mainly on district capacity. In Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island low-performing schools tend to be clustered in urban districts. Officials at all three state education agencies explained that this concentration led the agencies to reject a school-based approach.

State education agencies in the region are not unified in a belief that they should focus on districts. An official in Puerto Rico asserted that "the school is responsible for academic achievement and for its own decisions; it takes school power to get results." A New York state administrator, similarly convinced that the state education agency should focus on schools, said: "If some states are only working with the district administration, then they are losing a valuable opportunity to provide support on a school-by-school level. The district improvement approach suffers when district leadership changes." New York has continued to use a two-pronged approach—with consultation and professional development at the school level and with a continuum of support for priority districts (those with systemic weaknesses or persistent and widespread low performance) ranging from monitoring to technical assistance.

Rationales that balance the tension between state education agency requirements and local decisionmaking

In each jurisdiction the choices of state education agencies are shaped by local traditions about when to give schools latitude, when to prescribe actions, and when to negotiate. Respondents in Maine and New Hampshire spoke of a tradition of local control shaping their approach to school and district improvement. Administrators at each state education agency explained how challenging it is to find the right balance between agency demands and collaboration with schools or districts that are chronically in need.

New Hampshire represents one end of the continuum between control by the state and control by schools and districts: its history and tradition emphasize local control. One New Hampshire official said: "Our state attitude of 'Live free or die' affects the state accountability system. We need to move slowly, sell ideas to locals, not punish." Accordingly, New Hampshire legislation prohibits state takeovers of schools. Maine also emphasizes local control, not by legislation, but by allowing local superintendents to reject Title I status and funding for individual schools—leaving schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress exempt from the sequence of consequences required under the NCLB Act. Five Maine school superintendents have chosen this option.

Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York represent the other end of the continuum: all have legislation granting the state education agency authority to intervene and restructure chronically low-performing schools, and each agency has identified situations requiring it to use this authority. New York has taken over one school district. The Massachusetts Board of Education is authorized to remove principals and to require districts to provide their chronically underperforming schools with 10 "conditional structures" necessary for improvement, including budget authority for principals, common planning time for teachers, instructional coaching, and extra class time for students in need of remediation.

State education agencies' decisions to assert authority can fall between these two extremes. Even an agency that tends to offer substantial latitude to low-performing schools might impose certain requirements. For example, Maine offers schools considerable choice in professional development and other strategies. Yet Maine requires that all professional development services adhere to a list

of attributes to help ensure high quality and that school leadership teams include special education staff. The rules reflect a strong concern in Maine's Department of Education about the fruitlessness of weak professional development and the vulnerability of special education students. As one official said, "Professional development has to be scientifically based with a follow up. No 'one-shot deals.' If it's a conference, how is it going to fit into their overall plan?" In these two matters Maine's strong belief in certain needs overrides the state's general commitment to local control.

Similarly, approaches that are fairly prescriptive might allow latitude in certain matters. For example, New York has guidelines for district expenditures under Contracts for Excellence and has protocols to guide how Regional School Support Center staff work with schools. Yet Regional School Support Centers are charged to work with schools at their discretion, and the centers may choose to work with schools collaboratively within the parameters of state policies. (In interviews at least two centers reported working collaboratively with schools in their regions.) Similarly, Puerto Rico assigned outside vendors to help schools without allowing schools to choose the vendors. Yet Puerto Rico also required vendors to use a collaborative approach with schools. Again, Connecticut had designed a menu of approved professional development services. Yet Connecticut also allowed each district choice, through negotiations with the district's state support team. (For further details, see the supplemental materials available at www.relnei.org.)

Approaches to interventions shaped by concern for limited resources

State education agency officials consistently reported in interviews and focus groups that their capacity—human and financial—to deliver needed services to low-performing schools and districts is strained. The officials repeatedly spoke of the need to make difficult decisions about how many schools and districts receive interventions, and about the timing, breadth, and depth of that support. Such comments grew in intensity as the officials considered the prospect of increasing numbers of low-performing schools and, in some cases, of low-performing districts. The shared perception of these officials is consistent with many studies that have found that state education agencies lack the capacity and the infrastructure they need to lead and manage intense, complex interventions with large numbers of schools and districts (Center on Education Policy 2007; The Education Alliance at Brown University 2005; Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy at MassINC 2005; Sunderman and Orfield 2006).

Each state education agency has engaged outside organizations to supplement or expand its own direct support to schools or districts

State education agency officials reported that emphasis on certain strategies—contracting with outside partners, reorganizing offices within the state education agency, and attempting to align and coordinate efforts throughout the state education agency—arises from a need to manage and sustain interventions despite limited capacity.

Engaging outside organizations

Each state education agency has engaged outside organizations to supplement or expand its own direct support to schools or districts. In Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Puerto Rico, and Rhode Island one or more outside partners have provided ongoing services to assigned schools or districts. All state education agencies reported that they have engaged outside agencies to support their work with low-performing schools—by providing special expertise, such as professional development in literacy or mathematics, or in other ways. These decisions are made when state education agencies are unable to provide services directly because of limited staff, limited resources, or limited knowledge and expertise.

Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Puerto Rico used outside partners extensively to provide ongoing, intensive services

Respondents at each state education agency said that coherent service to schools and districts was complicated by uneven coordination and alignment across departments or service providers

to targeted schools and districts. Connecticut had developed a menu of approved outside service providers for low-performing schools and districts. The menu included intermediary agencies, nonprofit organizations, and universities. New York had a range of partners to provide school interventions—including teacher centers, a state staff and curriculum development network, and higher education institutions—and was seeking more. Massachusetts had contracted turnaround partners to consult with three small districts. Also, if a chronically underperforming school in Massachusetts became a pilot school, the state allowed it to choose and contract with an outside partner. Rhode Island used a cadre of leadership mentors and turnaround facilitators to support low-performing schools and districts. Whereas the examples of Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island concern work directly contracted by state education agencies, Puerto Rico—as a local education agency—sought and received a Title II grant to support a contract with 10 vendors to provide intensive supports to 10 schools each. Vendors include nonprofit organizations, universities, and a community foundation.

Three state education agencies reorganized their offices to focus on NCLB supports and accountability

Each state education agency has made staffing adjustments to accommodate the NCLB Act. But three—Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island—have reorganized their offices to focus strategically on NCLB supports and accountability. The most dramatic example is Connecticut, which reorganized the entire state education agency. Connecticut now has a Bureau of School Improvement and a Bureau of Accountability that together intervene with selected districts. The directors of the two bureaus initially collaborated to develop their approach. Staff members from both bureaus (approximately 20 total) comprise teams that assess and support the state's 12 targeted districts.

Rhode Island formed the Office of Progressive Support and Intervention in 2005 to attend to interventions, bringing together Title I, school improvement, and data analysis. And Massachusetts gathered Title I, curriculum, leadership development, and school and district improvement into an Office of Accountability and Targeted Assistance.

Cross-department coordination

Each state education agency has tried to align and coordinate efforts across department boundaries. State education agency lead administrators and focus group participants all described how, to serve low-performing schools and districts, they coordinate efforts with colleagues from different departments within the agency. New Hampshire has included members of various state education agency departments on the team that supports low-performing schools and districts. And Vermont state education agency staff responsible for school interventions have convened meetings among agency departments twice monthly—to discuss the status and needs of specific schools, and to identify appropriate supports. "We work across the department with other teams and other resources to provide as much focus on these schools as we can," said one Vermont administrator.

New York has supported low-performing schools regionally through its Regional School Support Centers. The state promotes regular collaboration and coordination among regional network partners including experts in bilingual education, special education, student support services, and adult education. Respondents from the other state education agencies described less formal efforts to coordinate with colleagues across divisions, and expressed a desire to expand such interactions.

Coherence is a challenge—even with clearly defined state approaches

Although respondents at each state education agency could give a rationale for the design and execution of the agency's interventions,

respondents also said that coherent service to schools and districts was complicated—and at times prevented—by uneven coordination and alignment across departments or service providers. The involvement of many actors inside and outside the departments, and the existence of different approaches to intervention, raised the issue of how to present a coherent front to schools and districts.

According to New Hampshire focus group participants, a recent review at the state education agency had uncovered 16 separate programs supporting districts or schools. In fall 2007 state education agency officials were still deciding how to leverage programs across the agency's divisions.

New York respondents described a challenge in the lack of alignment among services and among approaches taken by different departments. The state has developed protocols to guide uniform service delivery across each Regional School Support Center. The center contracts will soon be up for renewal, and the state is looking at ways to better align services. A New York administrator said:

> *In terms of our state system of support, we have had varying levels of success in supporting schools to increase their capacity, achieve the adequate yearly progress targets, and become schools that are in good standing. We are right now looking to try to identify what makes some regions more successful than others, so we can build those considerations into the next [request for proposals] for providing support to schools and districts.*

Puerto Rico's approach—contracting with 10 vendors to support schools—requires coordination and presents challenges to coherent service delivery. Rhode Island intends to create better-aligned state education agency services that respond more effectively to district needs. The state's deputy commissioner noted: "We need a common approach [for all our offices] . . . with clear, measurable outcomes." In contrast to other state agencies, focus group participants from the Vermont Department of Education underscored the internal alignment among the agency's efforts: "We work really well together. We sit together. We talk constantly. We are constantly developing ideas together. Schools get the same message." In Vermont a cut in the number of staff who are responsible for a growing number of identified schools prompted deeper collaboration across divisions within the state education agency.

Much remains to be learned about building school and district capacity to support student achievement. Much remains to be learned, too, about how state education agencies can focus and best provide supports for that goal

CONCLUSION

The eight jurisdictions examined in this report differ greatly in size, cultures, traditions, and populations. As they face the challenge of helping schools meet the NCLB Act's goal of proficiency in reading and mathematics for every student by 2014, state education agencies seek new ways of doing business, systematically intervening with low-performing schools and districts. Approaches range from broad and inclusive efforts to deeper interventions with a smaller number of schools and districts. Each state education agency strives to address local needs—within its resources, and while meeting its federally defined responsibilities.

This report presents the voices and perspectives of state education agency administrators. School and district leaders might respond differently to the same questions about interventions and rationales that were posed to state administrators for this study. School and district leaders and staff are likely to have their own perspectives on interventions and their own understanding of state education agency policies and practices. Thus, much remains to be learned about building school and district capacity to support student achievement. Much remains to be learned, too, about how state education agencies can focus and best provide supports for that goal.

NOTES

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1. Although Puerto Rico is not a state, this report uses *state education agency* generically and sometimes refers to a group of "states" or state education agencies in which Puerto Rico is included.

2. In this report a *rationale* is any theory that motivates policy choices made by state education agency staff by envisioning how an intervention can be expected to change schools and districts. If a state education agency official uses a certain term to denote an explicit model—for example, *logic model, theory of change,* or *theory of action*—the report uses that term.

APPENDIX A
GLOSSARY

Accountability plan. See *Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook*.

Accountability system. Under a state's accountability system the state sets academic standards for what every child should know and be able to do at different grade levels. It measures student academic achievement through state-administered assessments. And it reports school-level and district-level test results to the public.

Adequate yearly progress. An individual state's measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards—in other words, the minimum improvement that schools and districts must achieve in a year. To make adequate yearly progress, each school must meet two criteria (U. S. Department of Education 2006):

- At least 95 percent of the students in each subgroup who are enrolled at the school must participate in the assessment.
- The school must meet or exceed the state's annual measurable objectives, both with students in the aggregate and also with each subgroup that contains enough students to count toward school-level accountability. (Subgroups include economically disadvantaged students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and limited English proficiency students.) Even if a student subgroup fails to make the required progress, the school can still make adequate yearly progress if the number of students scoring below proficient in that subgroup decreased by at least 10 percent from the previous year and if that subgroup also made progress on one or more other academic indicators.

Annual measurable objective. Established by each state, annual measurable objectives must:

- Identify for each year a minimum percentage of students that must demonstrate proficient academic achievement or above on state tests.
- Ensure that all students meet or exceed academic proficiency for the state by 2014.

Annual measurable objectives must be the same throughout the state for each school, each local education agency (district), and each group of students. The objectives may be the same for more than one year if they are consistent with the state's intermediate goals.

Assessment. Any test or other task that permits students to demonstrate learning. Under the NCLB Act tests are aligned with academic standards. Since 2002/03 all schools have been required to administer tests in each of the three grade spans: 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12. Since 2005/06 annual math and reading tests have been required for grades 3–8. Since 2007/08 science achievement tests have also been required.

Confidence interval. An interval constructed in relation to an observed value, such as a test score or mean. The true value can be believed—with a certain level of confidence—to lie within the confidence interval. A wider confidence interval allows for more error.

Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook. A detailed federal form that each state education agency must complete and submit to the U.S. Department of Education to demonstrate that its accountability system meets the requirements of the NCLB Act.

Corrective action. Schools and districts are designated as in corrective action after failing to make adequate yearly progress for four successive years.

Decision letters from the U.S. Department of Education. To revise an accountability plan under the NCLB Act, a state submits a written request to the U.S. Department of Education including the rationale for the revision and any evidence about

its likely effects. The U.S. Department of Education reviews each amendment request—to ensure that it meets legal and regulatory requirements—and responds with a decision letter within 30 days.

Disaggregated data. Education data are disaggregated when test results for schools and districts are sorted into groups—students with disabilities, limited English proficiency students, students from racial and ethnic minority groups, economically disadvantaged students. The disaggregation allows parents and teachers to see how each student group is performing—not just the average score for a child's school or district.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, first passed in 1965, is the principal federal law affecting K–12 education. The NCLB Act is its most recent reauthorization.

English language learner students. Students with a non-English home language whose difficulty comprehending, speaking, reading, or writing English affects their school performance in English.

Formative assessment. A part of instruction that generates feedback to inform instructional improvement, formative assessment can include activities teachers and students do to assess learning.

Growth-based accountability model. A growth-based accountability model, or growth model, measures a school's or district's progress by analyzing performance against student trajectory toward proficiency over a set period—not by comparing a cohort's performance to the scores of students in the preceding year. Many states have expressed interest in the power of growth-based accountability models to reveal year-to-year growth by individual students. In 2005 the U.S. Department of Education announced a pilot program for qualified states to help evaluate the fairness and effectiveness of various growth models. In May 2006 the first two states, North Carolina and Tennessee, were approved for the pilot. Since then four more states have received approval, and one has received conditional approval, to implement growth models for 2006/07.

In need of improvement. Under Title I a local education agency must identify any school that has not made adequate yearly progress for at least two consecutive years as in need of improvement. Similarly, states must annually review and designate low-performing schools (see definition below), districts, or other local education agencies as in need of improvement.

Interventions under the NCLB Act. See tables B2 and B3 in appendix B for a list of interventions required by the NCLB Act. Intervention options change as a school or district fails to make adequate yearly progress for more than three successive years.

Limited English proficiency. See *English language learner students* and *subgroups under the NCLB Act.*

Local education agency. Within a state, a public board of education or other public authority that maintains administrative control of public elementary or secondary schools in a political subdivision of the state (such as a city, county, township, or school district).

Low-performing. In this report *low-performing* means that a school or district—having failed to meet adequate yearly progress under the NCLB Act for two or more successive years—is designated as:

- In need of improvement (failed to make adequate yearly progress for at least two successive years).
- Under corrective action (failed to make adequate yearly progress for four successive years).
- Under restructuring (failed to make adequate yearly progress for five or more successive years; applies only to schools, not districts).

This report emphasizes schools and districts that are under corrective action or under restructuring.

Multiple measures. Multiple measures are a variety of assessments used to characterize the performance of students, schools, and districts. Student measures can include—besides formal tests—portfolios and exhibitions, performance assessments, and teacher observations. School and district measures can include—besides formal tests—student growth measures, promotion rates, attendance records, suspension rates, graduation rates, and enrollment in honor or advanced placement classes.

National Institute for School Leadership. This Institute runs an executive development program for school principals that uses case studies, computer-assisted simulations, and group discussions of topics such as how best to align instruction with standards. It also uses readings, videos of exemplary practices, video clips from education and business experts, and web-based instruction including interactive tutorials. The program has two parts. First, institute faculty members teach the curriculum of the program for school principals to leadership teams comprising selected senior local educators. Second, institute-trained leadership teams in turn teach the institute curriculum to local principals and other school leaders.

New England Common Assessment Program. A series of annual reading, writing, mathematics, and science achievement tests, developed collaboratively by the New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont departments of education, the New England Common Assessment Program measures students' academic knowledge and skills aligned with grade-level expectations. Student scores are reported at four levels: proficient with distinction, proficient, partially proficient, and substantially below proficient. Reading and mathematics are assessed in grades 3–8, and 11; writing in grades 5, 8, and 11; and science in grades 4, 8, and 11.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Signed into law in January 2002, the NCLB Act reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. The act is built on four principles: accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research. NCLB provisions apply to schools and districts that have received Title I funds.

Northeast and Islands Region. The nine jurisdictions served by the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Vermont, and the Virgin Islands.

Percent proficient method. A method for measuring school and district performance in relation to state targets by calculating the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on state assessments. Compare with *performance index method*.

Performance index method. A method for measuring school and district performance in relation to state targets that allows partial credit for a student score at the basic level, and full credit for a student score at proficient or above. The performance index method thus rewards schools and districts for moving students from below proficient scores into higher achievement levels—unlike the *percent proficient method,* which does not.

Proficiency. A defined level of performance on an assessment. Each state education agency defines the criteria of proficiency on its state assessments. Proficiency criteria thus vary by state, as do the assessments.

Restructuring. Under Title I a local education agency must put under restructuring any school that has failed to make adequate yearly progress for five successive years.

Root cause analysis. In a root cause analysis teams attempt to understand the strengths and

weaknesses in a district that most directly shape school improvement and student achievement by examining existing data and gathering additional data.

State education agency. The agency that is primarily responsible, at the state level, for government supervision of public elementary and secondary schools.

Subgroups under the NCLB Act. The act requires that student subgroups contribute to school and district accountability. Such subgroups include students with disabilities, limited English proficiency students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, and economically disadvantaged students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. The minimum number of students constituting a subgroup that can be disaggregated for performance determinations (see disaggregated data) must equal or exceed the sample size necessary for reliable statistical analysis of predictive validity. The number must also be large enough to protect individual student confidentiality under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974.

Ten principles of accountability. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 requires that states establish accountability systems to track the progress of schools and districts toward the national goal of 100 percent student proficiency by 2014. To guide states as they fulfill the requirement, the law specifies 10 principles for accountability systems (see table B1 in appendix B). Each state education agency must submit a Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook addressing all 10 principles.

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act creates programs that are aimed at the most disadvantaged students in the United States and that reach about 12.5 million students enrolled in public and private schools. Part A provides assistance to improve the teaching and learning of children in high-poverty schools, to enable those children to meet challenging state academic content and performance standards. Title I requires each local education agency to use state assessments, along with local measures (if any), to annually review the performance of each school served under Title I.

Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Provides funding for preparing, training, and recruiting teachers and principals.

Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Provides funding for language instruction for immigrant and limited English proficiency students.

APPENDIX B
THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT OF 2001 AND STATE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

This appendix briefly explains the requirements and terminology set forth by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 that are most pertinent for designing state accountability systems and interventions.

The NCLB Act requires that states establish accountability systems to track the progress of schools and districts toward the national goal of 100 percent student proficiency by 2014. The law specifies 10 principles for accountability systems to guide that work (table B1; for a detailed list of NCLB requirements for low-performing districts and schools see tables B2 and B3). Each state education agency must show that its accountability system meets the 10 principles. The information is reported annually to the U.S. Department of Education through the Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook. Any amendments to an approved plan are negotiated through decision letters from the U.S. Department of Education to the requesting state education agency.

TABLE B1

Ten accountability principles for state education agencies as defined under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001

Principle	State accountability system
1. All schools	• Includes all schools and districts in the state • Holds all schools to the same criteria • Incorporates academic achievement standards • Provides information in a timely manner • Includes report cards • Includes rewards and sanctions
2. All students	• Includes all students • Has a consistent definition for full academic year • Properly includes mobile students
3. How to determine adequate yearly progress	• Expects proficiency for all student subgroups, schools, and local education agencies by 2014 • Defines how to calculate adequate yearly progress for student subgroups, schools, and local education agencies • Establishes a starting point • Establishes statewide annual measurable objectives • Establishes intermediate goals
4. Annual decisions	• Annually measures the progress of schools and districts
5. Subgroup accountability	• Includes all the required student subgroups • Holds schools and local education agencies accountable for the progress of student subgroups • Includes students with disabilities • Includes limited English proficiency students • Uses the smallest number of students necessary to yield statistically reliable information for each purpose for which disaggregated data are used • Protects the privacy of individual students—when reporting achievement results, and when determining whether schools and local education agencies are making adequate yearly progress based on disaggregated subgroups
6. Academic assessments	• Definition of adequate yearly progress is based primarily on the state's academic assessments

(CONTINUED)

TABLE B1 (CONTINUED)

Ten accountability principles for state education agencies as defined under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001

Principle	State accountability system
7. Additional indicators	• Includes graduation rate for high schools • Includes an additional academic indicator for elementary and middle schools • Includes only valid and reliable indicators
8. Separate decisions	• Holds students, schools, and districts separately accountable for mathematics (on the one hand) and for reading and English language arts (on the other hand)
9. Validity and reliability	• Produces reliable decisions • Produces valid decisions • Includes contingencies to address changes in assessment and student population
10. Participation rate	• Defines how to calculate the rate of participation in the statewide assessment • Defines how to apply the 95 percent participation criterion to student subgroups and small schools

Source: U.S. Department of Education 2007a.

TABLE B2

Requirements under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 for school improvement when schools are identified as low-performing

School status	Requirements for schools under the NCLB Act
In need of improvement	Provide professional development to staff using 10 percent of Title IA funds
Corrective action	At least one of the following: • Replace some school staff • Institute and implement new curriculum, including professional development • Decrease management authority of the school • Appoint outside expert to provide technical assistance • Extend school day or year • Restructure the school
Restructuring, year one—planning	All of the above, plus plan to do one of the following: • Reopen as charter school • Replace all or most of school staff, including the principal • Contract with an outside entity to operate the school • Turn the school over to the state education agency • Restructure school governance
Restructuring, year two—implementation	• Put into practice the restructuring plan created during previous year • Use technical assistance provided by the district to put into practice the restructuring plan

Note: This table presents only those federal requirements under the NCLB Act that directly address school improvement. The act does not require state education agencies to intervene directly. State education agencies may choose to involve themselves directly in some of the interventions listed above while leaving responsibility for others with the districts.

TABLE B3

Requirements under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 for district improvement when districts are identified as low-performing

District status	Requirements for districts under the NCLB Act
In need of improvement	• Revise and implement district improvement plan • Provide professional development to staff using 10 percent of Title IA funds • Limitations on transferability of federal funds. District may not transfer more than 30 percent of its Titles IIA, IID, IV, and V funds, and they must be used for approved improvement activities

Corrective action	All of the above (except the 10 percent set aside for professional development) and:
	• Prohibition on transfer of federal funds
	• State takes one or more of the following corrective actions:
	  • Defer programmatic funds or reduce administrative funds
	  • Institute a new curriculum
	  • Replace district personnel
	  • Remove individual schools from the district and arrange for their public governance and supervision
	  • Appoint a receiver or trustee to administer district affairs
	  • Abolish or restructure the district

Note: This table presents only those federal requirements under the NCLB Act that directly address school improvement. The act does not require state education agencies to intervene directly. State education agencies may choose to involve themselves directly in some of the interventions listed above while leaving responsibility for others with the districts

TABLE B4

Designations for low-performing schools and districts, by number of successive years they have failed to make adequate yearly progress

	Number of successive years	
Designation	Low-performing schools	Low-performing districts
In need of improvement	2–3	2–3
Corrective action	4	4+
Restructuring	5+	na

na is not applicable. Corrective action is the final NCLB category for districts that consistently fail to meet adequate yearly progress. Exit criteria are the same as for schools.

Note: A school that has failed to make adequate yearly progress for two or more successive years must show adequate yearly progress for two successive years to lose its designation as a low-performing school. A school that reaches adequate yearly progress targets for a single year retains its designation as a low-performing school for a second year. During that second year the school's performance determines whether it loses that designation in the third year or progresses to the next low-performing school designation.

Source: Authors' compilation based on U.S. Department of Education 2006.

Each state has flexibility in pacing the progress of its schools toward proficiency. States set their own annual measurable objectives to specify the progress toward proficiency that students must make on particular assessments each year. To make adequate yearly progress, each school must meet two criteria (U. S. Department of Education 2006):

- At least 95 percent of the students in each subgroup who are enrolled at the school must participate in the assessment.

- The school must meet or exceed the state's annual measurable objectives, both with students in the aggregate and with each subgroup that contains enough students to count toward school-level accountability. (Subgroups include economically disadvantaged students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and

limited English proficiency students.) Even if a student subgroup fails to make the required progress, the school can still make adequate yearly progress if the number of students scoring below proficient in that subgroup decreased by at least 10 percent from the previous year, and if that subgroup also made progress on one or more other academic indicators.

Designations for low-performing schools and districts differ by the number of successive years that the schools or districts have not shown adequate yearly progress (table B4). Schools designated as low-performing are subjected—by their district or the state, depending on their designation—to a progressive series of sanctions and supports. To lose the designation *low-performing* a school or district must show adequate yearly progress for two successive years.

APPENDIX C
METHODS

This project descriptively analyzes how eight state education agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region identify and support low-performing schools and districts, as required by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Researchers collected documents from April 2007 through April 2008. The team interviewed staff at each state education agency between July and November 2007, with follow-up interviews continuing through April 2008.

Research questions

Three research questions guided data collection and analysis:

1. What criteria do state education agencies use to identify schools and districts as low-performing, and how many schools and districts are placed in each category under the NCLB Act?

2. What services—and other supports and interventions—do state education agencies use with low-performing schools and districts?

3. What rationales do state education agency staff give for their approaches to school and district improvement?

Sample

The project initially proposed to examine the systems of support for each of the region's nine states and jurisdictions. The Northeast and Islands Region includes the six New England states, New York, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. This project included Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The U.S. Virgin Islands withdrew from participation because the absence of a commissioner of education for the duration of the project put many aspects of its work on hold or in flux—a factor that became a barrier to data collection. Virgin Islands administrators have asked for the final report to be shared with a design team, so that it can inform their future intervention planning.

At each state education agency the researchers interviewed a lead administrator, conducted focus groups with the team responsible for implementing the interventions with low-performing schools, and interviewed other state education agency officials.

Sample selection. To identify the lead administrator for NCLB interventions with schools and districts in each state education agency, the project directors drew on their prior knowledge and on that of state liaisons for the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands. Each lead administrator was asked to arrange the site visit to include both an in-person interview with himself or herself—lasting one hour or longer—and a focus group interview including up to six people who directly assisted schools and districts. In addition, each lead administrator was asked to identify the official responsible for state policies affecting school and district interventions (if that official was not the lead administrator) and to support arrangements for interviews and focus groups.

Lead administrators were asked to identify focus group participants because the state education agencies were staffed differently, and because the interventions varied significantly in the scope and depth of services. Lead administrators were asked to identify "the persons most involved in designing and working on interventions in districts and schools. These persons may be full- or part-time department of education staff, consultants, turnaround partners, or others." The project directors worked with lead administrators by telephone and on email to identify a purposive sample of people working directly on the interventions, differentiating the focus groups and interviews to adapt to unique circumstances while still garnering the same level of information from each state education agency. For example, conversations with the Puerto Rico lead administrator showed clearly that a focus group would not be appropriate there.

Puerto Rico's primary service providers are located in 10 distinct organizations. From the list of providers the researchers selected a sample of four organizations of diverse types, and checked with the lead administrator to ensure that this sample would be representative on other issues as well. Interviews at each of the four organizations' sites supplanted a single focus group. (For a description of the unique context of each state education agency, the numbers and roles of participants, and the reasons for adjustments to the numbers and types of interviews and focus groups, see table C1.)

Each lead administrator also identified another senior policy official to be interviewed for a different perspective. Only two state education agencies did not identify an official above the lead administrator (in Connecticut that position was vacant; in Vermont the person was not available). Administrators in New York and Puerto Rico arranged interviews with other key informants deemed necessary to understand the policy context.

State education agency administrators in three states (Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont) chose to participate in focus groups, in part because of how groups were organized and worked together. In Vermont, for example, the lead administrator reported that "staff does everything as a group" and requested that the site visit consist of one extended group interview—those who work with schools plus the lead administrator.

Confidentiality

There was no guarantee of confidentiality. Lead administrators and policy persons were told explicitly that they would be named in the report, and they gave their written permission with that understanding. Focus group participants were told that they would not be identified by name, but might be quoted and identified by role, and there was the understanding that in most states with few people working on interventions, people could be identified. All gave written permission and agreed to the recording of interviews and focus groups. Interview recordings and notes were saved to a secure drive.

Data sources

Data sources included publicly available information, interviews, and focus groups with state education agency officials, and documents provided by the state education agency officials. The documents included but were not limited to:

- Publicly available documents collected from federal and state government and other web sites—including, but not limited to, the NCLB Act itself, summaries of NCLB requirements, demographic data for each jurisdiction from the National Center on Education Statistics, *State Accountability Workbooks* describing state accountability plans approved by the U.S. Department of Education, and published lists of schools and districts identified as low-performing in 2007 and 2008.

- Supplemental materials provided by the state education agency, such as state legislation and state and federal court rulings related to state education agency interventions; descriptions of state education agency interventions; and materials related to state interventions (reports and materials describing stated theories of change, rationales for interventions, or desired outcomes of interventions).

- Interviews and focus groups held with state education agency lead administrators, selected service providers in each jurisdiction, and policy officials (table C1).

From these data sources the researchers drafted an initial profile of each state education agency's approach to interventions with low-performing schools, along with questions regarding further information or clarification.

Data collection

To answer the research questions, the researchers used an iterative data collection process, with each stage informed by and leading to the next. For

TABLE C1
Interviews and focus groups

State education agency	Lead administrator for main interview	Focus group participants[a]	Participants in further interviews to clarify state policies and practice
Connecticut[b]	Director, Bureau of School and District Improvement	Five from state education agency: • Special education and district improvement • School status assessments and program evaluation • Leader-in-residence working with district • Special education and school improvement • School climate improvement	• Director, Bureau of Accountability, Compliance, and Monitoring
Maine[c]	Director, Title I Accountability and School Improvement Office	na	• Policy Director, Federal Program Services • Distinguished educator who works with schools • Lead administrator
Massachusetts[d]	Assistant Associate Commissioner for Accountability and Targeted Assistance	Three from state education agency: • Two in school and district intervention • Lead administrator	• Associate Commissioner, Accountability and Targeted Assistance
New Hampshire[e]	Administrator, Office of Accountability and Administrator, Office of School Improvement	Four from state education agency: • One in school improvement and arts education • Title I staff • Title I director • Accountability administrator	• Deputy Commissioner

New York[f]	Executive Director, Regional School Services, Office of School Improvement and Community Services	• Five from Regional School Support Center A:
		  • Three who work with schools
		  • One who organizes data for school and district use
		  • Regional School Support Center administrative leader
		• Three from Regional School Support Center B:
		  • Two who work with schools
		  • Regional School Support Center administrative leader
		• Five from Regional School Support Center C, working with schools and districts
			• Associate Commissioner, New York State Education Department, to learn about state policy Special Education Coordinator, interviewed because of his office's unique programmatic and fiscal role in the state education agency intervention
			• Regional School Support Center A Director, to learn about districts that have been taken over (see profile)
			• Regional School Support Center C Director, to learn about the specifics of New York City interventions

Puerto Rico[g]	Assistant Secretary for Academic Services	na	• Deputy Commissioner of Education
			• Nine people in four interviews with a sample of four subcontractors:
			  • Subcontractor of type A (university)
			  • Subcontractor of type B (experiential-learning nonprofit)
			  • Two subcontractors of type C (community foundation)
			  • Two subcontractors of type D (community organization)

(CONTINUED)

TABLE C1 (CONTINUED)
Interviews and focus groups

State education agency	Lead administrator for main interview	Focus group participants[a]	Participants in further interviews to clarify state policies and practice
Rhode Island[h]	Director of Progressive Support and Intervention	Five participants: • Two state education agency employees who work with districts • Two subcontractor facilitators who work with schools • Consultant to the intervention design and implementation	• Deputy Commissioner
Vermont[i]	Division Director for Standards and Assessment	Five participants from state education agency: • State education agency lead administrator, • Four participants who work with districts and have responsibilities beyond the intervention	
Total	Nine lead administrators	Thirty-five participants in eight focus groups	• Six state education policy experts in six interviews • Fifteen others in eight interviews

na is not applicable.

a. Job titles are provided for lead administrators and policy officials, but—to preserve confidentiality—are not provided for focus group participants.

b. The Connecticut Department of Education has two bureaus (School and District Improvement and Accountability; Compliance and Monitoring) that work together for interventions. No policy person was in place at the time of the interviews.

c. The Maine intervention staff comprises three people: two distinguished educators and a lead administrator. One distinguished educator was sick on the day of the interview. There was no focus group—only interviews.

d. The Massachusetts lead administrator joined the group interview.

e. The two New Hampshire lead administrators were interviewed together because they said they work as a team.

f. New York State provides support to low-performing schools and targeted districts through five Regional School Support Centers. Because Regional School Support Centers are spread out geographically across the state, one joint focus group was not possible. State project leaders helped choose a sample of three Regional School Support Centers, one for New York City (which makes up over 30 percent of the public school enrollment in the state), one that includes another "Big Four" urban district, and one that includes the district taken over by the state. The Department of Special Education is a primary partner and funder of the Regional School Support Centers.

g. Puerto Rico uses 10 subcontractors for interventions. With many discrete vendors, it was not feasible to assemble a focus group. Instead, the deputy commissioner helped select a sample of interviewees to represent different vendor types. Since the Undersecretary for Academic Services was newly hired at the time of the interviews, the deputy commissioner was the primary interviewee.

h. Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education staff provided some direct support to low-performing schools and districts and also contracted to outside organizations and individuals to provide support.

i. The Vermont lead administrator asked that she and the team be interviewed together. The policy person had recurring scheduling conflicts.

Source: Authors' compilation.

each jurisdiction an initial review of state documents informed interviews with the lead state education agency administrator, which, in turn, informed the focus group and other interviews. This process was necessary because different information was made public by each state education agency about its interventions. The iterative process also allowed interviewers to customize protocols to each jurisdiction and to keep the burden on respondents low by narrowing the scope of the questions asked in each interview.

Framework for data collection. Using publicly available information, researchers developed an initial outline or framework on information to collect comparable data from each state education agency. The outline included background information (demographics, recent history of school

reform initiatives), criteria used to identify schools or districts for direct state education agency intervention, adequate yearly progress targets and standards, interventions, and funding sources. A single research associate drafted an initial profile for each jurisdiction using publicly available materials.

The research team then developed a list of questions and issues to explore in interviews during on-site visits to each state education agency. An open-ended interview protocol (available upon request) was developed for the lead administrator or administrators at each state education agency. The protocol was then individualized for each jurisdiction, taking into account the differences among interventions and the wide variation in the amount of documentation on interventions. A focus group discussion guide was developed and further customized for each jurisdiction—to help the researchers explore respondents' understanding about their interventions and the rationales behind them, and to help the researchers probe individual issues that had arisen in each jurisdiction.

Site visits. The project team conducted site visits to each of the eight state education agencies. The two project leaders participated in three site visits together, to ensure consistency in questioning. They divided the rest of the visits, each accompanied by a research associate. Each project director took the lead with four state education agencies. All interviews and focus groups lasted between one and two hours, with the exception of Vermont, where the focus group lasted two hours and 45 minutes (the length was needed to gather information from the lead administrator as well as staff working with schools; see description below). Each interview and discussion was led by one of the project directors, while the research associate took notes and ensured that interviews were audio-recorded.

Interviews with state education agency lead administrators. Interviews with lead administrators typically lasted an hour or more and were audio-recorded. A research associate took notes as well. Interviews explored the interventions and the rationales behind them. Typically interviews did not cover the identification process for schools or districts to receive direct state education agency interventions. Lead administrators were asked to describe their interventions, the state education agency's history of interventions with low-performing schools, challenges they faced, and specific issues that were not adequately described in written materials collected before the interview. In nearly all state education agencies administrators gave the study team additional, more up-to-date written materials that had not been available on the agencies' web sites. In addition, the researchers asked state education agency staff to explain their approaches. Where written materials existed describing the rationales, those materials were reviewed and discussed. Where written materials were not available, questions were asked about the intended outcomes of specific services provided.

Interviews and focus groups with service providers. Focus groups and other service provider interviews covered the same topics as the lead administrator interviews—interventions and rationales or theories of change—to determine how far various personnel shared the same understanding. In addition, these interviews allowed interviewers to ask more specific questions about interventions to the people doing the work in the field. Rationales for interventions were explored in detail, with questions about key strategies and actions, the reasons for the strategy, the intended outcomes of each action, and the relationships among various services.

Other interviews. At each state education agency the project directors also conducted an interview with a senior official responsible for policy in each state—generally the lead administrator's superior. Each of these interviews was unique, probing for additional information about policies and other contextual factors that influenced the state education agency's interventions. Some such interviews were conducted on the day of the site visit. Others were conducted by telephone after the site visit.

In New York additional administrators were interviewed at the request of the lead administrator. Each of these interviews, too, was unique, exploring the expertise of an individual—for example, the head of special education for New York State, whose office is central to these interventions.

After each site visit the research associate or a transcription service transcribed recordings and prepared notes on the state, drawing on both the data collected on site and the publicly available documents that informed the initial profile and the preparation for the site visit.

Internet searches. One researcher took the lead in compiling a series of cross-state tables to represent the identification of low-performing schools, including the following information from each site:

- Accountability measures.
- Accountability plan approvals and revisions.
- Annual measurable objectives.
- District-level adequate yearly progress requirements.
- Number and characteristics of low-performing schools and districts.

Data analysis strategies

The research team members worked together closely to ensure systematic and rigorous analysis of the collected data. The project directors and the research associate met regularly to discuss the data, develop state education agency profiles, and explore cross-site themes. This process was documented through memos and meeting notes. (Data analysis methods for each of the study's three research questions are summarized in table C2.)

Profile development. The project team (project directors and research associate) met regularly to

TABLE C2
Data analysis, by research question

Research question	Data analysis

1. What criteria do state education agencies use to identify schools and districts as low-performing, and how many schools and districts are placed in each category under the NCLB Act?	• Identified standard set of criteria-related data for inclusion in each state profile.
	• Compiled a series of cross-state tables regarding the identification of low-performing schools including:
	  • Accountability measures by state.
	  • Accountability plan approval and revisions.
	  • Annual measurable objectives.
	  • District-level adequate yearly progress requirements.
	  • Number and characteristics of low-performing schools and districts.

2. What services—and other supports and interventions—do state education agencies use with low-performing schools and districts?	• Identified state legislation related to interventions. • Identified a standard set of intervention categories to be addressed in each profile. • Compiled a cross-state education agency table of legislation. • Compiled a cross-state education agency table of interventions.
3. What rationales do state education agency staff give for their approaches to school and district improvement?	• Consulted with lead state education agency administrator for feedback on state education agency profile, including description of rationale. • Identified major elements that were commonly stated in state education agency rationales for intervention.

Source: Authors' compilation.

review state data, including transcripts of interviews, and to identify themes that emerged. A new outline for the state education agency profile, organized by research question, was developed with common elements to include in all profiles. The three primary researchers identified gaps and issues to explore further. Follow-up interviews were conducted either in person or by phone with lead administrators and sometimes senior policy officials to fill in information gaps. Each of the project directors took the lead in developing drafts of four profiles, and each contributed to a summary chart of state education agency interventions and corresponding rationales drawn from the interview responses.

Each draft profile was emailed to the lead state education agency administrator for feedback. The lead researcher for each state education agency then followed up with the lead state education agency administrator by telephone and email. The lead administrators were asked to also check tables and ensure that numbers were accurate. The Massachusetts and New York administrators provided additional information that had been developed after the interviews were completed; some of that information was included in their profiles. All fact corrections were accepted and incorporated into the next version of each profile. No issues of interpretation were raised. Because the study's purpose was to illustrate interventions from the perspective of the state education agency, the lead administrator's feedback was accepted and incorporated. After the profile had been edited it was sent back to the lead administrator for approval.

Each profile included in the supplemental materials for this report was approved by the state education agency lead administrator.

Cross-site themes. The project team next reviewed profiles to identify cross-state themes. Each of the three researchers took the lead on one research question and created tables to summarize information across state education agencies and memos on themes of interest to share with the rest of the team.

One researcher developed and populated a series of tables depicting how each state or jurisdiction used specific criteria and the numbers of low-performing schools and districts that resulted. The raw tables were then streamlined and refined to show similarities or differences in the state education agencies' criteria and in the numbers of schools and districts they identified as low-performing. Because of differences in state education agency reporting methods, data on all issues were not available from all sites. The research team together determined which issues were most useful in answering each research question and how best to show the data found.

One researcher created tables on issues related to interventions, collecting available data across sites on what services were offered, to whom services were made available, and issues that had emerged from interviews at several sites. Memos were developed and shared with the research team for further input and consideration. Final tables were shared with lead administrators, and any changes they made were accepted.

The third researcher took the lead in examining state education agencies' rationales, as described in the profiles that had been approved by the lead administrators. Memos included themes that seemed to be emerging from several sites, hypotheses about important concepts to explore, and ways to describe similarities and differences across sites.

The research team together reviewed each other's tables and memos, challenged each other's assumptions, and collected additional data when needed. For example, members of the team called lead administrators to ask additional questions, and they did Internet searches on possible cross-site themes. Some issues were eliminated when insufficient data were found, or when an issue appeared to be too complex to allow the researchers to ensure that their information was complete and accurate. For example, when it became clear that the funding of interventions was complex enough to warrant its own study, it was dropped

as a category for systematic analysis. Conversely, the categories describing the range of supports to schools—site specific supports, planning assistance, and professional development—emerged as the researchers looked at profiles across sites and identified common services across state education agencies.

Limitations

This report describes state interventions for low-performing schools and districts exclusively from the perspective of the state education agency lead administrators, persons employed by them, and state and federal documents that shape them.

Focus group participants were ultimately chosen by each lead administrator. That could bias the findings of the report toward the administrators' perspectives. The lead administrators also ultimately determined the number of people in focus groups and interviews. That influenced the number of perspectives at each site. In all cases the researchers heard from only a small sample of all staff involved in the interventions.

In some cases lead administrators participated in focus groups. This could bias how the focus group participants, who report to the lead administrators, responded to questions. Similarly, the absence of guaranteed confidentiality for the focus groups could affect how participants answered questions.

In addition, the project team relied on the lead administrator to review the profiles and tables on criteria and numbers of identified schools and districts, as well as interventions and rationales. Although the lead administrator approved all the information, the authors cannot guarantee that the state education agency staff member who was most expert in each area was given an opportunity to check information about that area.

This report does not include the perspectives of educators in schools and districts undergoing interventions, or of other groups and entities affected by the interventions. Its descriptions of each intervention represent only the perspectives of administrators who have most directly shaped the interventions and of others whom those administrators employ. Moreover, data gathered and reported here represent criteria, interventions, and perspectives captured at a specific time, from April 2007 through April 2008. Although researchers sought the most current data available, not all information on all state web sites was up to date. The authors recognize that many state education agencies have already changed their accountability systems or interventions, or are now changing them. Rationales evolve as people articulate and reflect on them. Thus, the profiles and cross-state analyses in this report should be read as snapshots of a particular place and time.

The researchers were not able systematically to investigate the funding of interventions.

APPENDIX D
SUMMARIES OF INTERVENTIONS AND RATIONALES FOR EACH STATE EDUCATION AGENCY

The researchers compiled the information in this appendix using interviews, focus groups, and state education agency documents (see appendix C for a full account of research methods). More detailed profiles of each state agency's interventions and rationales can be found at www.relnei.org.

Connecticut

Primary focus of interventions. Interventions focus on 12 targeted districts that, in the aggregate, have not made district adequate yearly progress for three or more successive years.

Key strategies. Cross-departmental state education agency teams work with 12 districts that have the largest numbers of lowest performing schools. The teams are trained in and use a model to conduct a five-day external needs assessment and then work with district teams to develop plans based on findings. Districts can choose from a menu of state-approved professional development resources on data analysis, leadership development, and instructional strategies.

Desired outcomes. Three outcomes are desired:

- District organization systems most aligned with the instructional core are strengthened.
- School systems and student learning are incrementally and notably improved.
- School improvement is sustained.

Rationale for interventions. Connecticut's rationale is that the Connecticut State Department of Education needs to provide clear and strong accountability and supports so that districts can develop and sustain stronger district systems that improve instruction, school systems, and student learning. District assessment criteria and process, along with effective professional development vendors and models, are selected by the state to ensure quality and are negotiated with districts to meet individual district needs.

Districts are expected to work on developing and improving systems and leadership capacity that sustain change over time, while the state takes responsibility for providing adequate guidance and direction so that districts know what systems need improvement and how they should function.

Maine

Primary focus of interventions. Interventions focus on schools. Maine has no low-performing districts.

Key strategies. In the first year of a school's designation as in need of improvement a distinguished educator works with leaders at each school to understand its culture and priorities, help analyze data patterns, and focus the school on short-term testing strategies. With support, school teams develop plans focused on effective, longer-term professional development. Teams must include school special educators. The superintendent and a district special education staff member are invited to participate. Limited professional development is available, including:

- A formative assessment initiative.
- Webinars (Internet seminars) on instructional coaching, differentiating instruction, and other issues, depending on the needs of schools.

Desired outcomes. Five outcomes are desired:

- Students on the cusp of proficiency move to the next level on the test.
- Low-performing schools implement the activities in their School Improvement Plans. Schools develop a more cohesive understanding of and approach to professional development.

- Educators use instructional strategies that better respond to student needs.
- There is a culture shift to focusing on students and expectations.
- Low-performing schools have a positive experience working with the Maine Department of Education staff.

Rationale for interventions. Maine's rationale asserts that schools must manage their own improvement, but that the state should—within its limited capacity—support compliance with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and longer-term improvement. Work on short-term testing strategies is expected to move students to the next level of mastery on the state test. It is also expected to help with identifying needed professional development.

The state frontloads support, believing that upfront data analysis and planning time will lead to a solid plan and to the implementation of that plan. Effective professional development based on the plan will lead to changes in instructional strategies that address student needs, so that school culture can better focus on students and expectations. District superintendents and special education staff are engaged to ensure that broader systemic changes (such as programmatic changes) can be made if they are needed.

Maine focuses on developing relationships of trust with school leaders. It wants such leaders to feel that their experiences with the Maine Department of Education have been rewarding.

Massachusetts

Primary focus of interventions. Twenty-four districts in corrective action, with the nine largest identified as "commissioner's districts."

Key strategies. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education staff provide ongoing implementation support to each of the nine commissioner's districts. Districts must give a set of conditions to low-performing schools. Principals must take part in leadership development courses. Superintendents of targeted districts participate in a network. Professional development is offered to help meet instructional needs.

Desired outcome. The desired outcome is enhanced district capacity to support low-performing schools.

Rationale for interventions. Massachusetts focuses on working with districts to establish conditions for change in low-performing schools—balancing requirements with supports at the district and school levels. Strategic choices include leadership development, intensive ongoing professional development in schools, and district-level consultation.

New Hampshire

Primary focus of interventions. Interventions focus on low-performing districts, with schools eligible for limited support.

Key strategies. Regional service teams offer districts and schools a range of supports to help them articulate, craft, and implement improvement plans. Coaches (school improvement and content experts) work with leadership teams and faculties. A weeklong summer institute provides access to experts and time for planning and reflection.

Desired outcome. The desired outcome is helping schools and districts make adequate yearly progress.

Rationale for interventions. New Hampshire's rationale is that a cross-departmental team brokering services and coordinating services with and for district teams, and providing development resources, will result in improved district plans and implementation, leading to school improvement.

New York

Primary focus of interventions. Interventions focus on schools and on selected districts including

Buffalo, New York City, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers—the "Big Five"—and on three additional priority districts, Hempstead, Roosevelt, and Wyandanch. In each of these districts the state also works with the schools.

Key strategies. Seven Regional School Support Centers provide customized assistance in causal data analysis, school and district planning, additional data analysis, professional development, and other services to address the causes of low performance. Districts additionally receive support in addressing systemic issues that impede school improvement. Regional School Support Centers convene a range of regional network partners that specialize in student support services, Title III English language learner students, special education, and other partners to coordinate efforts on behalf of low-performing schools and districts.

Desired outcome. The desired outcome is closing performance gaps across student subgroups in mathematics and in English language arts.

Rationale for interventions. New York's rationale asserts that a continuum of planning and data-based customized supports, with a parallel continuum of monitoring, should cause targeted schools and districts to eliminate the achievement gap across student subgroups—and that, if it does not, the schools or districts should be reorganized. The state's premise is that Regional School Support Centers can help to provide solid and consistent supports if they have protocols for when and how to engage schools, the freedom to customize supports based on school and district needs, and the charge to align services with partners. District regional administrators are left with responsibility for monitoring schools and districts and for supervising Regional School Support Centers and other networks.

Puerto Rico

Primary focus of interventions. Interventions focus on the 100 schools designated as low-performing.

Key strategies. Outside contractors support school teams through an intensive school improvement process to examine needs, build community, and lead change efforts to increase student learning. Each contractor is required to involve educators, parents, and community members in improvement focused on data-identified needs and shared leadership. Contractors also draw on their own past experiences and resources to offer different professional development resources.

Desired outcome. The desired outcome is that schools own, and are involved in, the development and implementation of improvement plans.

Rationale for interventions. Puerto Rico's rationale is to use trusted school improvement organizations to facilitate a local improvement process in each school, by involving all members of the school community in focusing and implementing plans to meet their needs in literacy and mathematics.

Rhode Island

Primary focus of interventions. Interventions focus on six districts.

Key strategies. Rhode Island works with six identified districts. State teams encourage districts to articulate and take responsibility for developing the capacity of their schools, and these teams customize supports and professional development for each district. The state provides a range of human resources and protocols to support reflective dialogue and data-based decisionmaking. It also helps districts establish internal systems and knowledge to support their schools in improving instruction in each classroom.

Desired outcomes. Three outcomes are desired:

- Principals and leadership teams realize their potential as leaders through leadership development.

- Educators improve their practice after participating in professional development related to content, curriculum, and pedagogy.

- Schools enhance parent involvement as it relates to parents understanding children's learning and how to support it.

Rationale for interventions. To let parents support their children's learning, and to help leaders with ongoing effective professional development, Rhode Island's rationale emphasizes supporting two-way relationships with districts and providing opportunities for reflection, professional development, and data use. The state's rationale is grounded in the belief that districts and the state education agency need genuine partnerships. On the one hand, districts must increasingly articulate and develop what they need to help schools build capacity. On the other hand, the state takes responsibility for building district capacity by developing readiness for change—supporting the development of systems to help districts build school capacity and so continually improve instruction.

Vermont

Primary focus of interventions. The primary intervention is with schools.

Key strategies. When a critical mass of schools is identified Vermont convenes them in the first year of low performance. Schools receive support to develop plans and use data—to understand the strengths and needs of students, and to work toward developing a comprehensive local assessment system. All schools must identify measures to track student progress, with particular focus on the groups and content areas for which the school is identified as in need of improvement; develop a continuum of supports for struggling students; report on progress with strategies twice annually; and have principals of newly identified schools participate in Principal Learning Communities. Professional development offered includes instructional strategies and response to intervention; strategies for particular students or groups of students; content areas; and assessment.

Desired outcome. The desired outcome is that schools have assessment systems to help teachers continually review student performance data, reflect on and improve their instruction, and develop additional student supports.

Rationale for interventions. Vermont's rationale asserts that schools should shape their own improvements. Yet it also asserts that the state education agency should support schools in developing local assessment systems and leadership, so that educators will continually reflect on and improve how they serve all students. Vermont's tradition is to assume that school leaders know what they need to do to improve student achievement. The state education agency helps expand knowledge and provide resources. Supporting data collection helps educators know what students need and track progress. Professional development opportunities are provided. Schools and educators will access what they need. Required participation in Principal Learning Communities aims to help principals learn about managing interventions and leading change. Increased leadership capacity then leads to the development of assessment systems, a linchpin in continually understanding and crafting responses to student instructional needs.

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