

Building a More Coherent, Responsive, and Effective State Education System

Executive Summary

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California is entering a period of extraordinary opportunity to strengthen its public education system. Recent changes to education governance, investments in the Statewide System of Support (SSoS), revisions to district performance classification criteria, and broader policy reforms create the opportunity to re-engineer how the state's education system works as a whole. Together, these changes invite a fundamental question: **How should California organize its education system so that every district has the clarity, support, and capacity needed to improve outcomes for students?**

Over the past two years, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) convened a broad cross-section of educators, county and state leaders, and system partners to answer that question. Building on the vision established by the 2025 SSoS Core Working Group, the Design Team, in [Building a More Coherent, Responsive, and Effective State Education System](#), developed a set of strategies and implementation considerations for redesigning California's statewide approach to improvement. Intended to generate ideas and spur conversation rather than achieve consensus on every recommendation, the Design Team's work is an invitation to the field to consider how to actualize the opportunities now provided through recently adopted policy. It is grounded in two complementary design principles:



COHERENCE

California's education system functions best when statewide goals, policy, accountability, support, governance, and continuous learning operate as an integrated improvement system rather than as disconnected programs and initiatives.



RECIPROCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Improving student outcomes is a shared responsibility across every level of the system. Districts are responsible for supporting educators to improve outcomes, while county offices of education, state agencies, and policymakers are responsible for providing the capacity, coordination, resources, and conditions that make improvement possible.

Together, these principles redefine the state's role—not simply as an entity that holds districts accountable, but as a partner that accesses its unique place in the ecosystem and genuinely shares responsibility for creating the conditions that make improvement possible.

These principles are translated into action through a memo to the field written in two parts. **Part I: Strengthening State-Level Capacity to Lead and Support System Improvement**, focuses on strengthening the state's capacity to lead a coherent improvement system through clearer statewide goals, better alignment across programs and agencies, and stronger systems for learning and continuous improvement. **Part II: Redesigning California's Statewide System of Support**, focuses on building the infrastructure for school and district improvement by providing proactive universal support, more meaningful diagnosis and differentiated assistance, and integrated pathways for increasingly intensive support and intervention. Together, these two parts present a blueprint for aligning state leadership, system infrastructure, and district improvement into one coherent statewide improvement system.

The need for this redesign is clear. California's education system under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) is built on principles that a broad-based set of education interest holders continue to agree upon: local flexibility, support over sanctions, continuous improvement, and productive relationships between state, county, and local partners. The challenge is not the vision, but ensuring that the education system is organized to deliver on it. Today, schools and districts often navigate multiple initiatives, overlapping planning processes, fragmented support structures, and disconnected accountability expectations that consume time and dilute focus. State agencies and support providers frequently operate through separate authorities, timelines, and organizational structures that make coordination difficult and obscure shared responsibility for improvement. Although each program serves an important purpose, together they can create a system that is difficult to navigate and insufficiently organized around a common vision for improving teaching, learning, and student outcomes. Meeting these challenges requires more than improving individual programs. It requires redesigning how the education system functions as a whole.

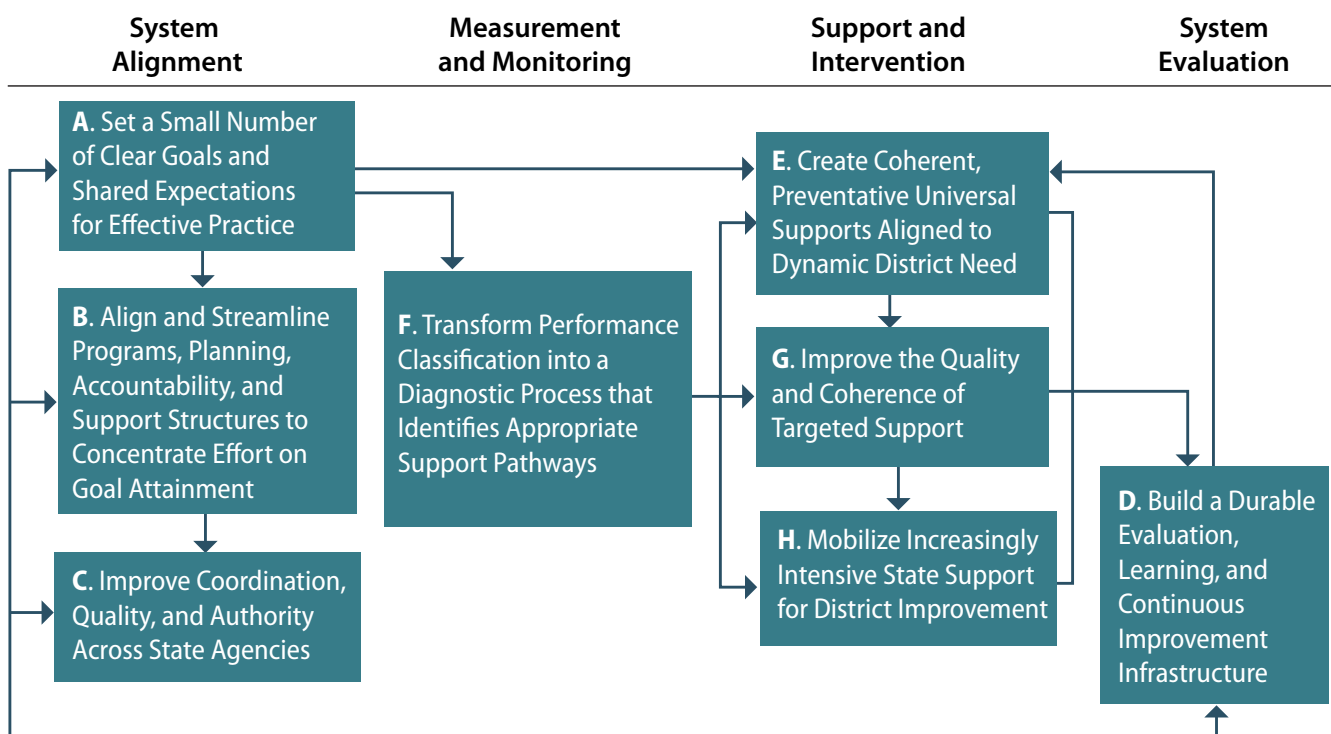
The [memo](#) proposes a new architecture for statewide improvement—one in which every component of California's education system works together in a continuous improvement cycle. Realizing this vision requires redesigning how the education system operates. To accomplish that redesign, the memo identifies eight interlocking strategies that work together to build a more coherent, responsive, and continuously improving education system. These strategies are supported by detailed implementation guidance, providing practical actions and design considerations to support implementation. **Figure 1** below illustrates how the strategies fit together as an integrated statewide approach to system improvement.

As shown in **Figure 1**, the redesigned system begins with a small number of shared statewide goals and clear expectations for effective professional practice that provide common direction for the entire education system (Strategy A). Those goals become the organizing framework for policy, funding, planning, accountability, and support, allowing state agencies, county offices of education (COEs),

and districts to align their work around shared outcomes while preserving local flexibility in how those outcomes are achieved. Programs, initiatives, planning requirements, accountability processes, and support structures are organized around these priorities, reducing duplication and creating a more coherent experience for districts that allows greater focus on improvement (Strategy B).

Achieving this vision also requires stronger state-level capacity to lead a more coherent system. State agencies, COEs, and other entities playing statewide roles would operate with clearer and more complementary roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority, supported by aligned governance, funding, staffing, organizational structures, and implementation routines. Rather than functioning through separate organizational structures and disconnected initiatives, state entities coordinate their work around shared goals and common improvement processes, enabling districts to experience the state as a coherent partner rather than as a collection of independent agencies and programs (Strategy C).

Figure 1. Eight Interlocking Strategies for Redesigning California’s Education System



Note: The eight strategies shown in Figure 1 correspond to the organization of the two parts: Strategies A–D are presented in **Part I**, while Strategies E–H are presented in **Part II**.

Within this coherent state infrastructure, the SSoS becomes the primary mechanism through which districts receive coordinated assistance to improve. Every district has access to proactive, high-quality universal supports designed to strengthen local capacity and respond to emerging needs before they become crises (Strategy E). The state’s shared goals and expectations for practice provide the foundation for identifying where districts need additional support and determining the most appropriate pathway for assistance. When performance signals indicate that additional attention may be needed, it prompts a process of inquiry rather than automatic intervention. Following identification, the coordinated intake

process would begin with a systemic review that combines quantitative evidence, professional expertise, and local context to identify the instructional, organizational, governance, operational, and fiscal conditions affecting district performance to determine the most appropriate support and/or escalation pathway. That understanding informs coordinated improvement planning and tailored assistance, ensuring that support addresses underlying causes rather than symptoms (Strategy F).

Based on the findings of the systemic review, districts are connected with the support provider best positioned to address their needs, and a single improvement plan becomes the coordinating framework for state-supported improvement efforts within the district (Strategy G). COEs serve as districts' primary improvement partners in most cases, coordinating expertise and universal resources across the broader SSoS while helping districts implement focused improvement efforts aligned with local priorities. However, if districts need more support than can be provided locally, the system mobilizes additional regional and statewide expertise, coordination, resources, and, when necessary, state-level intervention authorities through a single integrated escalation pathway (Strategy H). Support becomes progressively more intensive as district needs become more acute. The purpose of escalation is not punishment or compliance enforcement, but to ensure that districts receive the support, expertise, authority, and resources needed to address barriers that cannot be resolved through local efforts alone. Escalation occurs not because local control has failed, but because the system shares responsibility for ensuring that every student has access to a high-quality education.

The redesigned system also recognizes that California's public education system itself must build the infrastructure to continuously improve (Strategy D). Information gathered through implementation, support delivery, research, and evaluation is systematically synthesized to identify recurring challenges, emerging needs, and successful practices. Those insights inform adjustments to statewide policy, funding, guidance, organizational structures, and support strategies, ensuring that the education system becomes increasingly effective over time. In this way, continuous improvement is not only expected of schools and districts—it becomes a defining characteristic of the state education system itself.

Ultimately, this memo presents a vision for California's education system that is coherent in its design, responsive in its support, and committed to continuous improvement. Rather than operating as a collection of disconnected policies, programs, and support structures, the redesigned system genuinely aligns statewide leadership, local improvement, accountability, support, and learning around a shared purpose: improving outcomes for every student. **By replacing fragmentation with coherence, isolated responsibility with reciprocal accountability, and episodic and one-time funded programs with continuous improvement of ongoing programs, California can build an education system that is better equipped to support schools and districts—and ultimately better able to deliver on its promise of providing a high-quality, equitable education for every student.**

To read the full memo, visit

<https://ccee-ca.org/impact-initiatives-statewide-system-of-support-design-team/>