Abstract Title Page
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Title: State policies for intervening in chronically low-performing schools: A 50-state policy scan

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Abstract Body
Limit 4 pages single-spaced.

Background / Context:
Description of prior research and its intellectual context.
Current federal education policies promote a substantial role for state education agencies in school improvement. For example, the federal guidance for Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) flexibility requires that state education agencies "effect dramatic, systemic change in the lowest-performing schools by publicly identifying 'priority schools' and ensuring that each local education agency with one or more of these schools implements, for three years, meaningful interventions aligned with the turnaround principles in each of these schools" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 2). However, a recent report indicated that the majority of state education agencies are finding the task of improving their lowest-performing schools to be very challenging work (Tannenbaum et al., 2015). While federal initiatives provide guidance to state education agencies, the ways that state education agencies seek to influence school performance are shaped by state policies, which vary widely. In some cases, state policies provide guidance for districts or schools; in other cases, the policies have provisions for state education agencies to directly implement restructuring activities (Ziebarth, 2004).

Given these requirements, many states are considering changes to their policies in this area. For example, in 2014, nearly a quarter of the states considered legislation related to school improvement in general or for sanctions or interventions for low-performing schools (Education Commission of the States, 2015). State education agency staff in Nebraska requested that Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Central review policies that guide efforts to intervene in the lowest performing schools in states around the nation. As states consider new approaches to intervening in their lowest-performing schools, state education agency staff and policymakers can benefit from information on how other states are approaching this challenge.

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:
Description of the focus of the research.

This study seeks to answer the question "What policies are in place in each of the 50 states related to state intervention with chronically low-performing schools?" To address this question, the study provides a summary of policies in place related to state interventions with chronically low-performing schools that can inform education leaders, particularly those in states where policies are changing, as they make decisions about how to support school improvement in their lowest-performing schools.

Setting:
Description of the research location.

The study focused on all 50 states.

Research Design:
Description of the research design.

Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Central conducted a systematic search of states' laws, regulations, and other publicly available documents. Qualitative data analysis methods were used to identify common themes in the data.

Data Collection and Analysis:
Description of the methods for collecting and analyzing data.

The systematic search for legislation proceeded in three steps. First, researchers searched the Westlaw database of laws and regulations for each of the 50 states using 12 keyword combinations (see Table 1). Second, researchers scanned the section titles for each state's statutes and regulations to ensure that all relevant sections were included. Third, when reading laws and regulations, researchers made note of other legislation that was referenced. If not already located through the previous search steps, these laws and regulations were located and reviewed. This search retrieved 1,370 sections of state laws and regulations.

All laws and regulations were imported into MAXQDA qualitative analysis software. An initial coding scheme was developed based on the options for restructuring under No Child Left Behind and the allowed intervention models for SIG funding. Two researchers independently read and coded the laws and regulations beginning with two states. When researchers encountered a state intervention that did not fit within an existing code, they created a new code. The researchers then met to discuss how they coded each law or regulation and discussed any discrepancies until they reached consensus. They also presented their proposed new codes and the coding system was modified to include these new codes. This process was then repeated with two additional states and then again with a fifth state. At this point, the number of proposed new codes had diminished. The two coders then divided the remaining states. They continued to meet weekly to discuss progress and any potential new codes that should be added. To monitor the consistency of coding, once per month, the two coders coded the same state and compared their coding. The two coders demonstrated strong agreement for the codes for these states. When additional codes were added to the system, each coder went back and re-read laws and regulations from states previously completed to determine if any there was any text that should be coded with the new code. The final coding system included each of the types of interventions that are described in this report. Policy documents of the first seven states were coded by both researchers.

To supplement the information contained in laws and regulations, REL Central researchers obtained approved requests for ESEA flexibility for 43 states from the U.S. Department of Education website (http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/esea-flexibility/index.html). REL Central researchers read Principle 2 of these requests, which describes states' systems of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support. The remaining 7 states did not have approved flexibility requests at the time the study was conducted.

The study authors examined and coded legislation and ESEA flexibility requests and prepared a summary of policies for each state. The summaries included detailed information from these sources for each category of interventions. In cases where information from these primary sources was unclear, researchers consulted state websites for additional documents (for example, state guidance for Title 1 schools, state board regulations) that could provide clarification. Documents were located by browsing the section of the state education agency website that was focused on school improvement and by searching state education agency and state board of education websites using search terms that were related to topic that required clarification (e.g., "Delaware partnership zone"). For four states, Alabama, Delaware, Montana, and Wyoming, information from additional sources obtained on state websites was incorporated into the final summary of policies.

Findings / Results:
Description of the main findings with specific details.

Six broad categories of policies related to intervening in chronically low-performing schools were identified through the coding process:

- development or monitoring of school improvement plans,
- changes in staffing,
- closing a school,
- financial incentives or interventions,
- reforms to the day-to-day operation of the school, and
- changes related to the entity governing or operating the school.

The proposed presentation will summarize the nature of policies across the 50 states using graphical presentations of the findings (such as maps of the US overlaid with data and pie charts). Graphic displays will be accompanied by narrative that describes the range of interventions that states have implemented.

Conclusions:
Description of conclusions, recommendations, and limitations based on findings.

By summarizing how states are able to intervene in chronically low-performing schools, this study provides an important first step in a line of research that can inform policy-makers. In this rapidly changing policy area, the results of this study can provide a useful summary of policies that can inform state education leaders and policymakers about the range of policies that states have in place related to interventions with chronically low-performing schools. As state leaders consider changes to policy, this report can help them identify other states that have implemented similar policies so they can learn from the experiences of other states.

It is important to note that this study will summarize the ways that state policy allows intervention in low-performing schools based on information contained in policy documents that were examined. States are likely to vary in the extent that they actually intervene in these ways with low-performing schools. Future research might examine why states choose particular strategies, which strategies they choose most often from the range of options available to them, and the factors that influence decisions to use one strategy over another. Another important direction for future research is to examine the extent to which implementation of state interventions in chronically low-performing schools is associated with improved academic outcomes for students.

Appendices
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Appendix A. References
References are to be in APA version 6 format.

Education Commission of the States. (2015). ECS State Education Policy Database. Retrieved June 30, 2015 from http://www.ecs.org/html/statesterritories/state_policy_developments.htm.

Tannenbaum, C., Boyle, A., Graczewski, C., James-Burdumy, S., Dragoset, L. & Hallgren, K. (2015). *State capacity to support school turnaround. National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) Evaluation Brief* (NCEE 2015-412). Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences. http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED556118

U.S. Department of Education (2012). *ESEA flexibility* (updated June 7, 2012). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved October 30, 2013 from http://www.ed.gov/esea/flexibility/documents/esea-flexibility-acc.doc.

Ziebarth, T. (2004). *State policies for school restructuring*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Appendix B. Tables and Figures
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Table 1: Search terms used in Westlaw

(school district) & takeover
(school district) & insolven!
(school district) & interven!
(school district) & reconstitut!
(school district) & restruct!
(school district) & "low perform!"
(school district) & recovery
(school district) & "corrective action"
(school district) & "state appoint"
(school district) & "turnaround"
"school improvement"
school & receiver