

TO: RIDE Leadership Team

FROM: ESSA Committee of Practitioners

DATE: January 26, 2017

SUBJECT: Input on the role of various stakeholders in school improvement

The following is a summary of the Committee of Practitioners' input from a meeting on October 19th. After deeply considering topics of assessment and accountability, committee members heard from a panel of professionals from schools in intervention status to develop an understanding of the work of school improvement. Committee members, drawing on input from constituents throughout the state, offered the following insights on the roles of the state (SEA), local education agency (LEA), school, and community in facilitating school improvement efforts. The notes here do not represent consensus but rather a high level overview of the most frequent comments. More information on the input activities can be found [here](#).

In general, those closest to the students are best able to make educational decisions.

The committee indicated that the vast majority of school improvement activities must take place at the school level. Activities such as planning, data analysis, and course-correcting were indicated to be essential at the school level no matter the intervention status of a school. Some committee members also indicated that schools ought to have the freedom to make innovative decisions and work autonomously. One committee member noted, "I know many principals and teachers, who left to their own inspiration would create schools and individual classrooms that children and youth would want to be in every day. But most of them are fearful of the consequences of not following the script of what should be taught, in what manner it should be taught and when everything should be taught that's coming from the top." Among other areas, the ability for school leaders to staff the school, professionally develop teachers, plan with stakeholders, and engage parents were noted as essential to school improvement.

The role of the community in school improvement is currently ambiguous and ought to be expanded, but the path forward is unclear.

The committee noted that the current practices of school improvement do not sufficiently define a clear role for the greater school community. Most frequently, the committee noted that parents must be engaged with their children's education, but beyond this role, the kinds of activities the community could engage in to support school improvement were limited. Committee members indicated that providing extra-curricular supports could and should be used to improve and expand educational opportunities. One committee member, speaking of after school activities stated, "Our programs allow student to make errors and learn from them." Other potential ways communities could be involved included volunteering, fundraising, and provided internships or apprenticeships. Lastly, it was indicated several times that parents/community members should be involved in school improvement teams, which is not presently a requirement of schools in intervention.

The major role of the SEA in school improvement is to serve as a conduit for support and expertise.

One recurring theme regarding the role of the state was that it could act as an aggregator of strategies and provider of support and technical assistance. More than any other role, identifying research-based interventions was mentioned as best done by the state. Committee members suggested the state could help disseminate successful strategies from other schools both within the state and from other states. The second most-noted role for the state was to provide assistance in understanding and analyzing accountability and performance data. The general theme that the state's role was best when it was supportive and not punitive was consistently mentioned.

In cases of durable low-performance, the role of the LEAs and SEAs must expand.

There was consistent mention that districts and the state should "provide the freedom needed in schools," and take a "hands off approach on schools doing fine." However, it was noted that as the time over which a school has maintained low performance goes on, the district and the state must take a more active role in order to "push the envelope." Particularly, providing technical assistance in understanding the accountability system, analyzing data, and providing research-based interventions were noted as appropriate roles for the state education agency. For districts, providing leadership training and high-quality curricular resources were prominently noted. For both the state and district, holding schools accountable was broadly recognized as a significant role.