



# Statewide System of Support (SSoS) Core Working Group Report: Recommendations

Prepared for

**The California Collaborative for  
Educational Excellence**

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## Executive Summary

In early 2025, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) convened a Statewide System of Support (SSoS) Core Working Group to assess how well California’s current structures support school districts and to identify what must change to ensure every student receives the education they deserve. Drawing on interviews with more than 40 leaders, prior working group efforts, and months of collaborative inquiry, the group focused specifically on the layers of technical assistance—including Differentiated Assistance (DA) and Direct Technical Assistance (DTA)—and how they function for improving *schools and districts*.

Across conversations, **there was strong agreement that the core ideals of the SSoS** are right—a system centered on *support rather than sanctions*, responsive to *local context*, committed to *resource equity*, guided by *continuous improvement*, and built on *trusting relationships*. Yet members also agreed that **the system is not working as intended**. Districts face a proliferation of initiatives and compliance requirements that dilute focus on teaching and learning. Identification for assistance is unstable, overly broad, and confusing. Roles across state and county agencies remain fragmented, producing overlapping processes and unclear lines of authority. The quality and consistency of district support varies widely, and there is no clear statewide pathway for escalating intervention when persistent academic or governance dysfunction interferes with districts’ ability to serve students.

In response, the Working Group developed a set of recommendations grounded in two essential principles: (1) **coherence and alignment**, ensuring statewide goals, policies, roles, and tools reinforce one another, and (2) **reciprocal accountability**, meaning every level of the system shares responsibility for creating the conditions that enable districts to *improve teaching and learning*. The recommendations call for establishing a small number of clear statewide goals; clarifying roles and authority; streamlining reporting and compliance; refining identification to focus on essential academic outcomes and pairing those data with comprehensive reviews; strengthening expectations, capacity, and accountability for high-quality district support; creating a transparent escalation pathway; and building a statewide learning infrastructure that uses evidence from local implementation to inform policy.

With shared recommendations now in place, the next phase of work will focus on how to bring this vision to life—mapping practical pathways forward, determining which elements may require policy or legislative action, and aligning roles across the California Department of Education (CDE), the State Board of Education (SBE), CCEE, County Offices of Education (COEs), and districts. This implementation phase will draw on research, lessons from other systems, and the expertise of leaders within California’s education system to ensure coherence, learning, and reciprocal accountability remain at the center. Enacting these changes will require bold action and collaboration among educators, district and county leaders, families, students, and state policymakers working together to create a system capable of delivering the excellent education every California student deserves.

“At this pivotal moment, the working group offered a safe and transparent space for state partners to examine the strengths, challenges, and opportunities within the Statewide System of Support. This report offers recommendations that set a vision, and we are eager to engage with the design team as they develop actionable plans to turn it into reality, recognizing that meaningful progress depends on detailed planning and collective engagement.

—Ed Manansala, El Dorado COE Superintendent

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## Introduction

The Statewide System of Support (SSoS) was created nearly a decade ago to move away from the “blame and shame” era of No Child Left Behind. Its goal is to ensure every school and district gets the right help at the right time, through support—not sanctions—and by fostering relationships, responsiveness, and continuous improvement.

These ideas remain as important now as ever, even though the context in which our schools operate has shifted dramatically. In the years since the SSoS was initiated, the world has changed. The pandemic disrupted learning and widened inequities, and schools continue to face mounting pressures—from staffing shortages to heightened student needs. In a time when communities are navigating intense public debates and rising expectations, schools and public institutions are working hard to maintain trust with the public and meet the evolving demands schools and public institutions face. In the spirit of continuous improvement, it is essential to revisit our support and accountability systems, assess whether they are working as intended, and refine them to meet today’s challenges.

To this end, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) convened a Core Working Group to take stock of where the system stands today, specifically regarding the layers of technical assistance within the SSoS,

and what changes may be needed to better deliver on its vision. The timing is important: with current federal actions and upcoming state elections likely to influence California’s education landscape, we have a valuable opportunity to proactively shape improvements that strengthen system coherence and advance student outcomes. This moment also invites reflection on the structures guiding our collective work and offers a chance to model, at the system level, the spirit of continuous learning and improvement we hope to see across school districts.

The 2025 Working Group builds upon several other engagements that CCEE has led over the past couple of years, looking at various aspects of the SSoS. This group’s charge was to focus on how the system supports school districts, engaging in honest reflection about current practices and collaboratively identifying opportunities for meaningful, system-level improvement. It is important to note that this effort centered specifically on traditional schools and school districts; charter school oversight, support, and accountability were outside the scope of the group’s work.

Through this process, the Working Group found a wide degree of agreement that the current system for supporting school and district improvement is not working as intended. Authority, roles, and responsibilities are not

clearly defined; there is a greater focus on compliance than on continuous improvement; and there are limited mechanisms to ensure shared accountability for results. Priorities shift too often, resources are fragmented across disconnected statewide initiatives, and support is inconsistent. Districts lack coherent guidance and timely, aligned support.

In response, the Working Group has identified a set of system-level recommendations to clarify and align roles, responsibilities, and incentives so the SSoS can more effectively support districts, schools, and students. **At the heart of these recommendations are two foundational drivers: (1) *clarity and coherence* and (2) *reciprocal accountability*.** Clarity and coherence are achieved when there is a clear, shared vision; when goals and strategies are aligned to that vision; and when each partner understands and fulfills their role in achieving it. Reciprocal accountability is achieved when all partners in the SSoS—namely state agencies, county offices of education (COEs), and school districts—share responsibility for improving student learning outcomes and are collectively empowered to provide the meaningful support that enables

every student to thrive. The recommendations that follow reflect broad agreement on what California’s education system must achieve: a coherent, focused, and accountable structure that delivers the right support at the right time.

The next phase of this work will focus on implementation, drawing on research, lessons from other states and countries, and the expertise of California’s leaders to chart a practical path forward. The goal is to strengthen the system’s capacity to realize its original vision of support, collaboration, and continuous improvement over compliance.

This report begins with background on the SSoS and previous Working Group efforts, followed by an overview of the purpose and process of the current Working Group. It then outlines the key challenges identified, presents six recommendations for improvement, and concludes with a vision for the next steps.

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## Background on the SSoS and Prior Work

The ultimate goal of the SSoS is to provide coordinated, needs-based, and differentiated resources and support to local education agencies (LEAs) that lead to improved services for all students, which will be evidenced by the closing of opportunity gaps and improved student outcomes.<sup>1</sup> To this end, technical assistance offered through the SSoS is structured around three tiers of support (see **Table 1**):

- **Universal support**, available to all LEAs and support providers, includes statewide resources, professional learning networks, and tools intended to strengthen local improvement capacity. This encompasses a wide array of initiatives led by COEs that equip district leaders and other support providers with resources and expertise across a variety of instructional and operational areas.<sup>2</sup>
- **Targeted (or supplemental) support** is designed to assist school districts that are facing specific challenges. Historically, targeted support was exclusively provided through COE-led Differentiated Assistance (DA), which provides focused support to LEAs identified through performance indicators for student groups on the California School Dashboard. In the 2025–26 school year, two new targeted support mechanisms have been introduced: California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) DA, through which the California Department of Education (CDE) supports districts struggling to submit high-quality student data on time, and GeoLead DA, through which the Geographic Lead Agency in a region will support districts who have demonstrated academic performance issues with multiple subgroups over time.<sup>3</sup>
- **Intensive support** is provided through Direct Technical Assistance (DTA) and is reserved for LEAs with persistent or acute challenges. At this tier, the CCEE works in partnerships with the COE and the CDE to provide DTA, a tailored and specialized form of support based on an improvement plan developed by expert teams in collaboration with the LEA.

<sup>1</sup> For purposes of this section of the report, LEA refers to school districts. More broadly, universal support is available to all LEAs, including charter schools, COEs, regional occupational programs, and state schools through the SSoS.

<sup>2</sup> <https://tools.systemofsupport.org/resource-hub>

<sup>3</sup> A Geographic Lead Agency (GeoLead) is a county office of education who receives funding from the state to coordinate efforts across a region of the state. There are seven GeoLeads.

**Table 1. Universal, Targeted/Supplemental, and Intensive Assistance through SSoS**

Universal	Targeted/Supplemental (2)			Intensive (3)
<p>Available at no cost to all districts, charters, COEs, and Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs) in California.</p> <p>Includes tools, resources, and professional learning offered by technical assistance providers through the Statewide System of Support, coordinated by CCEE</p>	<p><b>Differentiated Assistance (DA)</b></p> <p>When a district, COE, or charter school meets <a href="#">specific criteria</a> the county superintendent or the CDE will work jointly with the LEA in affirming and/or supporting focus areas of work that builds local capacity through expertise and collaboration, fostering co-learning, reflection, and evidence to drive urgent action, improve student outcomes, and sustain lasting change.</p>	<p><b>CALPADS DA</b></p> <p>When a district or COE fails to submit accurate and timely CALPADS data, the county superintendent or the CDE will provide technical assistance focused on data management and strengthening the district's capacity to meet student and community needs.</p> <p>*2024 = 0 LEAs 2025= 7+ LEAs</p>	<p><b>GeoLead DA</b></p> <p>When a district has 1 or more student groups meet <a href="#">specific criteria</a> for three or more consecutive years, the geographic lead- and the county superintendent—must provide targeted technical assistance. They may bring in expert lead agencies to strengthen support and improve outcomes.</p> <p>*begins with 2025 Dashboard</p>	<p>Provided to districts, COEs, and charters facing persistent, multi-year challenges. Accessed through identification by CDE, CCEE, or COEs via DTA or intensive CIM. Involves close collaboration among state and local partners to tailor support strategies. May include expert technical assistance to drive improved student outcomes.</p>

In addition, there are **other technical assistance programs** that support districts facing significant challenges. Although these programs were not the primary focus of this Working Group, the programs were discussed as important components of California's broader technical assistance ecosystem. Specifically, in this report, we highlight the Compliance and Improvement Monitoring (CIM) process, which focuses on ensuring that districts meet state and federal program requirements; the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT), which provides diagnostic reviews, fiscal oversight, and intervention when financial or governance challenges threaten financial stability; and the Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) program, which directs pass-through monetary federal resources to the state's lowest-performing schools. Together, these and other programs operate alongside the SSoS, offering critical support that affects district functioning and student outcomes, even though these programs are governed by separate statutory and funding structures.

In 2022, CCEE, in participation with the CDE and the State Board of Education (SBE), convened the first SSoS Core Working Group to develop actionable recommendations to improve the accessibility of SSoS resources and support to all LEAs. The goal of the Working Group was to build from independent research



and evaluation being conducted statewide to bring system leaders from across the state together to make plans for improvement.<sup>4</sup> The first Core Working Group both made actionable recommendations on specific elements of the SSoS and revealed that a broader view was necessary. To this end, a second SSoS Core Working Group convened in 2025 to conduct a deeper inquiry into DA and DTA and advance the SSoS toward greater impact in benefit for all California students.

## 2025 SSoS Core Working Group: Process and Vision

The 2025 SSoS Core Working Group examined how the various layers of technical assistance, including DA, DTA, and related supports, help school districts and to identify ways to make them more coherent, accessible, and effective. This exploration revealed the deep interconnectedness of these layers, as well as key challenges and opportunities for improvement. This Working Group brought together leaders from the CDE, the CCEE, the SBE, COEs, and school districts. Together, these leaders committed to thoughtfully addressing the system's structural challenges and exploring ways to strengthen alignment, coherence, and support to improve outcomes for all students.

### Working Group's Process

The Working Group followed a structured, iterative process rooted in inquiry, collaboration, and reflection. Similar to the first Core Working Group, the members of this group were key decision makers and leaders in California's SSoS, representing state agencies, COEs, and school districts—all committed to improving outcomes for California's students. By bringing together 25 educational partners from across the state, the convening agencies aimed to build a shared understanding of the system's strengths and opportunities and to develop a common vision for how the layers of technical assistance, including DA and DTA, could more effectively support districts, schools, and students.<sup>5</sup>

In April 2025, facilitators conducted interviews with more than 40 individuals—including Working Group members, original architects of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), and other education leaders across the state—to solicit diverse perspectives on how DA and DTA are functioning in the larger context of the SSoS.

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<sup>4</sup> Full list of reports available in [Appendix 2](#).

<sup>5</sup> Thirteen Working Group participants represented state agencies, seven represented COEs, and five represented school districts.

These conversations, when paired with a systematic review of prior Working Group meetings and research conducted on the SSoS, helped clarify the system's strengths, barriers, and opportunities for growth.

Building on this foundation, the Working Group met in person in May 2025 to examine system challenges through multiple perspectives. Members explored how individuals at different levels of the system experience their roles, where misalignments may occur, and how these dynamics influence support for students. From this conversation, four key areas of focus emerged for deeper exploration and collective learning.

Throughout the summer of 2025, four subgroups met multiple times to develop potential solutions to these challenges. Members reviewed research, engaged with background readings, and refined proposals through discussion and feedback cycles. In parallel, CCEE engaged two Reactor Teams, which reviewed emerging ideas at key intervals. One team included representatives from CDE, CCEE, COEs, and special education local plan areas (SELPAs), which reviewed strengths and areas for improvement in the alignment between DA, DTA, and CIM processes. Another team included representatives from the California County Superintendents Curricular and Improvement Support (CISC) committee, which provided feedback and refined key concepts to ensure proposals were grounded in practitioner experience and implementation realities. CCEE also engaged its Advisory Council to provide feedback on both the challenges identified and the emerging recommendations, ensuring that the work was informed by a broader set of county and district leaders across the state.

This process culminated in a final in-person meeting of the Working Group in September 2025, where the draft recommendations were shared for collective review, discussion, and feedback to understand the level of support for each proposal.

The resulting set of recommendations reflects strong consensus on **what** California's SSoS must achieve: a more coherent, focused, and effective structure that provides the right support at the right time. The next phase of engagement, continuing into early 2026, will focus on **how** to bring these ideas to life, working with partners across the state to determine practical implementation steps and policy pathways to realize this shared vision. Drawing on research, lessons from other systems, and the expertise of California's leaders, implementation recommendations will specify where changes are needed in the system and how they can be achieved, including any legislative, regulatory, or funding actions required. The goal is to strengthen the system's capacity to realize its original vision of support, collaboration, and continuous improvement over compliance.

## Working Group's Vision

From the outset, the Working Group grounded its discussions in the original intent of California's education system, embodied in the LCFF and the SSoS. Members revisited the core principles of resource equity, local control, community engagement, and continuous improvement, asking whether these remain the right foundation for the state's work ahead. The group affirmed that this vision still holds true: a system that is centered on support rather than sanctions, responsive to local context, and committed to continuous learning remains relevant and inspiring.

At the same time, members acknowledged a familiar, historical pattern in California's education policies: a tendency for sets of policies to swing between state control and local autonomy, and to revert to compliance. The group emphasized the importance of maintaining focus and intentionality to ensure the system stays steady and responsive, rather than reactive, in the face of short-term challenges. Truly transformative change, they agreed, requires sustained effort, clarity of purpose, and a willingness to confront difficult truths about what is and is not working in the current system.

The Working Group's charge was not to reinvent the SSoS, but to strengthen it: to build on the progress already made, clarify its functions, and realign structures so the system delivers on its original promise. Participants emphasized that the state's goal should be meaningful, structural change—addressing the underlying conditions that shape system performance—rather than adding new layers of procedural reform. Achieving this vision will require open dialogue, shared responsibility, and a collective commitment to strengthening the system so it becomes more coherent, more effective, and more deeply focused on what matters most: supporting the adults who serve students so they can improve learning outcomes for every student in California.

“It was an honor to collaborate with colleagues across the state in the Statewide System of Support Working group. The group's focus on increasing clarity, building capacity, reducing burden, sharing responsibility, and ultimately improving outcomes for students was both inspiring and reaffirming.

—Heather Armelino, Superintendent, Enterprise  
Elementary School District

## Challenges Within the SSoS

In interviews and meetings with Working Group members and education leaders across the state, a set of common challenges emerged with the SSoS. These are described in further detail below.

### (1) Supports Miss the Biggest Challenges

California's SSoS continues to evolve, yet districts report that many of their most pressing needs remain difficult to address. School district leaders are working to implement multiple state-initiated programs that require complex reporting requirements, compliance monitoring, and an expanding Dashboard. Together, these responsibilities can make it challenging to maintain a clear and sustained focus on teaching and learning.

At the same time, local political dynamics—such as board transitions, labor-management tensions, and superintendent turnover—can create additional challenges for sustained improvement. Although these factors often extend beyond the current scope of SSoS support, they significantly influence a district's capacity for progress. Yet instead of addressing these deeper, systemic conditions that shape a district's ability to improve, current support efforts are too often dictated by the Dashboard indicators, creating a narrow, compliance-driven focus and leading to reactive pre-set services rather than the adaptive, context-based, and sustained support those within the system want to provide to address districts' greatest teaching and learning needs.

### (2) Identification for Technical Assistance Is Confusing and Overwhelming

Districts are now identified for various levels of technical assistance, each with its own criteria, timelines, and processes. These levels are not well-aligned or clearly understood across the system. This fragmentation is about to grow more complex with the addition of new identification processes, such as CalPADS DA and Geographic Lead DA (per Education Code 52071(f)). The result is a confusing array of entry points into assistance that diffuses focus and burdens both local and state systems.

The DA identification system has become particularly problematic, as the identification process has become unstable and overbroad. Across three DA identification lists (2022, 2023, and 2024), 68% of school districts and COEs have

been identified for DA at least once, with 53% identified every year.<sup>6</sup> This means that annual fluctuations sweep a large number of districts in and out of DA, leaving support providers focused on addressing short-term issues rather than supporting sustained system-level improvement. Even though the number of districts identified has slightly declined over this period—from approximately 620 to 590—the system remains overwhelmed.<sup>7</sup> The volume and volatility of identifications continue to stretch the capacity of COEs and CCEE, making it difficult for them to provide the thoughtful, sustained, positive support that the system was intended to provide.

In addition, the proliferation of indicators on the Dashboard used for identification has diluted focus, leaving less attention on core academic outcomes such as literacy and math. Furthermore, reliance on quantitative thresholds alone, without deeper systemic reviews, often triggers superficial fixes that do not address long-term underlying instructional or organizational challenges. In this way, the identification process, in practice, has reinforced a compliance mindset—where the goal becomes exiting DA rather than learning from it—diverting attention from capacity-building and genuine improvement.

### (3) Supports Lack Coordination and Consistency

Support is fragmented across multiple agencies including the CDE, CCEE, COEs, Geo Leads, and others, each with overlapping processes, tools, and timelines. This complexity is reinforced by statutory requirements spread across multiple sections of the Education Code—including §§ 53071, 52072, 52071(f), and others—each imposing distinct mandates, timelines, and accountability expectations. Multiple unaligned planning and reporting requirements (e.g., for the Local Control Accountability Plan [LCAP], School Plan for Student Improvement [SPSA], and various state grants and programs, as well as federal requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) create duplication and inconsistency across supports, undermining districts’

<sup>6</sup> California publicly reports 1,081 local education agencies (LEAs) that are not charter schools. Of these, various categories are not given designations for a type of assistance under the Statewide System of Support (SSoS): 14 charter schools authorized by the State Board of Education; 59 regional occupational programs (ROPs), 4 statewide schools for deaf, blind and/or the California Education Authority; 4 LEAs that are included under their respective administrative units (Petaluma City USD and Santa Rosa USD); and 1 geographically bound charter school. This leaves 999 LEAs across those three years that could receive designations for assistance under the SSOS. 322 LEAs over this period (2022, 2023, and 2024) received a designation of general assistance. Of this group, more than half (173 of 322) have an enrollment in 2024-25 of under 250 students, effectively excluding them from reaching a large enough size to report on the Dashboard and thereby making them unable to qualify for differentiated assistance support.

<sup>7</sup> The count of school districts in differentiated assistance was derived from the lists of school districts and their status on the California Department of Education’s Local Control Funding Formula landing page: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/>.

ability to develop coherent and sustained improvement strategies. Together, these overlapping requirements have entrenched a procedural, compliance-oriented culture in which agencies and districts focus on meeting documentation expectations rather than engaging in collaborative diagnosis and problem-solving.

Over time, new initiatives, agencies, and technical assistance providers have been added to the SSoS, creating opportunities for expanded support. However, there has been limited reflection on the quality and effectiveness of existing components or how well all parts of the system work together. In addition, because no single entity has authority to lead or coordinate the SSoS, no agency is responsible for overseeing or improving how these various parts function together. As a result, a great deal of time is spent on cross-agency coordination and collaboration simply to manage overlapping roles, responsibilities, and obligations.

#### **(4) DA Support Varies Across Counties, with Little Accountability for Quality or Effectiveness**

COEs play a critical role and are doing important work to support districts through COE-led DA. At the same time, there is considerable variability in how DA is delivered across the state, particularly for small, geographically isolated counties. Without clear statewide quality standards and consistent accountability measures, districts may experience very different levels of instructional and organizational support depending on their location.

#### **(5) No Active Mechanism for Escalation**

When districts face chronic underperformance or governance breakdowns, the state lacks a clear, enforceable protocol for intervention. Unlike fiscal oversight through FCMAT, there is no equivalent academic or governance pathway that defines thresholds, escalation steps, or authority to intervene when local systems are unable or unwilling to improve. The absence of a formal escalation framework leaves the SSoS without a clear mechanism to respond when students are not being adequately served because of persistent dysfunction. COEs are expected to assist but are not empowered to enforce change, and the state lacks a defined process to augment or reassign support when progress stalls. Without a structured, state-level intervention pathway comparable to FCMAT's fiscal model, students remain vulnerable when local leadership fails, and the system as a whole lacks the authority and accountability needed to ensure that every district can meet its educational obligations.



## Recommendations

The recommendations that follow respond directly to the problems outlined above. Taken together, they represent a vision for a more focused, coherent, and accountable SSoS that prioritizes and is focused on improving teaching and learning. **At the core is the idea of reciprocal accountability:<sup>8</sup> if we expect schools and districts to deliver better outcomes for students, every level of the system must also take responsibility for creating the conditions that make improvement possible for the professionals in schools and districts.**

Teachers focus on classrooms; districts ensure coherence and arrange resources for maximum effectiveness; COEs help address challenges beyond any single district's capacity; and the state sets clear priorities, aligns policies, and removes barriers. Each actor has distinct but interlocking responsibilities, and each must be both empowered and expected to carry them out in ways that strengthen teaching, learning, and student success.

Our six recommendations are establishing clear goals, aligning agencies and initiatives, refining identification and diagnostic processes, ensuring the quality of technical assistance, creating a transparent escalation pathway when improvement does not occur, and embedding continuous learning throughout the system. These recommendations are mutually reinforcing and intended to be implemented as an integrated package. Together, these shifts aim to reduce reliance on compliance and to emphasize and incentivize shared responsibility, sustained focus, and continuous improvement, so that every level of the system shares responsibility and accountability for improving teaching and learning.



The SSoS work shows how coherence and clarity at every level can empower people to improve outcomes for all learners.

—Grant Schimelpfening, Assistant Superintendent of Administrative Services, Lindsay Unified School District

<sup>8</sup> This term was first coined by Richard Elmore; see [“Bridging the Gap Between Standards and Performance”](#) (2002).

## Overview of Long- and Short-Term Recommendations from the SSoS Working Group

### 1. Set Clear, Nonnegotiable Goals for the System

- 1.1. Anchor the system around a few clear, sustained goals and show how state programs and initiatives connect to them
- 1.2. Be clear about what good district and school practice looks like and provide guidance to help get there

### 2. Create Systemwide Alignment and Coherence

- 2.1. Create clear lines of authority in SSoS leadership
- 2.2. Recalibrate roles and responsibilities among CCEE, CDE, FCMAT, and COEs
- 2.3. Streamline compliance and reporting by consolidating timelines, tools, and requirements so districts can focus on improvement

### 3. Rethink District Identification and Needs Assessment

- 3.1. Refine quantitative identification measures to focus on the highest-priority outcomes
- 3.2. Align and streamline identification across programs
- 3.3. Develop a holistic and systemic review process

### 4. Strengthen Quality and Accountability in District Support

- 4.1. Establish a clear definition of high-quality school district support
- 4.2. Redesign COE-led DA funding to provide stability and prioritize prevention and early intervention
- 4.3. Strengthen COE-led support through capacity-building, oversight, and accountability

### 5. Establish a Clear Escalation Protocol for Districts Unable or Unwilling to Improve

- 5.1. Define an escalation staircase for intervention in cases of persistent academic failure or governance dysfunction

### 6. Build a Systemwide Learning and Continuous Improvement Infrastructure

- 6.1. Create statewide learning infrastructure and feedback loops
- 6.2. Strengthen district capacity for system-level analysis

Each recommendation includes both a long-term redesign vision and short-term actions aligned with this goal. They reflect a broad consensus from the Working Group, though members expressed varying levels of support for specific proposals. To inform implementation, each section highlights the level of agreement, along with concerns and considerations that emerged in the discussion, guiding how the recommendations might be advanced in practice.

## Recommendation 1: Set Clear, Nonnegotiable Goals for the System

### Problem This Recommendation Addresses

The system is overloaded with state priorities, initiatives, and compliance requirements, leaving districts overwhelmed and unable to focus on what matters most. There is no shared definition of success, which results in fragmented support, incoherent execution, and a culture that too often tolerates chronic low performance.

### Long-Term Redesign Vision

The Working Group nearly unanimously agreed that the first step is to anchor the system around a small number of clear, sustained goals that define success for students, schools, and districts. These goals should be treated as urgent and nonnegotiable, providing stability for long-term planning, aligning policy and funding, and fostering collective responsibility for results. By clarifying what outcomes matter most and what high-functioning districts and schools look like, the state can create the coherence and focus needed to drive meaningful improvement, while still allowing flexibility for local context.

### Short-Term Recommendations

#### 1.1 Anchor the system around a few clear, sustained goals and show how state programs and initiatives connect to them

This recommendation proposes identifying a few critical academic outcomes—for example, outcomes related to literacy and math—that are so essential that underperformance signals a systemic issue. The system would also identify evidence-based practices that reliably improve these outcomes. By sustaining these goals over time and clearly showing how programs and initiatives connect to them, districts, counties, and state agencies can operate with greater stability and clarity. This approach would reduce overload and fragmentation, minimize initiative fatigue, and provide a unifying “guiding star” for the statewide support system.

This idea had nearly unanimous support from the Working Group. Members stressed that the primary reason to tighten the focus on academics is to focus districts (and support providers) on what matters most: student learning. However, participants also emphasized that the framing must be broad enough to avoid a narrow “test-score only” focus that sidelines whole-child priorities. Several noted the importance of communicating that these academic goals do not replace local priorities but rather create shared focus across the state. Members also emphasized the importance of thoughtful communication with school boards, advocacy groups, and communities to foster understanding and build shared commitment around this refined focus.

## **1.2 Be clear about what good district and school practice looks like and provide guidance to help get there**

This recommendation calls for the state to establish expectations for effective district functioning and pair them with practical guidance for improving school and district organizations. These expectations could include areas such as strong leadership pipelines, coherent instructional systems, effective operational systems (e.g., finance, technology, human resources) and responsive governance. To build coherence and improve, districts and COEs need a clearer vision of the practices most likely to affect student outcomes. With greater clarity, local leaders can align their efforts more effectively, ensuring consistency across the state and accelerating progress toward continuous improvement.

A strong majority of the Working Group members supported this recommendation. It discouraged a one-size-fits-all approach, noting the diversity of California's districts, particularly small or rural school districts with limited capacity. Others suggested that although expectations for effective practice already exist in the research literature, the real challenge is to ensure they are formally embedded in the system and supported through awareness, implementation, and capacity-building. Still, participants agreed that clarifying expectations is important, provided the expectations are inclusive, tailored to different contexts, and explicit about how setting the conditions for learning and engagement supports academic achievement.

## **Recommendation 2: Create Systemwide Alignment and Coherence**

Building on the clear goals and effective practice “look fors” established above, the next recommendation is to ensure that SSoS functions as a collaborating, accountable system—one in which agencies, timelines, and tools work together seamlessly to help districts improve their systems and accelerate student outcomes.

### **Problem This Recommendation Addresses**

Despite efforts of those in the system to improve coordination, the SSoS remains fragmented and overly complex. Roles across CDE, CCEE, FCMAT, and COEs overlap, while multiple unaligned plans and compliance requirements—LCAP, SPSA, CSI, and others—present districts with disjoint mandates and grant programs. Because no single entity is responsible for leading or coordinating the system, duplication and confusion persist. Districts spend valuable time complying with the law through submitting data, writing plans, accounting for fund allocations, and reporting, trying to build coherence from fragmented parts only to be left with outdated information and few ways to use it.

## Long-Term Redesign Vision

California's SSoS can be a powerful mechanism for shared improvement when its many parts operate in alignment. The Working Group's vision is for the SSoS, in time, to function as an integrated statewide system with clearly defined roles, streamlined processes, and a shared theory of action that connects every level, from state agencies to schools, around a small number of student-centered goals. In this redesigned system, clear leadership of the SSoS is essential, and several potential pathways exist to get there. One option discussed was the possibility of a designated lead agency that would collaborate with and coordinate the work of CDE, CCEE, FCMAT, COEs, and others to ensure coherence across initiatives, funding streams, and accountability structures. Policies and reporting tools would be designed to complement rather than compete with one another, enabling districts to plan once and meet the vast majority of requirements through a single, coherent process. The result would be a system where each agency's distinct strengths are leveraged toward common outcomes, oversight and support are mutually reinforcing, and district leaders are freed from compliance activities to focus on improving teaching and learning.

## Short-Term Recommendations

### 2.1 Create clear lines of authority in SSoS leadership

There was strong agreement within the Working Group that unclear roles and responsibilities and the lack of clear decision-making authority within the SSoS create confusion and contribute to misalignment and incoherence. The most straightforward way to address this issue is to identify one of the agencies currently playing a leadership role within the SSoS with authority to guide strategy, coordinate across agencies, and monitor how well the system delivers on its purpose of improving student outcomes. This lead authority would align priorities, convene partners to ensure coherence, and hold all actors accountable for results. The system would benefit from a single empowered lead authority within the SSoS to drive vision, coordination, and accountability rather than relying solely on collaboration and consensus to set direction and ensure execution.

Although most of the Working Group supported the idea that clear leadership of the SSoS is essential to coherence and accountability, there was no consensus about how to achieve it. Members raised questions about California's unique governance structure and whether it would be possible to name a single entity in charge or where this authority should reside. Some emphasized that naming a lead alone is insufficient; the role must be backed by statutory authority and sufficient resources to coordinate across agencies operating under different mandates.

## **2.2 Recalibrate roles and responsibilities among CCEE, CDE, FCMAT, and COEs**

Clarifying who does what and how agencies and activities relate to one another is essential for a cohesive and efficient system. The state should realign responsibilities so each agency contributes its strengths: CDE oversees compliance and state and federal programs, CCEE oversees school and district academic improvement, FCMAT ensures fiscal and operational health, and COEs provide district-level support and play critical leadership roles in the SSoS (e.g., Geo Leads and subject matter leads), with the lead authority given the responsibility to coordinate for systemwide coherence and quality. This realignment should be formalized through shared metrics, joint planning, and cross-agency agreements that promote collaboration and prevent duplication.

The vast majority of the Working Group supported this recommendation, seeing it as a prerequisite for coherence and mutual accountability. Participants stressed that success will depend on aligned incentives and reliable structures, such as formal agreements or performance frameworks, that make collaboration the expected way of working rather than an act of goodwill.

## **2.3 Streamline compliance and reporting by consolidating timelines, tools, and requirements so districts can focus on improvement**

Districts face overlapping planning and reporting processes that drain time and attention from instructional improvement. The state should align major plans (LCAP, SPSA, CSI, CIM), funding streams, and reporting (data for finances, outputs, and outcomes) on a shared timeline, integrate them, and eliminate duplicative requirements when new mandates are introduced. Over time, tools should shift from compliance checklists to instruments that help local leaders learn and improve.

The vast majority of members endorsed this idea but cautioned that many statutorily identified oversight requirements—especially those tied to federal programs—cannot be changed unilaterally. Several urged the state to begin with achievable steps, such as synchronizing deadlines, simplifying templates, and linking new requirements to the retirement of old ones. Doing so would demonstrate commitment to coherence and help redirect attention from paperwork to improving student learning.



This process gave me hope that we can shift from checking boxes to real support for learning. The recommendations are clear, practical, and focused on helping all students succeed.

—Adam Clark, Superintendent, Mt. Diablo Unified School District



## **Recommendation 3: Rethink District Identification and Needs Assessment**

### **Problem This Recommendation Addresses**

Districts are now identified for various levels of technical assistance, each with its own criteria, timelines, and processes. These levels are not well-aligned or clearly understood across the system. The COE-led DA identification system has become particularly problematic, as it has become unstable, overly broad, and misaligned with the realities of district performance. Since 2022, 68% of districts and COEs have been identified for DA at least once, a volume that undermines the credibility and effectiveness of a support structure intended to help those most in need. Frequent shifts in the Dashboard metrics sweep districts in and out of identification, forcing both COEs and districts to focus on compliance cycles instead of sustained improvement. Meeting the needs of all student groups is vital; however, the overreliance on student group performance and fluctuating thresholds dilutes focus on whole-system improvements in core academic outcomes such as literacy and math, while leaving small districts without student groups under-identified, even when overall student performance is low. Without a clear and stable method for identifying need, the system risks spreading limited resources too thinly and losing sight of its primary goal: building local capacity for lasting improvement in teaching and learning.

### **Long-Term Redesign Vision**

Over time, the state should establish a more focused and transparent identification and review system that distinguishes between different types and intensities of need while connecting directly to the core goals of the SSoS. A redesigned approach would anchor identification to a smaller set of critical academic outcomes, retain equity safeguards through student group analysis, and introduce an “all students” category specifically to ensure small or rural districts—whose student populations are often too small to generate subgroup data—are visible and accounted for. This structure would link quantitative data with qualitative diagnostic reviews, giving a fuller picture of system performance and the conditions that drive it. By calibrating identification across programs (e.g., DA, DTA, CIM, CSI), the state can create a single, coherent pathway for monitoring and support. The result would be a stable, equitable system that directs attention and resources where they are most needed, strengthens trust across agencies, and ensures the identification process serves as an early-warning and improvement tool, not a compliance burden.

## Short-Term Recommendations

### 3.1 Refine quantitative identification measures to focus on the highest-priority outcomes

The state should narrow the quantitative criteria that trigger COE-led DA eligibility to a small, stable set of critical academic indicators—such as PK–2 success measures, English Language Arts and math performance, and post-secondary success measures—while maintaining student group identification to preserve equity and other indicators as contributing factors to academic performance. An “all students” category should be added to ensure that small or rural districts with low overall performance are provided support. This focused, multiyear calibration would allow the SSoS to concentrate its attention and resources on districts most in need, reducing over-identification and strengthening the system’s focus on improving student outcomes.

Consensus among the Working Group was high for this shift, recognizing the need for focus and transparency. Members agreed that stability and fewer metrics would give both school districts and support providers the runway to achieve early success and establish positive sustained change. However, several raised concerns about balancing this refinement with California’s equity and whole-child commitments that maintain visibility into other essential aspects of student success, such as school climate, graduation, and student engagement. Implementation will also require thoughtful calibration to maintain focus and shared trust, to ensure benchmarks are developed collaboratively, and to keep efforts broad enough to honor the full range of students’ needs.

### 3.2 Align and streamline identification across programs

The state should align identification rules and timelines across programs such as DA, DTA, CIM, and CSI to eliminate duplication and confusion. A unified system would use shared thresholds to trigger the differentiated levels of support and transparent expectations for how district and school performance are monitored. This coherence would enable educators to spend less time navigating overlapping requirements and more time improving instruction and student outcomes.

Working Group members broadly supported this proposal, seeing coherence across programs as a prerequisite for system improvement. Concerns centered on the statutory and federal barriers that may limit alignment and, on the need, to coordinate timelines and data systems across agencies without overburdening

school districts. Participants recommended starting with achievable actions, such as synchronized timelines and crosswalks among plans, before pursuing larger legislative changes. There was shared agreement that these steps would send an important signal that the state is serious about coherence and learning.

### **3.3 Develop a holistic and systemic review process**

Quantitative indicators alone cannot provide a complete understanding of district and school performance. The Working Group recommends that the state pair data-driven identification with a structured, statewide review process conducted by support providers and cross-agency teams that assesses both instructional and organizational conditions. Reviews should be consistent across regions; adapted from existing tools such as FCMAT's fiscal health analysis, systematic instructional review, and CIM; and designed to identify root causes, guide intervention intensity, and establish clear criteria for no longer requiring DA. This process would give the SSoS a more balanced mechanism for diagnosing needs and targeting support on the basis of evidence rather than compliance.

There was strong consensus that adding a structured review would improve fairness and incentivize focus on systemic improvement. Members valued the potential for such reviews to elevate the quality of technical assistance and reduce superficial fixes. Nonetheless, group members raised concerns about the cost and logistics of establishing a consistent, statewide review process, as well as the time required for calibration. Participants also noted the importance of communicating that these reviews are designed for capacity-building, not punishment, to avoid eroding district trust during implementation. Current examples can be cited as evidence that the process can be rigorous and build local capacity (e.g., WASC accreditation).

## **Recommendation 4: Strengthen Quality and Accountability in School District Support**

### **Problem This Recommendation Addresses**

California's SSoS was established to ensure that every district has access to high-quality assistance to improve instruction and student outcomes. Yet, across its many components—DA, DTA, CIM, and other state and federal programs—there is no clear or shared definition of what “high-quality support” means, no consistent framework for ensuring those supports are high-quality, and limited opportunities to learn and improve across providers.

COE-led DA and DTA illustrate these challenges most clearly, as they are the most established and visible forms of technical assistance within the SSoS, reaching the vast majority of school districts in the state. COEs and the CCEE play a pivotal role in supporting school district improvement through DA and DTA. However, in the absence of clearly defined statewide standards, shared quality expectations, and aligned accountability structures, the level and coherence of support have varied across the state. Although many COEs demonstrate strong, collaborative practices that improve teaching and learning, there is a clear opportunity to build greater alignment, consistency, and shared expectations for high-quality support across the state.

In the absence of a defined structure to assess and strengthen the effectiveness of COE-led DA, some school districts may continue to struggle with improvement despite ongoing support. The current system offers limited reciprocal accountability—COEs are primarily measured by process compliance rather than outcomes—and there is no opportunity to establish clearer mechanisms for shared responsibility and timely intervention when progress stalls.

Furthermore, many COEs report feeling constrained from acting early or tailoring support, as current structures and incentives often reinforce a “wait-to-fail” model. Under today’s system, support is frequently triggered only after district outcomes have already declined,<sup>9</sup> resulting in an identification process that can unintentionally reward short-term fixes rather than sustained, preventive system-building.

### **Long-Term Redesign Vision**

Over the long term, California’s SSoS should ensure that every district receives high-quality, proactive, and reliable support, framed by reciprocal accountability and grounded in evidence-based practice responsive to local needs. Under this vision, COEs would be empowered to provide proactive services that genuinely help school districts before they are in trouble—identifying early warning signs, coordinating flexible, wraparound support, and removing systemic barriers that districts cannot resolve on their own.

To support districts with higher levels of need, the system would articulate a shared vision of effective technical assistance, establish clear expectations for quality and impact, and integrate currently separate programs into a coordinated structure so districts experience a single, coherent point of support rather than multiple, disconnected entry points. The SSoS lead authority would play an integrating role—supporting coherence, alignment, and equity across programs and providers—

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<sup>9</sup> Data used to identify school districts for support are released at least 5 months after the end of the school year in which the data are reported.

while empowering the agencies providing technical assistance with the guidance, authority, and resources needed to strengthen local capacity and outcomes. Ultimately, this redesign would create a coherent system where every level—state, county, and local—is both empowered and held accountable for results.

## **Short-Term Recommendations**

### **4.1 Establish a clear definition of high-quality school district support**

Develop and adopt statewide standards that define high-quality technical assistance, encompassing DA, DTA, CIM, and related supports. These standards should emphasize district-centered engagement; build from evidence-based practices already demonstrated in effective COEs and agencies; and focus on improving instructional coherence, leadership capacity, and student outcomes. The SSoS lead authority (discussed in Recommendation 2.1) should ensure that providers have the training and support needed to apply these standards consistently through professional learning and peer collaboration. Defining and communicating what good technical assistance looks like will create a common language for quality and a foundation for reciprocal accountability.

There was a strong consensus among the Working Group that clarity around quality standards is essential. Participants agreed that defining and calibrating what “high-quality” district support looks like would increase coherence and consistency across technical assistance providers and regions. However, members emphasized the importance of ensuring that any statewide approach honors local context and the unique challenges school districts face. Concerns also centered on the statutory and regulatory barriers that may limit alignment across programs and their respective requirements, particularly where state and federal technical assistance intersect.<sup>10</sup> Working Group members also noted that, without adequate investment in capacity, within COEs and other agencies, and time for thoughtful implementation, quality standards risk devolving to compliance activities rather than genuine support. For this effort to succeed, it should be paired with resources for professional learning, flexibility for local adaptation, and clear communication that these expectations are designed to empower and strengthen continuous improvement.

### **4.2 Redesign COE-led DA funding to provide stability and prioritize prevention and early intervention**

Because DA funding is allocated to COEs based on the number and size of identified districts, it can unintentionally create pressure to keep districts identified for DA. It may reinforce reactive rather than proactive support. For this reason, the Working

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<sup>10</sup> For example, CIM is a federal program with separate funding streams and regulations, which will make alignment challenging but not impossible.

Group agreed that it is important to reform the COE-led DA funding model to incentivize prevention and early intervention rather than a reactive response to district identification. Instead of allocating funds solely based on the number of districts identified for DA, allocate funds based on the total number of districts served, adjusted for size, need, and the intensity of support. This model would enable COEs to plan proactively, maintain staff capacity, and provide universal support before districts experience significant challenges. It would also align funding to the goals of stability and continuous improvement rather than short-term compliance cycles.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the Working Group endorsed decoupling DA funding from identification to create a more stable, preventive system. Participants highlighted important considerations regarding fiscal feasibility and emphasized the need to ensure that any funding adjustments continue to prioritize high-need areas. They also noted that transitioning from the current model would require thoughtful planning and collaboration to navigate potential political and administrative complexities, which could be mitigated through a pilot phase accompanied by careful study before broader implementation.

#### **4.3 Strengthen COE-led support through capacity-building, oversight, and accountability**

Establish a clear oversight and capacity-building framework that enables the SSoS leadership to work in close partnership with COEs to enhance their ability to deliver high-quality DA support. The primary focus would be to strengthen COE capacity through collaboration, professional learning, shared tools, and continuous improvement networks, while also promoting the coherence, quality, and consistency of support statewide.

This structure should include regular opportunities to review practices and impact, gather meaningful feedback from districts, and provide tailored support or adjustments when expectations are not yet fully met. In the spirit of reciprocal accountability, the SSoS lead authority would ensure that COEs have the capacity and resources to serve districts effectively, while also being empowered to intervene or reassign responsibilities if expectations are not met. Accountability would move beyond compliance to emphasize the quality and effectiveness of support, the progress school districts demonstrated, and the experiences and satisfaction of administrators and educators engaged in the improvement process.

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<sup>11</sup> If allocated this way, the DA funding would need to be aligned with the other pots of funding that COEs receive, specifically the Operations Grant of the LCFF, which is meant specifically to provide funding for Tier 1/preventative supports and is partially based on the number of districts in a county and number of students in the county.



There was widespread agreement that oversight, when coupled with capacity-building and support for improvement, is essential to ensure consistent quality of technical assistance services statewide. Working Group participants emphasized the importance of transparent evaluation criteria that make expectations clear to all counties, while also acknowledging that high-quality practice may manifest differently across regions due to differences in resources, capacity, and local context. Concerns centered on ensuring that oversight remains constructive rather than punitive and balances accountability with support. The group also emphasized that the SSoS lead authority will need both the authority and capacity to fulfill this role effectively. Equally important will be fostering trust through collaborative review processes and pairing reflection with coaching and support to promote shared learning and sustained improvement.

### **Recommendation 5: Establish a Clear Escalation Protocol for Districts Unable or Unwilling to Improve**

#### **Problem This Recommendation Addresses**

When districts face chronic academic underperformance, governance breakdowns, or a lack of will to improve, California's SSoS currently has no clear mechanism to respond. COEs are responsible for providing technical assistance and support through COE-led DA but are not empowered to compel change or trigger additional, higher-level intervention when improvement stalls. The state, in turn, does not yet have clearly defined thresholds and has not used its existing authority to step in when there are ongoing academic challenges, governance issues, or other significant barriers to improvement.

Unlike the fiscal oversight and intervention system (governed by AB 1200, AB 2756, and AB 913 and implemented by FCMAT), which provides a transparent pathway for intervention when financial mismanagement and associated governance/leadership dynamics threaten solvency, no equivalent structure has been operationalized to respond when academic outcomes reveal a district's inability to fulfill its educational responsibility.<sup>12</sup> As a result, students remain at risk in chronically struggling systems, and providers face uncertainty about when and how to act. This absence of escalation protocols erodes trust, allows inequities to persist, and leaves no entity empowered to ensure that every district can fulfill its core educational responsibilities.

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<sup>12</sup> Although current law (i.e., EC 52072.1 and EC 52072.6) provides the authority for the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (with SBE approval) to intervene in underperforming districts, these pathways have not been operationalized within the SSoS's structures.

## Long-Term Redesign Vision

Over time, California should establish a transparent, statewide “escalation staircase” that defines roles, thresholds, and authorities for intervention when districts are unable or unwilling to improve. Inspired by the state’s fiscal oversight system, this framework would ensure clear lines of accountability and an orderly progression of support—from local assistance to regional oversight to state intervention—when student outcomes, governance, or organizational health decline.

This redesigned system would foster reciprocal accountability across all levels, ensuring that each plays a distinct yet integrated role in advancing student learning. Districts are responsible for faithfully engaging in continuous improvement; COEs are responsible for providing high-quality, evidence-based support; and the state is responsible for alignment, coherence, and assistance when additional capacity is needed. The overarching goal is to promote sustained improvement, equity, and every student’s right to a high-quality education through shared responsibility and partnership.

## Short-Term Recommendations

### 5.1 Define an escalation staircase for intervention in cases of persistent academic failure or governance dysfunction.

Establish a staged framework, inspired by AB 1200, that delineates clear triggers, responsibilities, and authorities for each level of the SSoS:

- **Stage 1:** COEs serve as trusted partners in continuous improvement, offering targeted support and guidance aligned with clear, shared quality expectations.
- **Stage 2:** Geo Leads provide refined support when COEs or districts need enhanced capacity, coordinating regional expertise through clearly defined guidance.
- **Stage 3:** The SSoS lead authority (discussed in Recommendation 2) serves as the state’s intervention arm, empowered to take corrective action, including conditional plan approvals, mandated improvement plans, directed use of funds, or temporary adjustments to local governance authority.

To operationalize this system, the state should codify the triggers, review processes, and decision-making criteria for escalation and exit, ensuring consistency and fairness across regions.

Working Group members supported establishing an escalation protocol, recognizing it as a critical missing piece in California's current system. Participants agreed that without defined authority and clear thresholds, the SSoS cannot ensure accountability for student outcomes or equity of support.

However, concerns centered on the feasibility and legitimacy of implementation. Members questioned which agency should hold this authority, whether statutory changes would be required, and whether any existing entity (for example, CDE or CCEE) has the capacity and credibility to lead academic or governance intervention. Participants noted the importance of ensuring that any intervention approach is viewed as supportive and aligned with the principles of local control. They also noted that although this authority already exists in statute, it has been used only rarely. This raised thoughtful questions about what structural, political, or capacity changes might be needed within the system to enable it to be exercised effectively. They emphasized the need for strong checks and balances, clear criteria for determining when additional support is no longer needed, and thoughtful communication that frames escalation as a student-centered support mechanism designed to strengthen local capacity rather than diminish it.

Despite these concerns, there was strong consensus that a transparent and consistent framework grounded in clear expectations, shared accountability, and procedural fairness is essential to increasing the public's trust, promoting continuous improvement, and ensuring the system can provide timely and effective support when persistent challenges arise.

## **Recommendation 6: Build a Systemwide Learning and Continuous Improvement Infrastructure**

### **Problem This Recommendation Addresses**

California's SSoS needs a more coherent, data-informed learning structure that fosters reflection, continuous improvement, and shared accountability across all levels of the system. Districts and schools are held responsible for student outcomes, but state and county agencies providing technical assistance are not held accountable in the same way for ensuring that policies and support structures enable local success. As a result, compliance and reporting often overshadow learning and improvement. Data are primarily used for accountability and compliance purposes, so there is an opportunity to expand their use to better understand barriers, identify bright spots, and scale effective practices. Creating and strengthening feedback loops that connect local experience to state policy

would enable the system to learn from implementation and use evidence to refine programs and funding. These connections would help policies continuously evolve to reflect the realities and strengths of classrooms and districts.

## **Long-Term Redesign Vision**

The redesigned SSoS should function as a living, learning system—one in which data and evidence flow seamlessly among districts, COEs, and state agencies to inform decision-making and strengthen teaching and learning. Policymakers should have structured, ongoing access to insights from implementation and performance data, and local leaders should be equipped to study and adapt their own practices. A well-designed learning infrastructure would connect student outcomes with systemic factors such as leadership, professional learning, and resource allocation. Over time, this approach would build reciprocal accountability: state and county leaders would be responsible for creating the conditions that enable improvement, and local systems would continuously learn from implementation to drive better results for students. Ultimately, this redesign envisions a system that learns at every level, building the structures needed to fully realize the ideals of continuous improvement.

## **Short-Term Recommendations**

### **6.1 Create statewide learning infrastructure and feedback loops**

Develop formal structures that enable two-way learning between local implementation and state decision-making. The SSoS lead authority, in collaboration with all other relevant state entities (e.g., CDE, SBE, CCEE, the legislature, the governor's office), should establish recurring mechanisms to collect, synthesize, and present findings from district reviews, DA/DTA outcomes, regional networks, and implementation studies. These feedback loops would inform state leaders about the barriers districts face, identify emerging patterns in student performance, and highlight effective strategies for improvement. Policymakers could then use this evidence to refine policies, programs, regulations, and resource allocation. Additionally, the SSoS lead authority should use these systematic reviews to help ensure that state-level policies and structures reinforce, support, and incentivize the scaling of effective practices, creating the conditions for local innovations to grow into consistent, statewide improvements. Regular reviews of major policies, with clear expectations for impact and transparent measures of progress, would help illuminate whether each level of government is fulfilling its responsibilities and identify what adjustments are needed to better support continuous improvement.

Working Group members strongly supported the creation of formal feedback loops as essential for reciprocal accountability and continuous improvement. They agreed that such mechanisms would make state policy more responsive and grounded in the lived experiences of educators and students. Members urged that feedback systems be efficient and non-duplicative, leverage existing venues (e.g., legislative briefings, CCEE convenings), and handle sensitive data responsibly. They highlighted the importance of rigor and credibility in identifying “effective practices,” recommending partnerships with universities and research organizations to ensure scaling is based on strong evidence rather than untested strategies.

## **6.2 Strengthen district capacity for system-level analysis**

Invest in district and county capacity to conduct rigorous system-level analysis that links implementation to outcomes. Districts should receive the support they need to collect and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data to understand what strategies are working, why results differ across schools, and how to adjust course on the basis of evidence. The state can accelerate this work by providing training, common analytic tools, and access to peer-learning networks, and by leveraging new state investments in the Cradle-to-Career longitudinal data system. Building this capacity will allow local leaders to use data as a tool for inquiry and improvement rather than mere compliance.

There was a clear consensus that a stronger analytic capacity at the local level is essential for sustainable improvement. Participants emphasized that this effort should empower, not burden, districts—particularly smaller and rural systems with limited staff. Concerns included districts’ uneven readiness to engage in complex data analysis and the risk of overreliance on metrics without context. To address these issues, the group recommended aligning new supports with existing infrastructure, such as the Cradle-to-Career Data System and regional research partnerships, to ensure consistency and shared learning.



There are many great initiatives in CA that are all good ideas in isolation but, when put altogether, are difficult to comply with and add chaos to already over-stimulated systems. If arrows are aligned towards simple, yet powerful outcomes, there is great potential for student success!

—Annie Sharp, Executive Director, System Innovation & Improvement, Fresno County Office of Education

## Next Steps

The 2025 Core Working Group's findings represent an important moment of possibility for California's education system. Together, members affirmed that lasting improvement grows from coherence, clarity, and collaboration at every level. Across all recommendations, one message stands out. The Statewide System of Support must embody the same conditions it seeks to nurture in schools and districts: clarity of purpose, aligned and coordinated action, and the thoughtful integration of resources that ultimately strengthen opportunities and outcomes for all students.

Implementing this vision will require continued partnership across CDE, SBE, CCEE, COEs, and districts. With shared recommendations now in place, the next phase will focus on implementation, drawing on research, lessons from other states, and the expertise of California's leaders to chart a practical path forward. This includes clarifying decision-making roles; identifying what may require policy or legislative action; and ensuring that coherence, learning, and reciprocal accountability remain central to every step of the process. Most importantly, bringing these recommendations to life will require bold action and unwavering collaboration among teachers, students, families, and the many education partners who shape California's school communities every day. Their collective commitment is essential to creating the meaningful, lasting improvements our students deserve.





## Appendix 1: SSoS Core Working Group Members

Name	Role	Organization
Heather Armelino	Superintendent	Enterprise Elementary School District
Shannan Brown	Executive Director	San Juan Teachers Association
John Campbell	Superintendent	Kings Canyon Unified School District
Adam Clark	Superintendent	Mt. Diablo Unified School District
Mindy Fattig*	Senior Advisor	California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
Mike Fine	Chief Executive Officer	Fiscal Crisis & Management Assistance Team (FMCAT)
Lisa Gilbert	Deputy Superintendent	Kern County Office of Education
Dave Gordon	Superintendent	Sacramento County Office of Education
Stephanie Gregson*	Deputy Executive Director	California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
Mike Hanson	DTA Support	California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
Katie Hardeman	Chief Deputy Executive Director	State Board of Education (SBE)
Chris Hartley*	Deputy Executive Director	California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
Brent Malicote	Associate Supt, Integrated Sys Support	Sacramento County Office of Education
Ed Manansala	Superintendent	El Dorado County Office of Education
Michelle Magyar*	Senior Advisor, Policy Engagement and Impact Initiatives	California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
William McGee	Director, Student Achieve & Support Div	California Department of Education (CDE)
Cesar Morales	Superintendent	Ventura County Office of Education

Continued next page

Statewide System of Support (SSoS) Core Working Group:  
Recommendations

Name	Role	Organization
Matt Navo*	Executive Director	California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
Christine Olmstead*	DTA Support	California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
Ingrid Roberson	Chief Deputy Superintendent	California Department of Education (CDE)
Grant Schimelpfening	Assistant Superintendent of Administrative Services	Lindsay Unified School District
Annie Sharp	Executive Director, System Innovation & Improvement	Fresno County Office of Education
Sujie Shin*	Deputy Executive Director	California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
Jennie Snyder*	Consultant	
Lindsay Tornatore	Director, Systems Improvement & Student Success	CA County Superintendents Association
Michelle Valdivia	Assistant Policy Director	State Board of Education (SBE)

\*Those names denoted with an asterisk signify a CCEE representative who played a facilitation and support role, in addition to participating as a member in the Working Group.

## Appendix 2: Prior Reports on the SSoS

### State Agency Reports and Foundational Frameworks

[California Collaborative for Educational Excellence. \(2024\). \*California Statewide System of Support: Core Working Group Report\*. CCEE](#)

- This statewide report synthesizes findings from a multi-agency working group assessing the coherence, accessibility, and effectiveness of the Statewide System of Support. The report identifies structural gaps, identifies variation in implementation, and provides actionable recommendations to strengthen governance and system alignment.

[California Collaborative for Educational Excellence. \(2021–2025\). \*Annual Reports and Quarterly Initiative Reports\*. CCEE](#)

These reports document year-to-year progress on SSOS activities, including technical assistance delivery, lead agency performance, and statewide initiatives. The reports contain key trend data and serve as a primary evidence base for tracking system progress.

[California Collaborative for Educational Excellence. \(n.d.\). \*About the Statewide System of Support\*. CCEE](#)

- This resource provides an overview of SSOS goals, partners, and the statewide structure of technical assistance. It offers a concise summary of CCEE's statutory role and expectations.

[California Department of Education. \(n.d.\). \*California's Statewide System of Support\*. CDE](#)

- This page outlines the structure, purpose, and tiers of SSOS, defining responsibilities for CDE, county offices, and lead agencies. It reflects the state's official articulation of SSOS design and intent.

[California Department of Education. \(2020\). \*California Consolidated State Plan Under Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)\*. CDE](#)

- The ESSA plan explains California's federal accountability system and describes obligations for statewide technical assistance and school improvement, placing the SSOS within the context of federal requirements and funding structures.

[California Department of Education. \(2021\). \*One System: Transforming Education in California – Special Education Progress Report\*. CDE](#)

- This report provides updates on statewide efforts to align general and special education systems. Although focused on special education, it intersects with SSOS goals related to system coherence and statewide support structures.

## County Office and Technical Assistance Resources

[California County Superintendents Educational Services Association. \(2024–2025\). \*Differentiated Assistance Facilitation Guide, Version 4.0\*. CCSESA](#)

- This guide provides protocols and facilitation tools for county offices implementing Differentiated Assistance. It offers insight into how DA is delivered across counties.

[System of Support Directory. \(n.d.\). \*California Statewide System of Support – Hub and Directory\*. CCEE](#)

- This directory lists statewide and regional lead agencies, initiative leads, and contact information.

[CalTAN \(California Technical Assistance Network\). \(n.d.\). \*Technical Assistance Resources for Special Education\*. CDE and partner agencies](#)

- These resources describe statewide guidance for special education technical assistance, including lead functions and improvement strategies, and illustrate how special education aligns with SSOS structures.

[San Mateo County Office of Education. \(n.d.\). \*Differentiated Assistance Overview\*. SMCOE](#)

- This county-level resource illustrates how a medium-sized COE implements Differentiated Assistance. It provides an example of local operationalization and communication practices.

## Independent Evaluations and External Research

[Krausen, K., Tanner, S., et al. \(2022–2024\). \*Evaluation of California's Differentiated Assistance\*. WestEd](#)

- This evaluation examines the effectiveness of Differentiated Assistance and identifies systemic challenges, including capacity constraints and inconsistent implementation. It offers evidence-based recommendations to refine statewide support mechanisms.

[RAND Corporation. \(Various years\). \*Research Notes and State Accountability Analyses Referencing California's System of Support\*. RAND](#)

- RAND provides broader context for California's accountability system by comparing it with national research on school improvement and support. Although not exclusive to SSOS, these reports help situate California's system within wider research trends.

## Supporting Frameworks: MTSS and Statewide Improvement

[Orange County Department of Education. \(Various years\). \*California MTSS Implementation Frameworks and Resources\*. OCDE](#)

- These resources describe California's MTSS work, which aligns with SSOS through a shared emphasis on tiered support and continuous improvement.

[All4Ed. \(Various years\). \*California ESSA Implementation and School Improvement Briefs\*. Alliance for Excellent Education](#)

- These briefs summarize California's ESSA implementation and identify policy implications for school improvement and accountability, providing national comparisons and succinct explanations for policymakers.

[California School Boards Association. \(Various years\). \*Policy Briefs on ESSA, Accountability, and Support Systems\*. CSBA](#)

- These briefs provide local governance perspectives related to accountability and support systems.

