



# Connecting Commitments, Principles, and Practices to Strategically Address Equity and Improvement

## THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

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### **Connecting Commitments, Principles, and Practices to Strategically Address Equity and Improvement**

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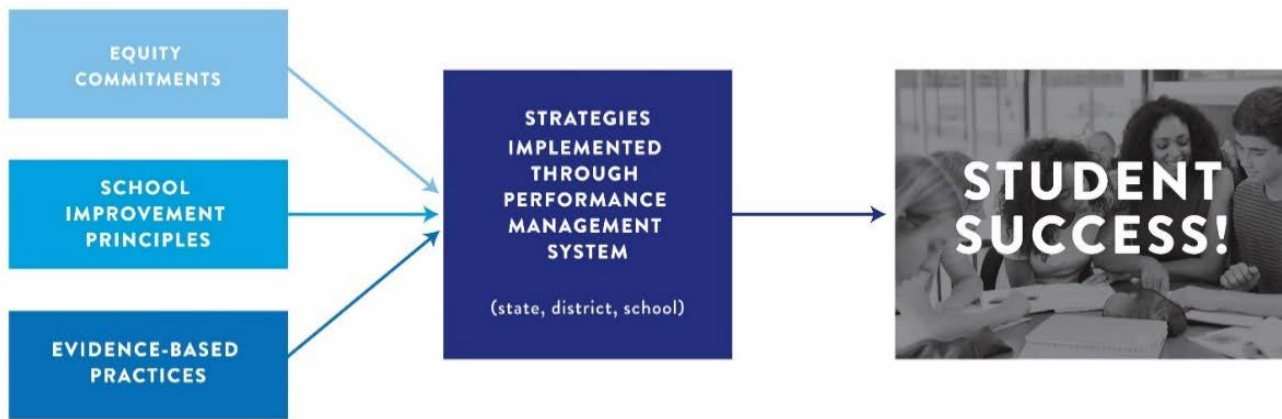


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## INTRODUCTION

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) provides state education agencies (SEA) with more flexibility to rethink how to identify and address low school performance while elevating the role of local education agencies (LEAs) in supporting schools in need of improvement. ESSA also puts a renewed focus on equity and further defines evidence-based practices. States are encouraged to use the flexibility and new provisions to create and support innovative opportunities leading to success for all students.

**Frameworks for Guidance.** As states pursue plans to support schools with the most need for improvement, three frameworks are particularly promising in addressing the problems of inequity and low performance.

1. Commitment to Equity. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and The Aspen Education & Society Program (AESP) put forth 10 equity commitments, creating a framework of actions education leaders can take for more equitable education systems. *Leading for Equity: Opportunities for State Education Chiefs* calls on state education leaders to “publicly articulate specific, measurable commitments to advance equity, and empower stakeholders to hold the system accountable for delivering on those commitments” (AESP & CCSSO, 2017, p. 3).
2. School Improvement Systems. CCSSO released its *Principles of Effective School Improvement Systems*, a set of 10 principles to “inform how states design effective systems to improve low-performing schools and provide an equitable education for all students” (CCSSO, 2017, p. 1).
3. Rapid School Improvement Practices and Indicators. The Center on School Turnaround (CST), a federally funded technical assistance center based at WestEd, published *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: A Systems Framework* (2017), which focused on four areas or domains that research and experience indicate are critical for turning around low-performing schools. A subsequent publication, *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: Indicators of Effective Practices* (Redding et al., 2018), includes indicators at the state, district, and school levels to provide specificity in guiding implementation of effective practice.

These three resources, each a framework of sorts, offer strategies and practices that could drive dramatic improvement for all schools, especially those with the greatest gaps and disparities. But looking at each of these three frameworks, or across all three, the question arises: Where to start? State education leaders committed to productive change that strikes a blow at inequity and low performance need a map with guideposts, a designated beginning, and an obvious destination. What do we do first? How do we achieve coherence, unity of purpose? How do we avoid duplication of effort, confusion, silos? How do we activate our gleanings from frameworks?

**Connections for an Equity-Conscious Approach to School Improvement.** This paper identifies connections among the three frameworks—equity commitments (AESP & CCSSO, 2018), principles of school improvement systems (CCSSO, 2017), and domains and indicators of rapid school improvement (CST, 2017; Redding, et.al., 2018)—and offers specific recommendations that leverage these connections in an equity-conscious approach to improve school and student performance. Strategic performance management (Layland & Redding, 2017; Redding & Layland, 2015), developed by the federally funded Building State Capacity and Productivity Center at Westat, is included as a foundational process to make order of the three frameworks and provide an interrelated approach to solving the problems of inequity and low performance.

## EQUITY COMMITMENTS

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Equity has been a longstanding priority in education, and yet inequity persists in states, districts, and schools.

Equity in education has been defined in many ways based on varying contexts. The Aspen Institute Education & Society Program and CCSSO note educational equity means “every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income” (2017, p. 3). Jenlink (2009) describes equity in education as composed of three standards: equity of access, equity of participation, and equity of outcomes. Lincoln (2015) notes three layers of educational equity as appropriateness, adequacy, and attainment.

At its root, educational equity means that every student has the opportunity to learn in the school, program, and classroom most appropriate to his or her needs and interests. Such a student-centered approach to equity ensures that each individual student receives the education most likely to optimize the full expression of his or her talent and effort. Providing students access not only means rigorous instruction, but also facilities, resources, and programs and services, as well as access to the most effective teachers. Beyond access lies equitable opportunities to participate in programs and services with culturally relevant standards, curricula, instruction, and assessments. SEA, LEA, and school leaders can take one step in reaching this goal by *committing* to the 10 equity commitments (AESP & CCSSO, 2017):

1. Prioritize Equity: Set and Communicate an Equity Vision and Measurable Targets
2. Start from Within: Focus on the State Education Agency
3. Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity
4. Go Local: Engage LEAs and Provide Tailored and Differentiated Support
5. Follow the Money: Allocate Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity
6. Start Early: Invest in the Youngest Learners
7. Engage More Deeply: Monitor Equitable Implementation of Standards and Assessments
8. Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders
9. Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-Emotional Development
10. Empower Student Options: Ensure Families Have Access to High-Quality Educational Options that Align to Community Needs

## SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PRINCIPLES

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Specific funding for school improvement began in 2001 with the Title I section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as No Child Left Behind, which provided federal funds to states to use for competitive grants to districts for their low-performing schools. By 2008, the number of persistently failing schools made it apparent that the lowest-performing schools and districts needed to shift from a slow, steady improvement mindset to one of rapid school turnaround (Herman, et al., 2008). Funding was significantly increased, as were the requirements for the use of the funds, by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). ARRA provided \$3 billion for School Improvement Grants (SIG), one of the largest investments in an education grant program by the federal government, and required states to use one of four school intervention models (transformation, turnaround, restart, or closure) (Dragoset et al., 2017, p. ES1). Unfortunately, the return on this investment has been disappointing. A recent evaluation report indicated that “SIG had no impact on any of the student outcomes we examined, including math and reading test scores, high school graduation rates, and college enrollment rates” (Dragoset et al., n.d., p. 2).

ESSA continues school improvement funding, but with more flexibility for states to support districts and schools in addressing improvement through evidence-based practices in the context of local needs and approaches. Determining how to use the flexibility to build and sustain an effective school improvement system that results in significant improvement is the challenge facing states. CCSSO (2017) identified 10 principles of school improvement critical to an effective school improvement system.

## CCSSO's 10 Principles for an Effective School Improvement System

1. Elevate school improvement as an urgent priority at every level of the system—schools, LEAs, and the SEA—and establish for each level clear roles, lines of authority, and responsibilities for improving low-performing schools.
2. Make decisions based on what will best serve each and every student with the expectation that all students can and will master the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college, career, and civic life.
3. Engage early, regularly, and authentically with stakeholders and partners so improvement is done with and not to the school, families, and the community.
4. Select at each level the strategy that best matches the context at hand—from LEAs and schools designing evidence-based improvement plans to SEAs exercising the most appropriate state-level authority to intervene in non-exiting schools.
5. Support LEAs and schools in designing high-quality school improvement plans informed by
  - each school's assets (and how they're being used);
  - needs (including but not limited to resources) and root causes of underperformance;
  - research on effective schools, successful school improvement efforts, and implementation science;
  - best available evidence of what interventions work, for whom, under which circumstances; and
  - the science of learning and development, including the impact of poverty and adversity on learning.
6. Focus especially on ensuring the highest-need schools have great leaders and teachers who have or develop the specific capacities needed to dramatically improve low-performing schools.
7. Dedicate sufficient resources (time, staff, funding); align them to advance the system's goals; use them efficiently by establishing clear roles and responsibilities at all levels of the system; and hold partners accountable for results.
8. Establish clear expectations and report progress on a sequence of ambitious yet achievable short- and long-term school improvement benchmarks that focus on both equity and excellence.
9. Implement improvement plans rigorously and with fidelity, and, since everything will not go perfectly, gather actionable data and information during implementation; evaluate efforts and monitor evidence to learn what is working, for whom, and under what circumstances; and continuously improve over time.
10. Plan from the beginning how to sustain successful school improvement efforts financially, politically, and by ensuring the school and LEA are prepared to continue making progress.



The principles were developed to guide SEAs in designing, implementing, and sustaining a meaningful system for school improvement, one that would facilitate the selection and implementation of evidence-based practices.

## EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

In the world of education, evidence-based practices have been referred to as effective practices, research-based practices, or best practices. People use the terms interchangeably, yet the terms are not the same. Table 1 provides distinct definitions for each term (Cook, et al., 2008. p. 495).

**Table 1: Distinctions Between Best, Research-Based, Effective, and Evidence-Based Practices**

Best Practices	Research-Based Practices	Effective Practices	Evidence-Based Practices
Instructional approaches recommended by experts or others that may or may not be supported by specific evidence of effectiveness	Educational approaches consistent with bodies of research rather than specific studies	Practices that actually result in meaningful outcome gains for the vast majority of students	Instructional approaches shown by high-quality research to result reliably in generally improved student outcomes

The earliest use of evidence in education occurred during the effective schools movement in the 1970s, which found differences in school practices as a key factor in student outcomes, leading to the concept of “best practices” (Coleman, et al., ; Edmunds & Fredrickson, 1978; 1981; Weber, 1971). Weber studied reading instruction in four urban schools and concluded that poor reading achievement was due to the school’s failure, not the backgrounds of the students. The conclusions were confirmed in subsequent schools (State of New York & Lezotte, et al., as cited in Edmunds & Fredrickson, 1978), and six practices were identified that distinguished effective schools from schools serving similar students with poorer outcomes:

- Strong administrative leadership
- Climate of high expectations for all students
- An environment that is orderly and conducive to learning
- Highest priority on learning basic skills
- Diversion of resources, when needed to teach basic skills
- Frequent monitoring of pupil progress

ESSA defines evidence-based as

an activity, strategy, or intervention that demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on (I) strong evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented experimental study; (II) moderate evidence from at least 1 well-



designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study; or (III) promising evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or (IV) demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes; and includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention. (ESSA, 2015, S. 1177—289(21)(A))

In 2017, *Four Domains of Rapid School Improvement: A Systems Framework* (Four Domains), published by the Center on School Turnaround, detailed four areas for rapid school turnaround: turnaround leadership, talent development, transformational instruction, and culture shift, henceforth referred to as domains. Evidence-based indicators at the state, district, and school levels for each domain have since been identified in *Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: Indicators of Effective Practice*. Each indicator of effective practice is “a concrete behavioral expression of a particular professional practice that research has shown contributes to student learning” (Redding, et al., 2018). SEA, LEA, and school leaders can utilize the indicators through a school improvement cycle that includes monitoring and adjusting based on indicator progress.

#### Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement and their 12 Effective Practices

##### Domain 1: Turnaround Leadership

Practice 1A: Prioritize improvement and communicate its urgency.

Practice 1B: Monitor short- and long-term goals.

Practice 1C: Customize and target support to meet needs.

##### Domain 2: Talent Development

Practice 2A: Recruit, develop, retain, and sustain talent.

Practice 2B: Target professional learning opportunities.

Practice 2C: Set clear performance expectations.

##### Domain 3: Instructional Transformation

Practice 3A: Diagnose and respond to student learning needs.

Practice 3B: Provide rigorous evidence-based instruction.

Practice 3C: Remove barriers and provide opportunities.

##### Domain 4: Culture Shift

Practice 4A: Build a strong community intensely focused on student learning.

Practice 4B: Solicit and act upon stakeholder input.

Practice 4C: Engage students and families in pursuing education goals.

Barriers and challenges to implementing evidence-based practices continue to be documented (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009; Fixen, et al., 2005; see also Cook, Smith, & Tankersley in Harris, et al., 2012), and the research-to-practice gap persists. Identifying practices is one thing; consistently implementing them with fidelity over time is another thing altogether.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN EQUITY-CONSCIOUS APPROACH TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Strong, coherent connections between the equity commitments, school improvement principles, and evidence-based practices can inform the selection and implementation of strategies to provide an integrated approach to remedying inequity, chronic low school performance, and poor student learning outcomes. Strategic performance management provides the foundation to successfully implement the strategies (see Figure 1).

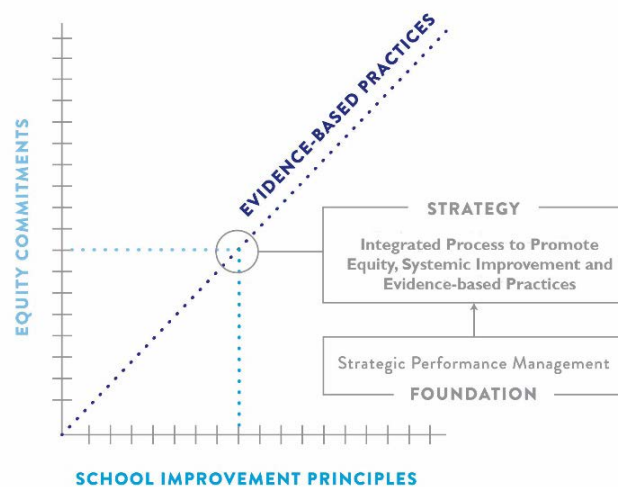


Figure 1. Integrating Commitments, Principles, and Practices to Inform Improvement Strategies

This conceptual alignment of otherwise challenging but important elements of judicious and continuous school improvement creates an integrated, focused approach. What follows are recommendations based on unifying the three elements of an equity-conscious approach to school improvement—equity commitments, improvement principles, and evidence-based practices—within strategic performance management processes. Attachment A illustrates how the sage advice of the three separate frameworks is taken into full account by the SEA. Creating and implementing strategies informed by the frameworks that are formulated within strategic performance management could result in the changes needed to truly provide an equitable and appropriate education for every student.

## ***RECOMMENDATION 1: Set a Strong Foundation***

The three elements of an equity-conscious approach to school improvement—equity commitments, school improvement principles, and evidence-based practices—all suggest a centralizing and continuous process founded on the vision, mission, and values of an SEA. Because equity and school performance are concerns that permeate an SEA and its mission, representing them in the core direction of the agency makes sense. They become part of the essential direction of the SEA to which all departments and initiatives have a stake. To build one foundation owned by all and used consistently to inform each person’s work, leadership, and staff

- engage in deep conversations about issues of equitable opportunity so every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income. Articulate organizational values that reflect the importance of equity, evidence, and accountability;
- prioritize practices based on evidence for impact on learning for all students; and
- engage as many staff as possible in creating the foundation.

## ***RECOMMENDATION 2: Continuously Engage the Community***

Stakeholders play a key role in addressing equity and local school performance. Consulting various stakeholder groups is critical in formulating a statement of vision, mission, values, goals, and later the strategies the agency will employ. Broad stakeholder groups include early childhood providers, community colleges and universities, social services, business and labor organizations, and private and charter schools. Stakeholder groups more proximal to the communities and schools include teachers, students, families of students, volunteers, and school board members.

- Engage stakeholders in delineating roles and responsibilities, providing their perspectives on current SEA performance and identifying educational needs in their communities.
- Reach out not only to those who support the SEA, but also to those who criticize it, for there is much to be learned by both.
- Implement a communication strategy that uses multiple avenues and methods to reach those difficult to engage.
- As plans are implemented, share progress publicly and make stakeholders part of the solution to address implementation challenges. One education agency is doing just that, providing a report detailing each input and how it was or was not used in finalizing its strategic direction. Quarterly performance reports are posted on its website.
- When gathering input and feedback, communicate how feedback and input are used to inform the SEA work. Recently, one education organization posted on its website stakeholder feedback and how it was used to make final adjustments to the group’s strategic direction, so all stakeholders know their voices were heard and their input was used.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 3: Create Goals, Strategies, and Milestones***

Data-informed goals, strategies, and milestones serve the interests of equity, solid improvement principals, and context-appropriate evidence-based practice. Goals should be student focused and apply to all students across gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, national origin, immigration status, family background, and/or family income. Use the alignment of equity commitments, school improvement principles, and evidence-based practices to create strategies that integrate SEA efforts and provide supports to district and schools. Equitable resources focused on a few strategies could have a better return on investment. Strategies for school improvement can include the use of evidence-based practices and equitable funding and resources to meet the needs of the most underserved students and communities. Attachment B provides key questions to consider when creating and selecting strategies.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 4: Identify Measures and Use the Data to Inform Strategies***

What gets measured gets done, and each framework stresses this concept. In addition to measuring student results, SEAs can measure the impact of their work on changing and sustaining leadership and staff practices at the district, school, and classroom levels. Implementation data (work completion—did we do what we said we were going to do) and impact data (change in adult practice and student learning) gathered through the goal- and strategy-aligned performance measures are used to make timely adjustments to ensure success. This includes measuring the knowledge or change in practice as a result of professional learning.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 5: Build Strong Structures, Functions, and Personnel***

When goals and strategies are informed by equity commitments, improvement principles, and evidence-based practices, using the most productive organizational structures is critical. Weaving these conceptual elements requires sophisticated personnel management in which roles, responsibilities, competencies, and performance expectations for every unit (e.g., division, department, office, grade level, classroom) and position are clearly defined and communicated. Proactive recruitment; professional learning, including opportunities for job-embedded learning based on gaps in competencies; and succession planning build and maintain a ready and capable workforce. Dedicated, equitable resources (time, staff, funding) to advance goals and strategies are readily available and matched to need. Build a culture of accountability embraced by all, one that encourages routine examination of policies, procedures, distribution of work, and use of resources. Realign organizational structures and functions so they support integration of equity, evidence-based practices, and school improvement work in a collaborative way across the agency. With the flexibility offered through ESSA and the ability to braid funds, now is the time to rethink structures and functions.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 6: Take Action and Provide Responsive Supports***

The commitments, principles, and practices provide a plethora of specific actions an SEA can take to improve district, school, and student performance. Evidence-based practices are more clearly defined, and numerous resources that point to practices with proven track records are readily available. Actions to assist districts and schools might include

- providing research and practice guidance on successful schools, effective implementation, and the science of learning and active transfer (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000);
- integrating culturally responsive instructional strategies (see Redding & Corbett, 2018) and ensuring equitable use and monitoring of resources to mitigate the impact of poverty and adversity on learning; and
- aligning and integrating supports, including professional learning, to build and reinforce equity-conscious school improvement.

Recently, two SEAs included the use of an equity lens in leadership academies focused on school improvement.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 7: Strategize Funding and Resources***

Equitable funding can ensure adequate resources are provided where they are needed most to support student learning and success. SEAs can model effective practices by conducting functional and structural analyses to identify gaps and redundancies and to better align the organization’s structure and people to utilize an equity-conscious approach for school improvement. A comprehensive needs assessment that includes a review of each district and school program implementation, impact, and cost effectiveness will provide important data to inform what programs to continue and what programs need to be eliminated. One SEA uses a three-pronged approach in its comprehensive needs assessment, which includes a review of student data and school demographics; a review of all schoolwide programs, including districtwide programs; and a review of evidence-based practices selected based on district and school data.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 8: Implement a Performance Management Cycle***

Each framework includes some aspect of a performance cycle to report incremental progress, identify areas where additional support is needed, and allow for ongoing adjustments to the planned implementation. Accountability starts from within and at the top. Promising practices are highlighted, innovative solutions are evaluated and shared, and successes are celebrated. When results fall short, it is not viewed as a failure but as an opportunity to learn, rethink, and improve. Progress data and lessons learned can also be compiled and used to create narratives that tell the story of the SEA’s work. These stories, perhaps annually prepared and disseminated, contribute to the internal sense of purpose and, externally, to a greater understanding of the direction of education in the state.

## **CONCLUSION**

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Connecting equity commitments, school improvement principles, and evidence-based practices using a foundation of strategic performance management provides the unifying framework that can bring together three challenging approaches to produce productive change in SEAs and also LEAs and schools. An equity-conscious approach to school improvement would inform the most effective strategies to be employed at each level of the education system and would guide the successful implementation of these strategies so each student can receive the instruction, services, and supports necessary for success.

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# ATTACHMENT A: ALIGNMENT OF ELEMENTS OF EQUITY COMMITMENTS, PRINCIPLES OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT, EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES, AND STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

## 1. Set a Strong Foundation for Equity-Conscious School Improvement So All Students Are Successful

School Improvement Principles	Equity Commitments	Four Domains of Rapid School Turnaround	Strategic Performance Management
<p><b>1: Elevate school improvement as an urgent priority at every level of the system—schools, LEAs, and the SEA—and establish for each level clear roles, lines of authority, and responsibilities for improving low-performing schools.</b></p>	<p><b>1: Prioritize Equity: Set and Communicate Equity Vision and Measurable Targets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Make the case that everyone benefits from equity in society.</li> <li>b) Proactively initiate and lead conversations about equity.</li> <li>c) Partner with stakeholders and others to create urgency, establish public commitments, and set ambitious and achievable goals for addressing inequities in the state.</li> </ul> <p><b>2: Start from Within: Focus on the SEA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Lead conversations on the impact of poverty on education, and advocate for the resources students and families need.</li> <li>b) Talk directly about issues of race and equity, and prepare the senior leadership team to speak effectively and comfortably about race and racism.</li> <li>c) Make equity an agency-wide priority by setting equity-related goals within and across divisions that are tied to the state's broader goals and strategies.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Domain 1: Turnaround Leadership</b></p> <p>Practice 1A: Prioritize improvement and communicate its urgency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Set the strategic direction for turnaround, and establish clear policies, structures, and expectations for constituents to work toward ambitious improvement goals.</li> <li>2. Articulate a commitment to turning around the lowest-performing schools, and advocate fiercely across audiences for these schools.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Module A: Setting the Direction</b></p> <p>Step 1. Create or Revisit Vision, Mission, Values, Goals, and Measures</p> <p>The vision, mission, and values provide the foundation for the organization's work.</p>

## 2. Continuously Engage the Community to Inform and Support Equity-Conscious School Improvement

School Improvement Principles	Equity Commitments	Four Domains of Rapid School Turnaround	Strategic Performance Management
<p><b>3: Engage early, regularly, and authentically with stakeholders and partners so improvement is done with and not to the school, families, and the community.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with schools, families, and community members to build trusting relationships, expand capacity, inform planning, build political will, strengthen community leadership and commitment, and provide feedback loops to adjust as needed.</li> <li>• Integrate school and community assets as well as early childhood, higher education, social services, and workforce systems to, among other things, help address challenges outside of school.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1: Prioritize Equity: Set and Communicate Equity Vision and Measurable Targets</b></p> <p>e) Partner with stakeholders and others to create urgency, establish public commitments, and set ambitious and achievable goals for addressing inequities in the state.</p> <p><b>3: Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity</b></p> <p>f) Partner with LEAs to ensure school improvement efforts are targeted to community needs and strengths.</p> <p><b>4: Go Local: Engage Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Provide Tailored and Differentiated Support</b></p> <p>a) Convene and build an ongoing dialogue with local leaders who hold different roles and perspectives on how to learn about promising practices and design.</p> <p><b>6: Start Early: Invest in the Youngest Learners</b></p> <p>f) Engage in partnerships with related state agencies or divisions to ensure alignment across all programs.</p>	<p><b>Domain 3: Instructional Transformation</b></p> <p>Practice 3C: Remove barriers and provide opportunities</p> <p>2. Partner with community-based organizations, such as health and wellness organizations, youth organizations, and other service providers, to support students in overcoming obstacles and developing the personal competencies that propel success in school and life.</p> <p><b>Domain 4: Culture Shift</b></p> <p>Practice 4A: Build a strong community intensely focused on student learning</p> <p>2. Provide explicit expectations and support for each person’s role (expected behaviors) both in the turnaround and in student progress.</p> <p>3. Create opportunities for members of the school community to come together to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning.</p> <p>Practice 4B: Build a strong community intensely focused on student learning</p>	<p><b>Module A: Setting the Direction</b></p> <p>Step 1. Create or Revisit Vision, Mission, Values, Goals, and Measures</p> <p>The vision, mission, and values provide the foundation for the organization’s work. Goals are student-focused and may not be restricted by time, as they express an ongoing execution of the agency’s mission.</p> <p>Step 3. Appraise Current Situation</p> <p>Conduct a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis, including stakeholder input and perceptions.</p>

School Improvement Principles	Equity Commitments	Four Domains of Rapid School Turnaround	Strategic Performance Management
<i>Continued...</i>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gather and use collective perceptions—held by school personnel, students, families, and the broader community—about the degree to which their school climate is or is not positive to gauge the climate-related work to be done by a school striving for turnaround.</li> <li>2. Consider stakeholder perceptions when identifying priorities and improving the underlying conditions that contribute to school climate issues.</li> <li>3. Acknowledge and respond to constructive feedback, suggestions, and criticism.</li> </ol> <p>Practice 4C: Engage students and families in pursuing education goals</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Meaningfully engage parents in their child’s learning, progress, interests, and longterm goals.</li> </ol>	

### 3. Create Goals, Strategies, and Milestones to Address Needs Related to Equity-Conscious School Improvement

School Improvement Principles	Equity Commitments	Four Domains of School Turnaround	Strategic Performance Management
<p><b>2:</b> Make decisions based on what will best serve each and every student with the expectation that all students can and will master the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college, career, and civic life.</p> <p><b>4:</b> Select at each level the strategy that best matches the context at hand—from LEAs and schools designing evidence-based improvement plans to SEAs exercising the most appropriate state-level authority to intervene in non-exiting schools.</p> <p><b>10:</b> Plan from the beginning how to sustain successful school improvement efforts financially, politically, and by ensuring the school and LEA are prepared to continue making progress.</p>	<p><b>3: Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity</b></p> <p>b) Set ambitious and achievable interim and long-term goals for English learners, and ensure they are making adequate progress achieving English language proficiency.</p> <p><b>9: Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-Emotional Development</b></p> <p>a) Measure and improve school culture as one important aspect of closing achievement gaps.</p> <p>d) Consider how best to integrate social-emotional development measures into state reporting and accountability systems while acknowledging the limitations of current measurement strategies.</p>	<p><b>Domain 1: Turnaround Leadership</b></p> <p>Practice 1B: Monitor short- and long-term goals</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop goals informed by assessments of recent performance trends, and identify practices aimed at realizing a clearly articulated turnaround vision of significantly improved student learning.</li> <li>Establish milestones for gauging progress. Continually update timelines and tasks to maintain the pace needed to accomplish meaningful goals quickly.</li> </ol> <p><b>Domain 3: Instructional Transformation</b></p> <p>Practice 3C: Remove barriers and provide opportunities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Systematically identify barriers to student learning and opportunities to enhance learning opportunities for students who demonstrate early mastery.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Module A: Setting the Direction</b></p> <p>Step 1. Create or Revisit Vision, Mission, Values, Goals, and Measures</p> <p>Goals are student-focused and may not be restricted by time, as they express an ongoing execution of the agency's mission.</p> <p>Step 2. Delineate Roles and Responsibilities</p> <p>Delineate the roles and responsibilities of the state, district, and school in relationship to the goals.</p> <p>Step 3. Appraise Current Situation</p> <p>Conduct a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis.</p> <p>Step 4. Determine Goal-Aligned Strategies</p> <p>Strategies focus on the “what” and “how” of the organization’s work and the direct and indirect impact of implementing each strategy. Once strategies are determined, identify performance measures for each strategy.</p> <p>Step 5. Establish Performance Measures and Milestones for Strategies</p> <p>Create and adjust milestones for at least two years at a time. Each year, add others based on the previous year’s progress and results.</p>

## 4. Identify Measures and Use the Data to Inform Equity-Conscious School Improvement

School Improvement Principles	Equity Commitments	Four Domains of School Turnaround	Strategic Performance Management
<p><b>2: Make decisions based on what will best serve each and every student with the expectation that all students can and will master the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college, career, and civic life.</b></p>	<p><b>1: Prioritize Equity: Set and Communicate Equity Vision and Measurable Targets</b></p> <p>c) Ensure that data are clear, accurate, and accessible to key stakeholders, with a focus on parents, legislators, and the media.</p> <p><b>3: Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity</b></p> <p>a) Include measures of proficiency <i>and</i> progress and growth in the accountability system.</p> <p>c) Collect data and report on school climate.</p> <p>d) Analyze and publicly report rates of identification for special education services.</p> <p>e) Ensure the accountability system is relevant and meaningful to parents, students, and other stakeholders.</p> <p><b>8: Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders</b></p> <p>b) Annually report on multiple indicators of the diversity of the educator workforce.</p> <p>d) Track and report on differential teacher retention and turnover rates.</p> <p><b>9: Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-Emotional Development</b></p>	<p><b>Domain 1: Turnaround Leadership</b></p> <p>Practice 1A: Prioritize improvement and communicate its urgency</p> <p>3. Closely monitor, discuss, report, and act upon the progress of schools undertaking rapid improvement.</p> <p>Practice 1B: Monitor short- and long-term goals</p> <p>3. Respond to regular feedback on progress toward goal-directed milestones and make timely changes in policy, programs, and personnel to get on track in achieving desired results for students.</p> <p><b>Domain 2: Talent Development</b></p> <p>Practice 2A: Recruit, develop, retain, and sustain talent</p> <p>2. Use multiple sources of data to match candidate skills and competencies to school needs, prioritizing the highest-need schools.</p> <p><b>Domain 3: Instructional Transformation</b></p> <p>Practice 3A: Diagnose and respond to student needs</p> <p>1. Diagnose student learning needs and use identified needs to drive all instructional decisions.</p>	<p><b>Module A: Setting the Direction</b></p> <p>Step 3. Appraise Current Situation</p> <p>Conduct a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis.</p> <p>Step 5. Establish Performance Measures and Milestones for Strategies</p> <p>Create and adjust milestones for at least two years at a time. Add others each year based on the previous year's progress and results.</p> <p><b>Module C: Implementing a Performance and Innovation Cycle</b></p> <p>Step 10. Assign Milestones to Units</p> <p>Form collaborative teams to action plan and complete the work.</p> <p>Step 11. Engage Personnel in Performance Management</p>

School Improvement Principles	Equity Commitments	Four Domains of School Turnaround	Strategic Performance Management
<i>Continued...</i>	d) Consider how best to integrate social-emotional development measures into state reporting and accountability systems while acknowledging limitations of current measurement strategies.	<p><b>Domain 4: Culture Shift</b></p> <p>Practice 4B: Build a strong community intensely focused on student learning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gather collective perceptions—held by school personnel, students, families, and the broader community—about the degree to which their school climate is or is not positive and use them to gauge the climate-related work to be done by a school striving for turnaround.</li> <li>2. Consider stakeholder perceptions when identifying priorities and improving the underlying conditions that contribute to school climate issues.</li> <li>3. Acknowledge and respond to constructive feedback, suggestions, and criticism.</li> </ol>	A performance cycle is the regularity with which progress toward milestones is reviewed and necessary adjustments in actions are made. Monthly status reports on each action, submitted by the Unit Team leaders, and related data give teams necessary information to keep work on pace and seek even better ways to meet milestones and carry out strategies. The feedback is used to improve processes, so productivity is increased and innovation is encouraged and supported.

## 5. Build Strong Structures, Functions, and Personnel to Implement an Equity-Conscious School Improvement

School Improvement Principles	Equity Commitments	Four Domains of School Turnaround	Strategic Performance Management
<p><b>1:...</b>and establish for each level clear roles, lines of authority, and responsibilities for improving low-performing schools.</p> <p><b>2:...</b>Challenge and change existing structures or norms that perpetuate low performance or stymie improvement.</p> <p><b>6:</b> Focus especially on ensuring the highest-need schools have great leaders and teachers who have or develop the specific capacities needed to dramatically improve low-performing schools.</p> <p><b>7:</b> Dedicate sufficient resources (time, staff, funding); align them to advance the system’s goals; use them efficiently by establishing clear roles and responsibilities at all levels of the system; and hold partners accountable for results.</p> <p><b>8:</b> Establish clear expectations and report progress on a sequence of ambitious yet achievable short- and long-term school improvement benchmarks that focus on both equity and excellence.</p>	<p><b>1: Prioritize Equity: Set and Communicate Equity Vision and Measurable Targets</b></p> <p>f) Assign state agency staff and allocate state funding to support data analysis and communications functions.</p> <p><b>2: Start from Within: Focus on the SEA</b></p> <p>d) Consider restructuring SEA roles to prioritize equity.</p> <p>e) Diversify SEA staff.</p> <p><b>6: Start Early: Invest in the Youngest Learners</b></p> <p>e) Prioritize trainings and resources on cultural and linguistic services for the early grades.</p> <p><b>8: Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders</b></p> <p>b) Annually report on multiple indicators of the diversity of the educator workforce.</p> <p>c) Analyze and monitor teacher licensure requirements and create new programs to increase diversity in the teaching profession.</p> <p>e) Deliberately develop cultural competencies among aspiring and practicing educators so that educators are prepared to meet the needs of each student.</p>	<p><b>Domain 2: Talent Development</b></p> <p>Practice 2A: Recruit, develop, retain, and sustain talent</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Proactively plan for recruiting and developing talent with turnaround-specific competencies to quickly fill the vacancies that will inevitably occur during the turnaround process.</li> <li>2. Use multiple sources of data to match candidate skills and competencies to school needs, prioritizing the highest-need schools.</li> <li>3. Institute succession planning activities by creating in-house district preparation programs designed to foster and generate turnaround competencies to develop future turnaround leaders and teachers.</li> </ol> <p>Practice 2B: Target professional learning opportunities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offer high-quality, individualized, and responsive professional learning opportunities designed to build the capacity needed for rapid school improvement.</li> <li>2. Offer regular opportunities for job-embedded learning, including coaching, mentoring, and observation (including peer observations).</li> </ol>	<p><b>Module B: Operationalizing the Direction</b></p> <p>Step 6. Conduct Functional Analysis</p> <p>Pursuing goals and executing strategies requires the performance of specific functions to address gaps in functions and how to address redundancies that lead to inefficiencies.</p> <p>Step 7. Conduct Structural Analysis</p> <p>Map out the needed or ideal structure aligned to the functions and compare with the current structure to identify redundancies, gaps, or issues to address so the structure supports work to implement the strategies and milestones to realize the goals, mission, and vision.</p> <p>Step 8. Establish Coordinating Teams</p> <p>Determine roles and competencies aligned to the structure and functions, the need for specific training and professional learning, and funding sources.</p>



School Improvement Principles	Equity Commitments	Four Domains of School Turnaround	Strategic Performance Management
<i>Continued...</i>	<p>f) Initiate programs to ensure the school leadership pipeline prepares principals to lead in urban, rural, and other disadvantaged or hard-to-staff districts.</p> <p><b>9: Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-Emotional Development</b></p> <p>e) Invest in principals' ability to lead schools that support the whole child.</p> <p>f) Integrate analysis of teachers' ability to teach social-emotional competencies into licensure requirements and teaching frameworks.</p>	<p>Practice 2C: Set clear performance expectations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create and share expectations for a level of professional performance by every role in the system.</li> </ol> <p><b>Domain 4: Culture Shift</b></p> <p>Practice 4A: Build a strong community intensely focused on student learning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Provide explicit expectations and support for each person's role (expected behaviors) both in the turnaround and in student progress.</li> <li>4. Champion high expectations (of self and others), embed them in everyday practice and language, and reinforce them through shared accountability and follow-through on strategies for dramatically improving student outcomes.</li> </ol>	<p>Step 9. Align Personnel to Structure</p> <p>Place personnel to perform the appropriate functions of their roles within the unit. In determining the fit of personnel for specific positions within the structure, give greater weight to competency and ability to take on new responsibilities than experience in a certain job category.</p>

## 6. Take Action and Provide Responsive Equitable Supports

School Improvement Principles	Equity Commitments	Four Domains of School Turnaround	Strategic Performance Management
<p><b>3: Engage early, regularly, and authentically with stakeholders and partners so improvement is done with and not to the school, families, and the community.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrate school and community assets as well as early childhood, higher education, social services, and workforce systems to, among other things, help address challenges outside of school.</li> </ul>	<p><b>2: Start from Within: Focus on the SEA</b></p> <p>f) Target more SEA funding toward outreach and communications with a focus on directly engaging low-income families and families of color and building partnerships with organizations that have closer ties to families and community leaders.</p> <p><b>4: Go Local: Engage LEAs and Provide Tailored and Differentiated Support</b></p> <p>e) Require or incentivize participation in and funding for high-quality trainings that address the needs of the whole child.</p> <p>f) Provide grants for innovative, local programs targeted at specific disadvantaged groups of students.</p> <p><b>5: Follow the Money: Allocate for Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity</b></p> <p>a) Advocate for equitable and adequate funding.</p> <p>d) Prioritize coordination of public funding and services.</p> <p><b>6: Start Early: Invest in the Youngest Learners</b></p> <p>a) Advocate for increased funding for more children to attend high-quality pre-K.</p> <p>b) Provide state funding, via formula or competitive grants, to improve the quality of publicly funded pre-K programs tied to quality standards and target areas with highest need.</p>	<p><b>Domain 2: Talent Development</b></p> <p>Practice 2B: Target professional learning opportunities</p> <p>3. Leverage and maximize the effectiveness of high-performing teachers, coaches, and leaders by using them as models and peer coaches.</p>	<p><b>Module B: Operationalizing the Direction</b></p> <p>Step 6. Conduct Functional Analysis</p> <p>Pursuing goals and executing strategies requires the performance of specific functions to address gaps in functions and how to address redundancies that lead to inefficiencies.</p> <p>Step 7. Conduct Structural Analysis</p> <p>Map out the needed or ideal structure aligned to the functions and compare with the current structure to identify redundancies, gaps, or issues to address so the structure supports work to implement the strategies and milestones to realize the goals, mission, and vision.</p> <p><b>Module C: Implementing a Performance and Innovation Cycle</b></p> <p>Step 10. Assign Milestones to Units Form collaborative teams to action plan and complete the work.</p> <p>Step 11. Engage Personnel in Performance Management</p>

School Improvement Principles	Equity Commitments	Four Domains of School Turnaround	Strategic Performance Management
<i>Continued...</i>	<p><b>7: Engage More Deeply: Monitor Equitable Implementation of Standards and Assessments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b) Remove financial barriers to college- and career-readiness.</li> <li>c) Ensure that all students have access to high-quality instructional materials.</li> <li>g) Ensure students with disabilities and English learners have access to accommodations in instruction and assessment.</li> </ul> <p><b>8: Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>h) Provide funding for teacher training on restorative justice.</li> </ul> <p><b>9: Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-Emotional Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>h) Advocate for the state to direct additional funding and technical assistance toward mental and physical health services to schools with the greatest need.</li> <li>i) Provide incentives, competitive grants, or guidance to LEAs and local communities to design and offer school-based comprehensive services such as community schools to low-income communities and communities of color.</li> </ul>		<p>A performance cycle is the regularity with which progress toward milestones is reviewed and necessary adjustments in actions are made. Monthly status reports on each action, submitted by the Unit Team leaders, and related data give teams necessary information to keep work on pace and seek even better ways to meet milestones and carry out strategies. The feedback is used to improve processes, so productivity is increased and innovation is encouraged and supported.</p>

School Improvement Principles	Equity Commitments	Four Domains of School Turnaround	Strategic Performance Management
	<p><b>10: Empower Student Options: Ensure Families Have Access to High-Quality Educational Options That Align to Community Needs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>b) Incentivize inter-district choice programs that create more diverse schools.</li><li>c) Invest in high-quality distance and virtual learning options.</li><li>d) Subsidize the provision of transportation for low-income families to access high-performing schools outside their community.</li></ul>		

## 7. Implement a Performance Management Cycle

School Improvement Principles	Equity Commitments	Four Domains of School Turnaround	Strategic Performance Management
<p><b>9: Implement improvement plans rigorously and with fidelity, and, since everything will not go perfectly, gather actionable data and information during implementation; evaluate efforts and monitor evidence to learn what is working, for whom, and under what circumstances; and continuously improve over time.</b></p>	<p><b>1: Prioritize Equity: Set and Communicate Equity Vision and Measurable Targets</b></p> <p>c) Ensure that data are clear, accurate, and accessible to key stakeholders, with a focus on parents, legislators, and the media.</p> <p>d) Collect, disaggregate, analyze, and publicly share data on other indicators of long-term success.</p> <p>g) Once these commitments and goals have been established, chiefs should hold themselves and others in the state accountable for making progress and celebrate success where it is achieved.</p> <p><b>3: Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity</b></p> <p>d) Analyze and publicly report rates of identification for special education services.</p> <p><b>4: Go Local: Engage LEAs and Provide Tailored and Differentiated Support</b></p> <p>d) Highlight promising local practices for equity.</p> <p><b>5: Follow the Money: Allocate Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity</b></p> <p>c) Monitor equitable distribution of local funds.</p> <p><b>7: Engage More Deeply: Monitor Equitable Implementation of Standards and Assessments</b></p> <p>a) Monitor district course offerings and screening practices to determine whether low-income students and students of color are being provided a college- and career-ready course of study.</p>	<p><b>Domain 1: Turnaround Leadership</b></p> <p><b>Practice 1A: Prioritize improvement and communicate its urgency</b></p> <p>3. Closely monitor, discuss, report, and act upon the progress of schools undertaking rapid improvement.</p> <p>Practice 1B: Monitor short- and long-term goals</p> <p>3. Respond to regular feedback on progress toward goal-directed milestones, and make timely changes in policy, programs, and personnel to get on track in achieving desired results for students.</p> <p>4. Capitalize on initial turnaround successes and momentum to shift the focus from change itself to incorporating and establishing effective organizational processes, structures, and interactions that contribute to continuous organizational improvement.</p> <p>Practice 1C: Customize and target support to meet needs</p> <p>3. Regularly monitor progress and identify supports needed and then act to address those needs.</p> <p><b>Domain 2: Talent Development</b></p> <p>Practice 2C: Set clear performance expectations</p>	<p><b>Module C: Implementing a Performance and Innovation Cycle</b></p> <p>Step 11: Engage personnel in performance management</p> <p>A performance cycle is the regularity with which progress toward milestones is reviewed and necessary adjustments in actions are made. Monthly status reports on each action, submitted by the Unit Team leaders, and related data give teams necessary information to keep work on pace and seek even better ways to meet milestones and carry out strategies. The feedback is used to improve processes, so productivity is increased and innovation is encouraged and supported.</p>

School Improvement Principles	Equity Commitments	Four Domains of School Turnaround	Strategic Performance Management
<i>Continued...</i>			
	<p>d) Check for bias in curriculum and assessment as part of state-level review of instructional materials, and assist LEAs in implementing strategies to detect bias in curriculum and assessment, particularly for locally selected or designed materials.</p> <p>e) Analyze the quality of assignments against rigorous standards, and share learnings with the LEA.</p> <p><b>8: Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders</b></p> <p>a) Determine where state equity plans have been successful, and celebrate this progress prominently to illustrate what is possible and to guide other systems.</p> <p>b) Annually report on multiple indicators of the diversity of the educator workforce.</p> <p>d) Track and report on differential teacher retention and turnover rates.</p> <p><b>10: Empower Student Options: Ensure Families Have Access to High-Quality Educational Options that Align to Community Needs</b></p> <p>h) Ensure all schools, including charters, are held accountable for providing high-quality education.</p>	<p>2. Develop and implement performance-management processes that include clear means for monitoring progress, flexibility to rapidly respond to professional learning needs, and opportunities to revise milestones as needed.</p> <p><b>Domain 4: Culture Shift</b></p> <p>Practice 4A: Build a strong community intensely focused on student learning</p> <p>1. Celebrate successes—starting with quick wins early in the turnaround process—of students, family, teachers, and leaders.</p> <p>4. Champion high expectations (of self and others), embed them in everyday practice and language, and reinforce them through shared accountability and follow-through on strategies for dramatically improving student outcomes.</p> <p>Practice 4B: Build a strong community intensely focused on student learning</p> <p>2. Consider stakeholder perceptions when identifying priorities and improving the underlying conditions that contribute to school climate issues.</p> <p>3. Acknowledge and respond to constructive feedback, suggestions, and criticism.</p>	

## ATTACHMENT B: KEY QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Creating a culture committed to addressing inequities through evidence-based continuous improvement requires strong commitment, strategic use of data, differentiated services and resources matched to needs, and equitable opportunity. The following questions can be used to ensure strategies address or support equity and use of evidence-based practices within a system of continuous improvement at the state, district, and school levels.

**Identify a possible strategy and write it as a Theory of Action. Discuss what it would look like at the state, district, and school levels if the strategy was successfully implemented.**

IF \_\_\_\_\_

THEN \_\_\_\_\_

AND \_\_\_\_\_

**Ask the following questions to determine if the strategy aligns and supports the advancement of equity, use of evidence-based practices, and principles of school improvement.**

1. Will this strategy move the organization closer to carrying out its mission and realizing its vision based on equity commitments, evidence-based practices, and principles of school improvement?
2. How will the strategy address inequity or advance the conversation on and benefits of increasing equity and use of evidence-based practices in education?
3. Will the strategy ignore or worsen existing disparities or produce other unintended consequences?
4. How will the strategy advance the use, confirmation, or identification of evidence-based practices to improve the opportunities and successes of underserved and underperforming students, schools, and districts?
5. How and what performance and results data could be collected and analyzed to report the impact of the strategy on underserved and underperforming students, schools, and districts; individual and school community learning; and the advancement of equity, evidence-based practices, and sustained improvement?
6. How will the investment or resource allocation for this strategy advance the equitable distribution and use of resources?
7. How will the strategy contribute to the greater body of work in advancing equity, evidence-based practices, and improvement principles throughout the school, district, state, and nation?
8. How will stakeholders—particularly those representing underserved and underperforming students, families, communities, schools, and districts—continually be engaged in and informed of the work, progress, and results of the strategy?









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