



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

Part II. Redesigning California's Statewide System of Support

Prepared for

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This two-part series presents a vision for building a more coherent, responsive, and accountable education system in California. **Part I** focuses on strengthening state-level capacity by establishing clearer goals, aligning policies and programs, improving coordination across agencies, and building stronger systems for learning and continuous improvement. **Part II** focuses on redesigning California's Statewide System of Support so districts receive the right support at the right time through stronger universal support, more coherent COE-led Differentiated Assistance, improved diagnostic processes such as systemic reviews, and structured escalation when local challenges exceed local capacity.

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Introduction

California is entering a period of extraordinary transition in public education. Recognizing the need to strengthen California's Statewide System of Support (SSoS), state leaders have recently advanced a number of policy changes intended to improve how the state supports schools and districts. First, via the budget process, the state approved a new approach to county office funding that places greater emphasis on proactive, universal support designed to help districts address challenges before performance declines.¹ Second, the State Board of Education (SBE) revised the criteria used to identify districts for Differentiated Assistance, narrowing the pool of identified districts so that County Offices of Education (COEs) can focus more intensive support on those facing the most significant academic challenges.² At the same time, California is approaching a broader period of governance and policy transition. Over the next year, the state will elect a Governor and State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI), and newly elected officials will begin implementing significant governance reforms intended to reshape how California's education system is led.³ Taken together, these developments create a rare opportunity to reconsider not only what California expects from its public education system, but also how the state education system itself is organized to support improvement in schools and districts

Ultimately, the success of any redesign should be judged not by changes in state structures alone, but by whether teachers, principals, and central office administrators in school districts experience the system as clearer, more coherent, less duplicative, and more responsive—allowing them to spend less time navigating fragmented requirements and more time improving teaching and learning that lead to better student outcomes.⁴

Over the past 2 years, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) has convened a broad cross section of public education leaders, practitioners, researchers, and system partners to help envision what a more coherent, responsive state system could look like—and to identify the changes that could help make that vision a reality. In 2025, a Core Working Group developed a set of recommendations for redesigning

¹ [AB 126](#) enacted changes to fund COEs to provide “universal and targeted assistance” to districts including, but not limited to, data management, professional development to improve student performance and closing achievement gaps, implementation of LCAP goals and actions, and improving the performance of local indicators.

² The California State Board of Education (SBE), at its July 9–10, 2026 meeting, adopted new performance criteria for the classification of districts in the Statewide System of Support (SSoS) which will go into effect in the 2026–2027 school year.

³ [AB 181](#), signed into law on July 10, 2027, enacted an education governance restructuring, with a governor-appointed and Senate-approved Education Commissioner now running the California Department of Education (CDE) and the SSPI now playing a system accountability and evaluation role.

⁴ Recent research released by the Stanford Center for Acceleration of Learning and Equity (SCALE) in *Getting Down to Facts III* underscores this point: [Toward a Stronger Next Generation of California Education](#) (2026).

California's SSoS, culminating in a [public report](#) released in December 2025. The Working Group set a path for a redesigned system in which each part of the system's approach to improvement reinforces the next step: stated statewide goals and aligned expectations; clearer signals about district performance and needs; proactive, high-quality support; escalating assistance when barriers persist; and responsive policy feedback loops that enable the state itself to continuously improve.⁵

Beginning in the late fall of 2025, CCEE convened a Design Team to translate that aspirational vision into a set of actionable strategies and considerations for how to achieve it. Drawing on extensive field experience, existing effective policy, research on continuous improvement, and examples from other states and public sectors, participants spent hundreds of collective hours refining ideas about the organizational design of California's governance, accountability, and support systems.

The result is a set of strategies and implementation considerations for building a more coherent and responsive state system—one in which statewide goals, accountability systems, support structures, and programmatic infrastructure work together to make improvement easier for schools, districts, and COEs. Built around reciprocal accountability,⁶ shared problem-solving, and continuous learning across all levels of the system, the proposed redesign aims to reduce fragmentation, clarify expectations, strengthen support, and enable policymakers and responsible state agencies to learn and improve over time. Developed alongside major state policy and budget deliberations throughout the 2025–2026 school year, the framework both reflects and extends changes already underway, identifying areas where additional action can be taken to create an even more coherent and effective system. This publication is one of a two-part series outlining a potential path forward for California at this pivotal moment:

- This memo, ***Part II. Redesigning California's Statewide System of Support***, focuses on improving California's SSoS to help schools and districts address challenges earlier, provide meaningful universal and targeted assistance, and create clearer pathways for escalating support and intervention when local challenges exceed local capacity. This memo may be particularly valuable for school and district leaders, COE staff, and others who work closely with districts to support continuous improvement across California's public education system.
- The other memo and companion publication, [Part I. Strengthening State-](#)

⁵ It is important to note that this effort has centered specifically on traditional schools and school districts; charter school oversight, support, and accountability are outside the scope of the group's work.

⁶ Reciprocal accountability requires that for every increase in performance expectations by a supervising organization, there must be a corresponding increase in the capacity and support provided by that supervising organization to meet those expectations. This term was first coined by Richard Elmore; see Elmore, R., (2002), [Bridging the Gap Between Standards and Performance](#), Albert Shanker Institute.

Level Capacity to Lead and Support System Improvement, focuses on establishing clearer statewide goals and shared expectations for practice; aligning and streamlining programs and support structures; strengthening coordination and authority across agencies; and building stronger systems for evaluation, learning, and continuous improvement to sustain long-term system effectiveness. This memo may be particularly valuable for policymakers, state agency staff, COE leaders, and other education partners who play a role in shaping statewide policy and supporting continuous improvement across California's public education system.

The implementation considerations presented in this memo were developed based on the recommendations of the Working Group and the discussion, feedback, and expertise shared by Design Team participants throughout the design process. Representatives from the California State Board of Education (SBE) and the California Department of Education (CDE) attended Design Team meetings as participant observers, providing context and sharing information relevant to the discussions. Their participation was intended to support dialogue and should not be interpreted as endorsements of the recommendations or as reflecting the official positions of their respective agencies. This memo reflects the facilitators' synthesis⁷ of the ideas explored through these discussions and is intended to spur conversation about future policy and implementation efforts. Although the facilitators sought to develop proposals that were broadly supported by participants, the Design Team was convened to explore, test, and refine ideas rather than to reach consensus on every recommendation or implementation consideration. As a result, this memo synthesizes the dialogue, feedback, and expertise shared throughout the process and should not be interpreted as representing unanimous agreement on every proposal.

The Design Team's work took place alongside significant governance and policy changes that were unfolding during 2026, including the enactment of California's education governance reforms. As a result, the group was not positioned to determine how these recommendations should ultimately be implemented within the state's evolving governance structure. Instead, this report offers a vision and a set of implementation considerations. Translating that vision into policy and/or practice should be informed by additional analysis and widespread engagement with educators, school and district leaders, COEs, state agencies, policymakers, students, families, and communities.

These memos aim to contribute to a broader conversation about what it would take to build a state education system that is easier for local educators to navigate, better

⁷ OpenAI's ChatGPT was used as a drafting and editorial aid to support writing, organization, and editing. These memos were developed by the authors, refined through feedback from the SSoS Design Team, and independently finalized and approved by the authors, who retain full responsibility for the final content.

able to respond to local needs, and capable of continuously learning, adapting, and improving at the scale that California's students deserve.

The Vision Emerging from the SSoS Core Working Group and Design Team

In the Working Group [public report](#) released in December 2025, the group articulated a vision for a more coherent and responsive education system—one in which goals, accountability, support, and policy work together to improve outcomes for students and strengthen the capacity of schools and districts over time.

At the center of this vision is the belief that California's education system can be strengthened through greater coherence, alignment, and shared responsibility for student success. This vision builds on the principles that have guided California's education system under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF): local control, equity, support over sanctions, continuous improvement, and meaningful community engagement. The challenge is not the vision, but ensuring that the education system is organized to deliver on it. Doing so requires organizing the system around a common set of goals, clearer roles and responsibilities, stronger collaboration across agencies and support providers, and a commitment to continuous learning and improvement at every level.

“ The best possible education for our students can only come from thoughtful and intentional systems that align resources, efforts, and structures to meaningful and targeted outcomes.
—Jeff Harris, Del Norte County Office of Education/Unified School District

Table 1 describes the Working Group's vision across several key system elements, highlighting opportunities to move from the current experience toward a more coherent, supportive, and improvement-oriented system. It is presented from the district perspective because districts are where state policy is integrated into the day-to-day decisions, supports, and conditions that ultimately shape teaching and learning.

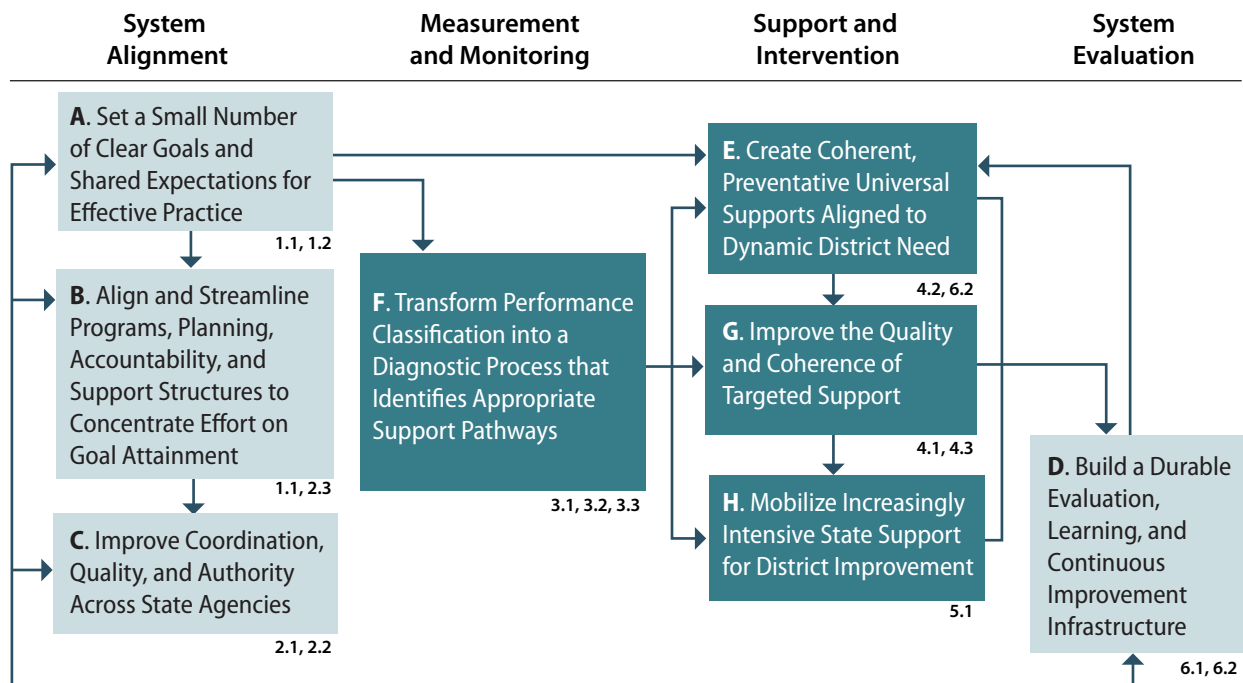
The vision articulated by the Working Group is not simply about changing individual programs or accountability mechanisms. It is about redesigning how the functions of the system work together to ensure better responsiveness. **Figure 1** below illustrates how the redesigned system is intended to function as an integrated, continuous improvement cycle rather than a series of discrete reforms. Statewide goals and shared expectations shape planning, support, and accountability; performance information is used to understand needs and guide assistance; supports are matched to those needs; and ongoing evaluation informs adjustments to policy, practice, and resource allocation. Those changes in turn strengthen the system's goals, supports,

and expectations, creating a continuous cycle of learning and improvement. The dark blue boxes identify the strategies addressed in this memo; the remaining strategies are explored in [Part II. Redesigning California's Statewide System of Support](#).

Table 1. The Working Group's Vision for How California's Education System Can Better Support School Districts

System Element	Current Reality	Redesigned System
Goal clarity, focus, and alignment	- Multiple state priorities and initiatives competing for districts' attention - No shared definition of success for students, professionals, schools, or districts - Overlapping plans, timelines, and reporting limit the time and energy for meaningful improvement	- A small number of clear, sustained goals for increased student learning - A shared definition of what effective school and district practice looks like - Aligned goals, plans, reporting, and supports across programs and over time
Clear signals about performance	- Performance is measured across many indicators that shift year to year - Performance signals have not been sufficiently focused to clearly identify where support is needed most - Classification has become a procedural requirement more than a tool for learning and improvement	- Performance signals provide consistent expectations and remain stable over a longer period of time - Measures signal overall student performance and growth while continuing to monitor student group performance - Quantitative signals paired with systemic reviews to diagnose needs and guide support
Proactive, high-quality support	- Targeted support most often begins after performance has already declined - Universal supports are available through a large variety of channels and initiatives, but districts experience differences in coordination, timing, and responsiveness across those supports	- Coherent, high-quality universal supports aligned to priorities and adapted to local context - Proactive support triggered by early-warning signals and district-identified needs
Escalated support to remove barriers	- Assistance may feel top-down or disconnected from the specific expertise districts need to address core challenges, such as governance, local political context, workforce, or implementation capacity - Interventions may operate in parallel to other district, county, and/or state initiatives with limited coordination or accountability	- A clear escalation pathway of support that mobilizes county, regional, and state capacity and resources as local challenges persist - Clear roles and accountability across county, regional, and state actors, with the ability for districts to elevate or change support when it falls short
Responsive and accountable policy	- State policies and requirements often create local implementation challenges - Local experience may not consistently inform policy refinement - Accountability largely flows downward to districts	- Two-way feedback loops between districts and state leaders - Systematic synthesis of field feedback and real-time learning about which policies help or hinder improvement - The state is held accountable for acting on that learning—adjusting rules, funding, and priorities—and reporting back publicly on what changed

Figure 1. How the Redesigned Public Education System Would Continuously Improve: Mutually Reinforcing Strategies



Note: This figure illustrates how the eight strategies proposed across both memos work together as an integrated framework for strengthening California's SSoS. The lettering (Strategies A–H) corresponds to the relevant sections of the two memos, with Strategies A–D presented in [Part I. Strengthening State-Level Capacity to Lead and Support System Improvement](#) and Strategies E–H, shown in dark blue boxes, presented in this memo. The numbers shown below each box correspond to the original [Working Group recommendations](#).

The Design Team, charged with translating the Working Group's recommendations into concrete implementation considerations, included local, county, regional, and state education leaders, practitioners, and system partners⁸ who worked collaboratively throughout 2026 to provide feedback on recommendations related to governance, accountability, support structures, and organizational design. Participants' work was guided by a set of design principles that served as anchors for the deliberation, review, and formation of the strategic actions and tasks identified in both memos. **Table 2** provides further details.

“ The Design Team engaged in a thoughtful, reflective process grounded in the tenants of system improvement with the goal of developing actionable strategies for improving our state education system.
 —Jennifer Hicks, Placer County Office of Education

⁸ For a list of the educators, administrators, and system leaders who participated in the SSoS Design Team, see [Appendix A](#).

Table 2. Design Principles Undergirding the Design Team's Work

The Design Team was guided by the following design principles in the construction of the strategic actions and tasks:

- 1. Clarity of Purpose:** Every element of the system should have an articulated purpose and connected theory of action. When proposing new policies, structures, supports, or requirements, the expected impact on teaching, learning, and system improvement should be explicit so that implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement can be aligned to that intent.
- 2. Coherence:** Align the system, ensuring that organization roles, responsibilities, expectations, and incentives that directly contribute to systemwide goals.
- 3. Reciprocal Accountability:** Every level of the system—state, county, and local agencies—shares responsibility for student outcomes and for providing the support for achieving statewide goals. Accountability is paired with a corresponding commitment to build capacity, remove barriers, solve problems collaboratively, and continuously improve.
- 4. Design for Purpose, Not Compliance:** Every element of the system should reinforce the core intent of the work: supporting teaching, learning, and continuous improvement. Structures, tools, and policies must encourage desired behaviors and prevent additional bureaucratic compliance.
- 5. Design with Optimism and Possibility:** We begin from the belief that meaningful improvement is achievable. When we surface barriers, we pair them with solutions—ensuring that challenges become opportunities to design better ways of working. Our strategies should sustain the energy of good ideas over time and protect the flexibility educators need to innovate, rather than constraining the system based on isolated failures.
- 6. Design Through Human Experience to Transform Systems:** Because systems are created by people, they can be redesigned by people. By grounding our work in the lived experiences of educators, students, and communities, we identify system-level barriers and develop solutions that genuinely strengthen culture, capacity, and coherence.

Throughout the process, Design Team members engaged in iterative drafting and feedback cycles informed by field experience; review of current statutes, regulations, and guidance;⁹ and examples from other states and sectors. Through

⁹ For the purposes of work with the Design Team the following parameters were used to define statute, regulation, and guidance. *Statute* is interchangeable with legislation that refers to current or future changes of the Education Code, Government Code, or other relevant code to TK–12 education (transitional kindergarten through 12th grade). Vehicles for this include: (a) budget or policy bills approved by both houses of the Legislature and signed into law by the Governor; (b) citizen-initiated propositions approved by the voters, and/or (c) court rulings that clarify the meaning of a law that directs implementation. *Regulation* is a rule or standards adopted by a state government agency that has the force of law within the state's jurisdiction. Regulations are often implementing or interpreting

structured subgroup discussions, review of research and case studies, examination of accountability and support models, and ongoing refinement of implementation considerations, participants worked through the technical, organizational, and policy challenges involved in building a more coherent statewide improvement system. The work also included statutory reviews; development of implementation approaches, governance and operational design options; and analyses of potential pathways for adoption. Although these materials are not included in these public memos, they inform the recommendations that follow and can be made available to policymakers, education leaders, and system partners interested in advancing this work.

The next section provides an overview of how the redesigned SSoS would function as an integrated improvement system. The sections that follow then describe the four interlocking strategies that make this vision possible:

- [Strategy E. Create Coherent Preventative, Universal Supports Aligned to Dynamic District Needs](#)
- [Strategy F. Transform Performance Classification into a Diagnostic Process that Identifies Appropriate Support Pathways](#)
- [Strategy G. Improve the Quality and Coherence of Targeted Support](#)
- [Strategy H. Mobilize Increasingly Intensive State Support for District Improvement](#)

a state law. This purpose infers that because the force of law underlies the regulation, violation of the regulation can carry penalties or other corrective action. The California Code of Regulations codifies this language which includes the process of proposed regulations presented to the SBE for approval and, if passed, goes to the Office of Administrative Law for filing. *Guidance* manifests in various forms including letters to the field, posted effective practices, links to other resources, and convenings by state agencies to discuss and share implementation practices. Guidance encompasses administrative functions deployed by state agencies.

How the Redesigned Support System Would Work

Recent policy changes have begun to lay the foundation for a significant shift in how California supports schools and districts. Changes to COE funding and responsibilities place greater emphasis on proactive, universal support rather than relying primarily on intervention after performance declines.¹⁰ New investments and expectations related to community schools create additional opportunities for county offices to help coordinate services, connect districts to community resources, and strengthen local capacity.¹¹ Also, there have been revisions to how districts are identified for additional support that are intended to focus the state's improvement resources on districts facing the most significant academic challenges.¹² Together, these changes have created the conditions for a more differentiated and coherent approach to assistance.

Taken together, these changes create an opportunity to rethink how the various parts of California's SSoS work together to help schools and districts improve. The Working Group first articulated a broader vision for a more coherent, responsive, and improvement-oriented support system in its [December 2025 publication](#), and the Design Team continued to develop that vision as state policymakers considered changes to the current SSoS. During the Design Team process, many of the group's recommendations were informed—and were reflected in—subsequent policy decisions. This memo builds on that work by describing how the redesigned system could function as a coherent whole, illustrating how recent policy changes might fit within a broader vision for supporting continuous improvement across California's education system.

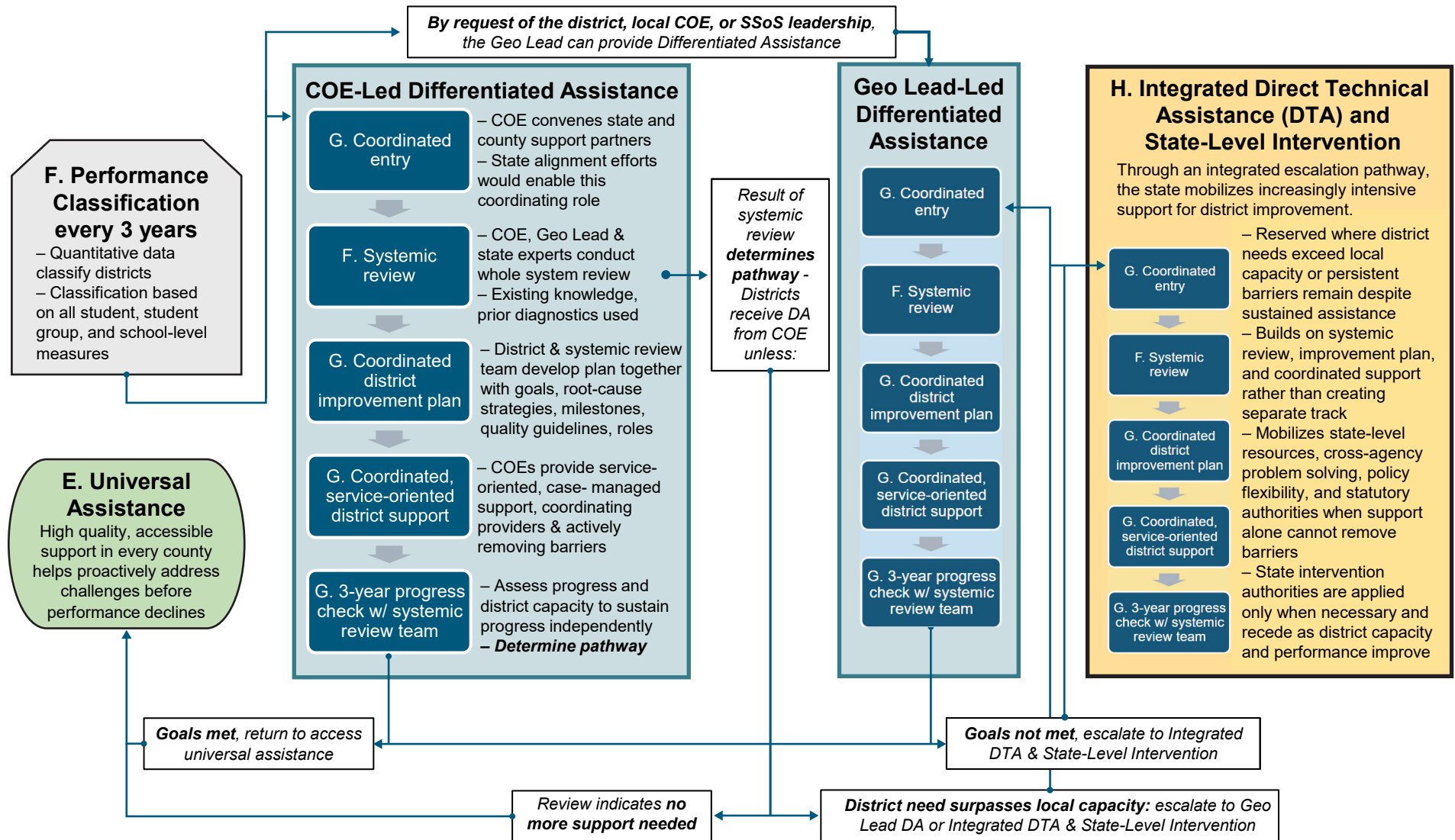
Figure 2 illustrates this vision as a single, coherent support continuum designed to help districts address challenges earlier, access meaningful assistance when needed, and receive additional support when local challenges exceed local capacity to overcome them. Rather than operating as a collection of disconnected programs and initiatives, the redesigned system provides a clear progression from prevention to intervention, with each stage building on the previous one and reinforcing a common focus on improvement. Districts experience one improvement pathway that moves from universal support, to performance signals that trigger COE-led

¹⁰ [AB 126](#) enacted changes to fund COEs to provide “universal and targeted assistance” to districts

¹¹ [AB 126](#) amended Education Code section 8902 to expand and clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of the state and regional community schools technical assistance centers and COEs in supporting the implementation of community schools.

¹² The California State Board of Education (SBE), at its July 9–10, 2026 meeting, adopted new performance criteria for the classification of LEAs in the SSoS which will go into effect in the 2026–2027 school year.

Figure 2. Conceptual Support Continuum for California's Redesigned SSoS



Note: This figure illustrates how the four strategies presented in this memo work together as an integrated continuum of support. The lettering (Strategies E–H) corresponds to the relevant sections of this memo and continues from [Part I. Strengthening State-Level Capacity to Lead and Support System Improvement](#), where Strategies A–D describe the state-level conditions that enable this redesigned system.

Differentiated Assistance,¹³ to systemic review and improvement planning, to coordinated support, and, when necessary, increasingly intensive state assistance.

The redesigned system begins with the idea that all districts would have access to universal support designed to strengthen local capacity and address challenges before performance stagnates or declines. The new law takes a step in that direction, making universal assistance available free of cost to all districts under Education Code section 2575.35, with an annual list used to prioritize outreach and support. These supports would be responsive to district needs, aligned to statewide priorities, and available without requiring formal classification for assistance. (Detailed in [Strategy E.](#))

To identify districts that may need additional support, performance classification would focus on stable, meaningful indicators aligned to the state's most important student outcomes, creating a clearer signal for when additional support may be needed. Classification across state support and intervention programs would be aligned into a single, coherent improvement pathway so that districts experience one coordinated process for identification, diagnosis, support, and, when necessary, intervention, rather than multiple overlapping classification and support systems. If a district is identified for Differentiated Assistance, it would enter a coordinated inquiry process beginning with a statewide systemic review. The review would examine instructional, organizational, governance, operational, and fiscal conditions to identify root causes, implementation challenges, and barriers to improvement. Those findings would inform the development of a focused district improvement plan and determine the type and intensity of support most likely to help the district improve. (Detailed in [Strategy F.](#))

In most cases, the COE would serve as the district's primary improvement partner, providing and coordinating support throughout the improvement process. However, as illustrated in **Figure 2**, the systemic review also serves as the decision point for determining the most appropriate support arrangement. Based on evidence from the systemic review and professional judgment, districts whose needs exceed the expertise or capacity available through the local COE could instead receive support from a Geographic Lead Agency (Geo Lead).¹⁴ In cases involving severe, persistent, or system-level challenges, the review may indicate the need

¹³ Although funding for Differentiated Assistance has been replaced with funding for combined "universal and targeted assistance," this memo continues to use the term Differentiated Assistance to refer to the targeted supports districts are expected to receive after being identified through quantitative performance measures.

¹⁴ Recent changes eliminated the quantitative identification criteria that previously triggered Geo Lead Differentiated Assistance. However, the Working Group and Design Team continued to envision a role for Geo Leads in providing regional expertise and capacity when district needs exceed COE capacity or when more specialized support is needed. Geo Lead roles remain authorized in statute, and this report assumes they would continue to serve as part of the redesigned statewide support continuum.

for escalated support from CCEE from the outset. The district improvement plan, aligned with and operationalizing the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), would establish clear priorities, measurable goals, and defined roles for support providers. Support providers would then deliver coordinated, case-managed support aligned to the plan, helping districts access expertise, remove barriers, and sustain implementation over time. Under this model, improvement is supported through shared responsibility: Districts are accountable for genuinely engaging in improvement efforts, while support providers are accountable for delivering timely, coordinated, and high-quality assistance. (Detailed in [Strategy G.](#))

Aligned with new state policy, on a 3-year timeline, progress would be reviewed to assess the district's advancement toward its goals within the context of provided support and its readiness to sustain continuous improvement on its own. As districts demonstrate sustained improvement, they would no longer meet the criteria for COE-led Differentiated Assistance and would continue to access the universal assistance and resources available to all districts through the SSoS. Districts facing ongoing challenges, however, could receive increasingly intensive expertise, coordination, support, and, when necessary, state-level intervention through a unified escalation pathway. (Detailed in [Strategy H.](#))

The purpose of escalation is not punishment or compliance enforcement. Rather, it is to ensure that districts receive the level of support, expertise, authority, and resources necessary to address barriers that cannot be resolved through local efforts alone. As challenges become more complex or persistent, support becomes more intensive and may include access to specialized expertise, stronger coordination across agencies, regulatory flexibility, additional resources, or state-level action to help remove barriers to improvement. At every stage, the goal is to ensure that students receive the educational opportunities necessary for success, and that educators have the tools and guidance to foster positive outcomes for all students. Escalation occurs when support alone is not enough—not because local control has failed—but because the system has a responsibility to ensure that every student has access to a high-quality education.

Throughout the support continuum, statewide leadership would provide common standards, tools, quality assurance, coordination, and opportunities for continuous learning. State, regional, and county partners would be responsible for identifying and addressing gaps and barriers within the support system itself, creating a reciprocal accountability structure in which responsibility for improvement is shared across all levels of the system. Information gathered through implementation,

support, and intervention efforts would inform future policy, resource allocation, and system design, helping California continuously improve its ability to support schools and districts over time.

It is important to note that the Working Group and Design Team intentionally began by asking what kind of support would be most helpful to districts, rather than what could be delivered within the constraints of the current system. The resulting vision reflects an aspirational model of coordinated, high-quality, district-centered support. Participants recognized that achieving this vision would require significant investments in COE capacity, stronger statewide coordination, and changes to existing funding and organizational structures, and that it is possible not all counties would have the capacity to offer this level of service. At the same time, they emphasized that the limitations of the current system should not define the ambitions of its redesign. Designing around today's constraints risks perpetuating those constraints rather than addressing them.

It should also be noted that significant implementation work is already underway across California's education system in response to recent policy changes. State agencies, COEs, and other system partners are developing guidance, defining roles and responsibilities, establishing implementation approaches, and building the infrastructure needed to support universal and targeted assistance under the new policies. These efforts are both necessary and important, and many of the near-term improvements they identify can strengthen support under the current system. The recommendations in this memo are intended to complement—not replace—those implementation efforts by describing a longer-term vision for how the SSoS could continue to evolve. In that sense, this memo is less a step-by-step guide for immediate implementation than a possible blueprint for a more coherent, responsive, and effective support system over time.

“ We must acknowledge that designing an effective system of support for scholars is critical to the success of California. All actors (lawmakers, educators and researchers) need to consistently ask, ‘How can we do better to serve each and every scholar?’
—Dr. Daryl F. Camp, San Lorenzo Unified School District

Strategy E. Create Coherent Preventative, Universal Supports Aligned to Dynamic District Need

Core idea: If California creates clearly defined, quality, and accessible universal supports as the foundation of the SSoS that are responsive to dynamic district needs, then more districts will be empowered to address challenges earlier and often thereby enabling accelerated growth in instructional, leadership, and governance capacity and reducing the need for targeted intervention.

The challenge

Historically, California's SSoS has been organized primarily around responding to stagnant or declining performance on state identified indicators (i.e., on the California School Dashboard), rather than proactively building district capacity before challenges become major impediments to improvement. Although many districts receive assistance through a variety of state, county, and regional programs, the system's main source of structured support (COE-led Differentiated Assistance) has most often begun only after performance has declined enough to trigger formal identification. This dynamic, originating in state law, has advanced the perception that the system is designed to respond to, rather than prevent problems.

Although the state has invested heavily in universal support¹⁵ and many COEs provide services to districts beyond the existing definitions in the SSoS—these supports have not consistently reached practitioners as intended.¹⁶ Where universal supports have existed, they have frequently been more narrowly focused on specific practices or initiatives that are disconnected from the system-level conditions that influence student outcomes, including organizational coherence, quality staffing processes, governance, fiscal stability, and the design of instructional systems to support the whole-child. Further, while approaches vary across COEs, many districts experience universal support as a largely self-directed model in which leaders identify relevant resources, determine how they fit together, and adapt them to their local context.

Identifying the relevant resources alone can be challenging. For example, the SSoS Resource Hub hosted by CCEE includes over 376 universal resources, the SSoS directory lists over 222 contacts available to support districts, and there

¹⁵ Examples include technical assistance centers, professional learning resources, facilitation guides, effective practice examples, and guidance accompanying direct funding to districts.

¹⁶ The June 2024 report, [Core Working Group Report: California Statewide System of Support](#), by RTI International, states that "some perspectives from the field point out that not all [districts] believe the resources in the System of Support are universally accessible."

are 54 known technical assistance centers.¹⁷ Supports are often organized around individual programs or initiatives, district priorities, or a combination of both, but they can vary across regions and may be experienced as separate offerings rather than as part of a coherent approach to strengthening district capacity. Further compounding these challenges, the state invests directly in districts through grants and funding initiatives—many accompanied by their own implementation guidance, professional learning, and technical assistance—to build capacity in many of the same areas addressed by universal support (see [Appendix B](#) for a full list). Yet, there is little to no coordination between them. As a result, district leaders must expend considerable time and effort navigating, organizing, and integrating available support. Time that otherwise would be focused on improving their implementation practices.

The recently passed 2026 budget bill takes a step in addressing these challenges by creating a new funding structure for COEs for both “universal and targeted assistance.” Historically, outside of the specific supports referenced above, COE funding for district support has been allocated based on the number of districts identified by quantitative measures as needing COE-led Differentiated Assistance, but now COEs will receive a set amount of funding to provide both universal supports and COE-led Differentiated Assistance.¹⁸ Explicitly, the legislation identifies coaching for LCAP development and implementation, Dashboard support, professional learning, and coordination of community schools efforts within the SSoS as suggested support activities.

As history has shown, funding changes and modest guidance in law alone will not produce a coherent prevention-oriented system. The new funding structure is a necessary foundation, but it is not an operating model. Without shared expectations for access and quality, clear differentiation among baseline county services, optional local services, and specialized regional or statewide expertise, and routines for coordination and feedback, districts may continue to experience universal assistance as a collection of disconnected offerings. The implementation task is therefore to translate the statutory funding and responsibilities into a coherent, relationship-based support infrastructure while preserving flexibility for local context.

¹⁷ Notably, many of the technical assistance centers have regional hubs as well, further multiplying the number of sources of assistance. Examples of these regional assistance centers include areas such as community schools, California PBIS (which promotes positive behavioral interventions and supports [PBIS]), English Learner Specialists, and Educator Workforce Investment Grants.

¹⁸ AB 126 (2026) fundamentally revised the funding model for COEs to support universal and targeted

The vision for California

Even before these policy changes were adopted, the Working Group envisioned universal support as the foundation of the SSoS, reorganized to provide districts with responsive, proactive support that helps address challenges before they affect student learning outcomes. In the redesigned model, three features are evident: First, every district would have access to high-quality tools, coaching, professional learning, data support, and countywide services aligned to statewide goals. Second, there would be a consistent and commonly known operating structure that all districts and COEs engage in. Third, universal support would be responsive to local needs, enabling COEs to connect districts with tailored expertise and resources as emerging challenges arise, before they become barriers to continued improvement.¹⁹ Four key design principles undergird the Design Team's implementation actions:

Protect local adaptation by investing in structured, responsive relationships.

Because districts operate in different contexts—with varying size, geography, student needs, organizational capacity, governance conditions, leadership history, labor relationships, and community priorities—they will require different combinations of support. The state can define a baseline of what every district should be able to access, while allowing COEs, Geo Leads, and content leads²⁰ to adapt delivery to local context.

Every district should be able to expect and access the same baseline of universal support, regardless of location, size, or local capacity. The state should define expectations for quality and access and promote the standard that every school system has a right to leverage these resources to improve their individual, team, or school system practices.

Accelerate the improvement of practice aligned to state priorities by creating intentional coherence between universal support and direct district funding. Today there is little to no connection between universal support provisions of the

assistance. Beginning in 2026–27, funding is no longer based on the number of districts identified for Differentiated Assistance. Instead, each COE receives a universal and targeted assistance grant consisting of (1) a \$500,000 base allocation (adjusted annually for inflation), (2) an Average Daily Attendance (ADA)-based allocation tied to the county's share of statewide enrollment, and (3) a stability grant to ease the transition to the new formula.

¹⁹ In the public health field researchers refer to this as proportionate universalism. In public education and community-based engagement the closest equivalent is targeted universalism which that has most often been applied to support for students. Examples of strong universal support systems include: Head Start's Practice-Based Coaching model, Singapore's career-long teacher-learning system, and Project ECHO which began in the health field and has since spread to behavioral health, education and other social service arenas.

²⁰ "Content leads" are the COEs that serve as Resource Leads, Lead Agencies, or statewide initiative leads within the SSoS, providing specialized expertise, professional learning, technical assistance, and implementation support in specific content and programmatic areas.

SSoS and the direct funding districts receive from the state for capacity building. The definition for universal support should mirror the types of supports, implementation priorities, and strategies that are embedded in direct district funding from the annual state budget process. Creating this more active connection would accelerate adoption of agreed-upon practices aligned to clear goals and optimize those funding allocations ([Part I](#), Strategy A).

Continuously improve the quality and consistency of universal support.

Universal support should be grounded in reciprocal accountability: a shared commitment in which districts are responsible for actively engaging with and using available supports to strengthen local practice, while state agencies and COEs are responsible for ensuring those supports are high-quality, responsive to district needs, and consistently available to every district. Through providing universal support to districts, COEs are well positioned to identify implementation challenges, emerging needs, and promising practices. These lessons should be systematically captured and used to strengthen universal support within counties and across the state through the statewide learning and policy-feedback infrastructure (described in [Part I](#), Strategy D). The quality of universal support should be judged not by the amount of professional development delivered, but by whether it builds district capacity, improves instructional practice, and continuously evolves in response to district needs.

Implementation actions

E.1 Define universal support, distinguished from Differentiated Assistance, and build capacity for COEs to provide it.

California enacted AB 126 which amended Education Code section 2575.35 to establish a new COE funding formula for universal and targeted assistance. The statute provides a broad definition for how resources should be prioritized, requiring that funding first support those districts identified for targeted assistance. The formula also includes a transition year and allocates funding primarily based on the average daily attendance of all districts in the county, reflecting an assumption that county capacity needs generally scale with the size of districts served. Key interest holders (e.g., district leaders, COEs, content center leads, and Geo Leads) should use the upcoming implementation period of the funding shift to create an operational definition of “universal and targeted assistance” that is specific enough to guide



The power of this work is moving from a system that identifies problems after they show up in student outcomes to one that notices patterns early, coordinates the right expertise, and learns alongside the field.

—Christine Olmstead, Orange County Department of Education

funding, expectations, and quality assurance, but flexible enough to fit California's diverse districts and counties. The definition should clarify the baseline of support available to every district, the topics covered, the quality features expected, and how support changes when a district enters COE-led Differentiated Assistance (as further discussed in [Strategy G](#)). This transition period may also create space to enhance the formula by adding additional capacity measures that fund COEs for universal and targeted assistance.

Specific tasks:

- Aligned with the recommendations in [Part I](#), Strategy A, clearly designate the statewide entity or entities responsible for defining universal and targeted assistance, establishing statewide implementation expectations, and overseeing implementation and continuous improvement across the SSoS. Clarify the respective roles and contributions of COEs, district leaders, educators, students, and families in informing, implementing, and continuously improving these supports.
- Publish a draft definition of a reliable statewide baseline of support every district can expect to receive while allowing delivery models to vary by county size, geography, staffing, student need, and local partnerships. This includes distinguishing between what services would be offered as fee for service above and beyond the universal supports definition in the SSoS.²¹
- Specify the core functions of universal support which may include, but are not limited to: access to tools and professional learning, LCAP and Dashboard coaching, early identification of emerging needs, case-management of support requests, and shared problem-solving to address barriers to improvement early. Build from existing examples of good universal support practices already being implemented by COEs across the state.
- Align universal support with the support continuum described in Strategies [G](#) and [H](#), defining how support evolves from universal assistance for all districts, to proactive support for districts showing early signs of declining performance, to formal identification for COE-led Differentiated Assistance, which initiates a systemic review, a coordinated improvement plan, and increasingly intensive targeted support.
- Align universal support with other major state-funded initiatives to help districts implement those investments as part of a coherent

²¹ The California County Superintendents' Curricular and Improvement Support Committee (CISC) is currently developing definitions and implementation guidance for universal and targeted assistance in response to state policy changes.

improvement strategy rather than as separate programs. Over time, future state investments should be designed to reinforce this approach by explicitly incorporating universal support as a mechanism for building local implementation capacity.

- Revisit how COE capacity is defined and assessed by considering both internal factors (staffing, workload, responsibilities) and external factors (feedback from districts on service quality, geographic context, and mix of and needs of districts served). This information should be used to strengthen the quality of universal support, inform how counties support one another, and ensure support capacity is aligned with local needs.
- Build COE capacity and establish quality assurance mechanisms for universal support, including clarifying how CDE, CCEE, Geo Leads, content leads, and other providers²² work together to support capacity building, learning, coordination, and improvement across the system. For more on capacity building and quality assurance across the system, see Strategies [G.2](#) and [G.3](#).
- Define and create structures for ensuring that information gathered through universal support will be elevated into the policy-feedback loops detailed in [Part I](#), Strategy D without becoming another compliance report.

E.2 Map the landscape of existing universal supports, then organize COE and district relationships to access it effectively.

The state would build on information already collected to conduct a comprehensive review of existing universal supports, with the goal of better understanding how well they respond to local needs and identifying opportunities to strengthen and refine those supports in alignment with district needs. This work would leverage existing COE, CDE, CCEE, and notable external resources minimizing the need for districts to complete additional disconnected needs assessments.

Specific tasks:

- Create a statewide inventory of content leads, initiatives, regional technical assistance providers, professional learning resources, and countywide child-serving support that integrates and builds upon existing tools and repositories, including the CCEE Resource Hub.
- Map each existing and projected state resource—including direct funding streams and SSoS supports—to statewide goals (as detailed

²² Specifically this refers to research, technical assistance, and service providers not formally a part of state, regional and local government that retain specific expertise that could be leveraged to build understanding and skills among COE staff.

in [Part I](#), Strategy A), effective practices, and common district needs, including instructional quality, English learner and special education supports, attendance, community engagement, governance, workforce stability, and fiscal sustainability.²³ Identify how universal support is intended to enhance the district's use of direct funding—including required sequencing where SSoS support must precede funding rollout.

- Review existing resources to improve accessibility, ease of use, and identify opportunities to adapt, combine, or streamline resources where appropriate.
- Analyze gaps in support for small, rural, Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS), county-operated, and high-need districts, and develop shared-service or regional solutions where local capacity is limited.
- Build and implement a more intentional, relationship-based infrastructure between districts and COEs to assign stable, ongoing liaisons to districts from the COE, track the supports provided to districts at a high level, and coordinate supports internally at a COE before it is deployed to districts. (For more detail on internally reorganizing agencies to be more responsive to districts, see [Part I](#), Strategy C).

E.3 Strengthen collaboration and coherence across education and other local child-serving agencies.

California enacted AB 126, which amended Education Code Section 8902 to expand and clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of the state and regional community schools technical assistance centers and COEs in supporting the implementation of community schools. Among other activities this includes centralizing certain planning templates, facilitating peer networks, building stronger integration with other local child- and student-support agencies, and further integration with other SSoS leads. This emphasis on coordination reflects growing recognition that stronger cross-agency collaboration can improve support for students and families. For example, initiatives such as the California Youth Behavioral Health Initiative have shown that increased collaboration across agencies can meaningfully contribute to more coordinated and timely support for students and their families in the areas of health, behavioral health, social services, early childhood, and workforce.

Even before these statutory changes, the Design Team had identified a stronger regional coordinating role for COEs as an important direction for universal support. Recent changes reinforce this direction by expanding COEs' role in providing

²³ An example is a regularly updated repository similar to what is currently hosted by CCEE for the content leads, here: <https://tools.systemofsupport.org/resource-hub/>

universal support while also establishing regional coordination functions through designated Community Schools Regional Technical Assistance Center leads, further strengthening regional collaboration across education and related systems. Realizing this opportunity, however, will require recognizing differing capacities of COEs and planning accordingly to ensure support is intentionally organized so districts experience one coherent, accessible, and responsive system rather than a collection of disconnected initiatives.

Specific tasks:

- Organize countywide resources and supports into priority domains that reflect the core functions of effective student support and learning, including integrated student supports, family and community engagement, collaborative leadership and governance, and expanded learning opportunities. These domains would establish common practice areas and create explicit opportunities and expectations of coordination and collaboration among support providers.
- Design the system so that COEs serve as the primary regional point of contact for universal support, creating guidance for how to use shared regional services and partnerships where they can strengthen capacity, coordination, and access.
- Create a single intake and referral process, supported by common communications and a public resource map, so districts can find the right support without knowing every program across every county and/or state agency. Establish shared coordination protocols across agencies within the same county—including common calendars, joint planning routines, and expectations for warm handoffs—to ensure districts experience coordinated support rather than being passed between agencies and programs.
- Further develop the COE as the facilitator of district access to non-educational services provided by county agencies and nonprofit organizations.²⁴
- Pilot the coordinated model in selected regions, evaluate district user experience, and refine before statewide rollout.

²⁴ California is already developing promising models for this work. For example, [CCEE's Ecosystem of Care Toolkit](#) provides guidance for building cross-sector partnerships among education, health, behavioral health, social services, and community organizations to better coordinate supports for children and families. Similarly, the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools' [Transforming Together](#) initiative demonstrates how county offices can convene governmental, educational, nonprofit, and community partners to build integrated countywide systems of support.

Early success measures

- **A clear public definition of universal support.** The definition should include the baseline of support available to every district and how support becomes more structured when needs intensify.
- **A visible resource map and intake process.** Districts should be able to identify the right support based on their problem of practice and know where to go to access it.
- **Fewer duplicative offerings and clearer coordination.** Districts should experience coordinated support across content leads, COEs, Geo Leads, CCEE, and CDE rather than navigating multiple disconnected initiatives.
- **Fewer districts requiring targeted assistance or more intensive intervention.** Over time, universal support should help more districts address challenges before performance declines to the point of formal identification, particularly among small, rural, DASS, and high-poverty districts.

Strategy F. Transform Performance Classification into a Diagnostic Process that Identifies Appropriate Support Pathways

Core idea: If California adopts a performance classification system that balances quantitative data from the California School Dashboard with systemic reviews, and aligns identification across programs, then districts can be guided into more meaningful, elevated support pathways that address their needs in a timely and quality manner.

The challenge

Even in a strong prevention-oriented system, the state must be able to recognize when districts require more intensive support. Universal support is intended to strengthen local capacity and address challenges early, but some districts will continue to face persistent and/or complex barriers that require a more structured improvement process. The purpose of performance classification, therefore, is not simply to identify those districts, but to ensure that those needing additional assistance enter a meaningful pathway that investigates district needs, aligns appropriate support, and, when necessary, provides access to increasingly intensive intervention. Ultimately, this is the heart of reciprocal accountability: district responsibility for improving student outcomes must be matched by the state's

responsibility to provide the capacity-building, expertise, and support necessary for districts to succeed.

Since its creation with the rollout of the California Schoolboard Dashboard in 2017, California's performance classification system has evolved in ways that have made it difficult to provide a clear and consistent entry point to elevated supports, limiting the system's ability to address identified barriers in a timely and effective manner. For COE-led Differentiated Assistance, performance criteria historically identified a large proportion of California districts, and districts frequently moved into and out of eligibility based on short-term changes in Dashboard performance. At the same time, some persistent challenges—particularly in small and rural districts—went unidentified because limited student group data prevented districts from meeting identification thresholds. Together, these dynamics made it difficult for the system to consistently distinguish between districts experiencing temporary fluctuations in performance and those needing sustained improvement support.

In addition, different state and federal support programs have used different indicators, timelines, thresholds, and planning requirements, creating multiple entry points into the support system rather than a single, coherent improvement pathway.²⁵ The result has been a mismatch between signals and support. Classification can become a compliance event instead of the start of a focused inquiry into what students need and what district systems must change.

State policy is already moving toward addressing several of these challenges identified by the Working Group and Design Team. The SBE had been charged with making improvements to the SSoS aligned with the findings of the independent evaluation of Differentiated Assistance,²⁶ and decisions made at the [July 2026 meeting](#), along with changes made in the [2026 budget bill](#), made various updates to the performance criteria for assistance and intervention. These legal changes improve the stability and focus of the quantitative entry signal for COE-led Differentiated Assistance, but they do not address the broader challenge of aligning identification across improvement programs or ensuring that performance signals

²⁵ This includes the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) school identification of Comprehensive School Intervention (CSI) and Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI), the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) compliance improvement monitoring (CIM) process, California's CALPADS-related technical assistance for data quality and submission standards, and multiple state support and intervention pathways within the SSoS itself. For example, COE-led Differentiated Assistance, Geo Lead Differentiated Assistance, and Direct Technical Assistance (DTA) have historically operated through different eligibility criteria, decision points, and support processes.

²⁶ In 2022, the Legislature commissioned an independent evaluation of California's Differentiated Assistance system. The [evaluation](#), conducted by WestEd, found that DA has had positive effects on student outcomes and system capacity while also identifying opportunities to improve the stability of identification, strengthen coordination, clarify support pathways, and better align assistance with district needs. The recent statutory changes directing the State Board of Education to revise performance criteria were informed, in part, by these findings.

lead to a diagnostic process capable of identifying district needs and matching them with appropriate support. The next phase of work is to ensure a proportionate diagnostic process that leads to a coordinated improvement and support response.

The vision for California

The vision laid out by the Design Team is a redesigned system that would strengthen identification in three complementary ways. First, it would create clearer and more stable performance signals focused on the student outcomes that matter most. Second, it would align identification for state and federal support programs into a more coherent improvement pathway. Third, it would use systemic reviews to diagnose underlying challenges and determine the type and intensity of support districts need. Together, these changes would create a more focused, equitable, and improvement-oriented approach to identification and support, that enables the responsive support continuum detailed in Strategies [G](#) and [H](#).

Quantitative data should help inform where the state, COEs, and districts can most effectively direct attention, support and resources; it should not, by itself, determine the intensity of support, the provider, or the escalation path. In the redesigned system, once performance signals indicate a need for closer examination, systemic reviews would become the diagnostic engine of the support system. Reviews would examine instructional quality, student supports, staffing, governance, fiscal and operational conditions, and implementation capacity. The review would produce both findings and an implementation support plan that clarifies what the district will do, what the COE or support providers will do, and what barriers require regional or state action. Rather than relying solely on separate quantitative triggers to determine when districts move to more intensive state support, findings from the systemic review would inform professional judgments about the type, intensity, and provider of support. This then creates a single, coherent escalation pathway based on district needs rather than performance metrics alone (see [Strategy H](#) for more detail).

Over time, California's various state and federal accountability, support, and monitoring programs would become more intentionally aligned so that districts experience a single, coherent improvement pathway rather than multiple, disconnected processes. In the near term, COE-led Differentiated Assistance would serve as the primary district-level entry point for coordinating related academic improvement efforts. When a district is identified for COE-led Differentiated Assistance, it would enter a coordinated, case-managed improvement process through which the COE organizes and aligns assistance across relevant state, regional, and local support programs. Over time, additional accountability, support, and monitoring programs would be integrated into this coordinated approach while

preserving their distinct statutory and regulatory responsibilities, allowing districts to increasingly experience one front door to statewide support.

Implementation actions

F.1 Align classification pathways and focus COE-led Differentiated Assistance on stable, high-priority outcomes.

Recent statutory changes and actions by the SBE have addressed many of the concerns raised by the Working Group and Design Team regarding the identification process for Differentiated Assistance. In particular, the revised eligibility criteria create a more stable and focused quantitative entry signal for districts needing elevated support. State law changes through the budget process this year and SBE adoption of new criteria at its July 2026 meeting included the following:

- Addition of a new student group, All Students, to the eligibility criteria for districts, providing a more stable signal of overall district performance while continuing to monitor student group outcomes.
- Shifting COE-led Differentiated Assistance and Direct Technical Assistance (DTA) to a 3-year eligibility and support cycle, creating greater stability and allowing more time for meaningful improvement efforts to take hold.
- Phasing out quantitative referral to Geo Lead Differentiated Assistance, simplifying the support continuum and creating opportunities for a more coherent escalation process based on district need.
- Shifting data management-related support out of the Differentiated Assistance framework, allowing academic improvement support to focus more directly on improving teaching, learning, and district capacity.

Further, action under state law shifts more responsibility to the SBE to consider future changes for these classification criteria, and, the SBE has already signaled that it intends to return to consider further updates in 2027. Together, these changes represent significant progress toward the Design Team's vision for a more stable and meaningful identification system.

These changes provide an important foundation for the next phase of redesign: focusing performance classification on a small set of stable academic outcomes aligned with the statewide goals established in [Part I](#), Strategy A, and aligning related state and federal identification pathways so they serve as coordinated entry points into a more coherent district-facing SSoS. Once districts enter that coordinated improvement pathway, statewide systemic reviews can provide a richer diagnosis of district needs and determine the most appropriate support.

In the near term, COE-led Differentiated Assistance should serve as the coordinating mechanism to align accountability and support programs. When a district enters COE-led Differentiated Assistance, the COE would organize and align relevant state and federal improvement supports—including programs such as Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) and Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI), the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT), and Compliance and Improvement Monitoring (CIM)—into a coordinated improvement process. This would provide districts with a single point of coordination across related improvement efforts, even as individual programs continue to operate under their existing statutory authorities. (Districts not identified for COE-led Differentiated Assistance would continue to work directly with these programs.)

Over time, this district-level coordination should be supported by greater alignment among the programs themselves (as detailed in [Part I](#), Strategy B). The state should pursue a phased strategy to align implementation timelines, planning cycles, review processes, reporting expectations, and other operational requirements across related accountability, support, and monitoring programs wherever permitted by state and federal law. As these operational barriers are addressed, districts should increasingly experience these programs through a single, coordinated improvement process—with fewer separate timelines, planning requirements, and points of contact—while the underlying statutory responsibilities of each program remain intact.²⁷

Specific tasks:

- Integrate CSI/ATSI into the COE-led Differentiated Assistance intake and systemic review process by aligning identification, timelines, and improvement planning, so districts address related academic issues through a single LCAP-aligned improvement cycle rather than separate school and district compliance tracks. Use repeated CSI/ATSI identification, multiple identified schools, substantial enrollment share, and systemic review findings to inform the type and intensity of district-level support.
- Over time, align DTA within the graduated support continuum described in [Strategy H](#), replacing separate quantitative escalation triggers with professional judgment informed by systemic review findings, district capacity, implementation progress, and evidence of need.
- Develop distinct but coherent technical rules for school districts, charter

²⁷ Experience from other high-functioning systems—such as New Jersey's [Quality Single Accountability Continuum \(QSAC\)](#)—demonstrates that aligning accountability, support, and monitoring into a single, user-facing pathway, while preserving underlying statutory authorities, improves clarity, effectiveness, and trust.

schools, COEs, DASS schools, small rural LEAs, and county-operated programs.

- Aligned with [Part 1](#), Strategy B, develop and implement a phased, long-term plan to further integrate accountability, support, and monitoring programs—including CIM, Federal Program Monitoring (FPM), FCMAT, charter accountability, and other state improvement processes—into a more coherent district-facing SSoS while preserving their distinct statutory responsibilities.
- Align performance classification with the statewide goals and focal priorities established in [Part I](#), Strategy A, using stable academic indicators and performance floors for non-negotiable student outcomes to establish clear thresholds for when additional support should be mobilized.

F.2 Establish a statewide systemic review process.

Once districts enter this coordinated improvement pathway, the next step is to ensure that the system accurately diagnoses the challenges they are experiencing and matches them with the support they need. The systemic review would examine the instructional, organizational, governance, fiscal, and operational conditions contributing to district performance and provide the evidence needed to develop an improvement plan and determine the appropriate level and provider of support. In this way, the systemic review becomes the bridge between the redesigned identification process described above and the coordinated support continuum described in Strategies [G](#) and [H](#).

The review should be improvement-oriented, proportionate to need, and trusted by districts and COEs. It should build from existing tools and expertise, including CCEE's Systemic Instructional Review,²⁸ COE diagnostics, CIM, FCMAT, Western Association of School Credentialing (WASC)-style self-study routines, and the newly-approved community schools certification process. Rather than creating an entirely new review process, the goal is to establish a common statewide framework that organizes and strengthens existing review approaches while producing more consistent diagnostic information, improvement planning, and support decisions across the SSoS.

Specific tasks:

- Designate a responsible state entity to lead the research, design, initial implementation, and refinements on the systemic review process.

²⁸ Existing law requires a CCEE systemic review for districts referred following an emergency apportionment, which may be a possible model from which to draw upon.

- Develop a single statewide systemic review framework with differentiated levels of intensity: light-touch intake, targeted domain review, and comprehensive review.
- Define review triggers and cadence, including initial eligibility for targeted support, CSI/ATSI patterns, COE or district referral, and 3-year milestone reviews; allow earlier review when governance, staffing, or implementation barriers are acute.
- Create multidisciplinary review teams that include local COE knowledge, peer district expertise, and calibrated statewide reviewers, with domain experts added based on the problem presented.
- Require each review to produce findings that lead to the development of the district improvement plan that also includes the role and responsibility of support providers to ensure high-quality implementation of the improvement plan (as further detailed in [Strategy G](#)).
- Pilot the process, publish what duplicative reviews or artifacts are retired, and calibrate reviewers before statewide rollout.

Early success measures

- **A single district-facing pathway that connects eligibility for districts receiving targeted support.** Districts experience one coordinated improvement process that connects COE-led Differentiated Assistance, CSI/ATSI identification, systemic review, support planning, and LCAP implementation, reducing duplication and creating clearer roles across support providers.
- **Systemic reviews consistently guide support decisions.** Systemic reviews identify root causes, clarify the responsibilities of districts and support providers, and inform decisions about the type, intensity, and coordination of support received.
- **Clearer, more focused performance classification.** Performance classification is aligned with the state's small set of priority student outcomes, uses stable academic indicators and performance floors for non-negotiable outcomes, and more accurately identifies districts that would benefit from additional support while accounting for the unique contexts of DASS schools, county offices, small and rural LEAs, and other specialized settings.

Strategy G. Improve the Quality and Coherence of Targeted Support

Core idea: If California establishes clear expectations for high-quality district support, strengthens COE capacity to coordinate and deliver that support, and creates stronger mechanisms for quality assurance and system learning, then districts will experience targeted support as a coherent, responsive, and improvement-oriented partnership that builds local capacity and improves outcomes for students.

The challenge

California has invested heavily in targeted support over the past decade through Differentiated Assistance, DTA, CIM, services provided by FCMAT, and a growing array of state-sponsored technical assistance initiatives. These investments reflect an important recognition that accountability alone is insufficient to improve outcomes for students and that districts often need support to address complex instructional, organizational, operational, governance, and fiscal challenges. However, Working Group and Design Team participants observed that districts report that they do not always receive the coordinated, high-quality support they need to address their most pressing improvement challenges.

One important contributor to this challenge is the absence of a shared operational improvement plan to guide coordinated support. Although the LCAP was intended to be a concise, public-friendly planning document that described how districts would improve student outcomes and use Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) resources to increase or improve services for unduplicated students,²⁹ over time it has also become the vehicle for meeting a growing number of state planning, reporting, and accountability requirements. As a result, many LCAPs encompass numerous goals and activities and often do not function as the focused implementation roadmap needed to guide coordinated improvement efforts. This can leave districts and support providers without a shared operational plan that identifies the highest-priority work and organizes implementation around those priorities.

Even when districts have identified clear priorities, the quality and intensity of support available to help implement those priorities can vary significantly across counties and regions. Although many COEs have developed strong expertise and effective approaches to district improvement, and statewide frameworks and guidance are available to support this work, there are limited statewide expectations

²⁹ "Unduplicated students" are students who are identified as low income, English learners, or foster youth, with each student counted only once regardless of how many of these categories apply.

and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure consistent implementation across COEs. As a result, districts cannot consistently expect the same level, quality, or approach to support when they enter COE-led Differentiated Assistance, and the support they receive may vary considerably depending on geography, local capacity, or provider expertise.

Compounding these challenges, Design Team members observed that the current system has limited mechanisms for understanding whether support is actually helping districts improve. Although districts are held accountable for outcomes, there are fewer structures for assessing the quality, coherence, or effectiveness of the support they receive. Similarly, information about recurring implementation challenges, barriers to improvement, and promising practices is not consistently collected and used to strengthen support strategies or inform statewide policy decisions.

The vision for California

In the redesigned system, targeted support functions as a coordinated, service-oriented, and improvement-focused partnership designed to help districts address challenges, build local capacity, and improve outcomes for students. Rather than operating as a collection of disconnected programs and initiatives, county, regional, and state supports are aligned around a shared understanding of district needs and a district-led improvement strategy, with support providers working through a coordinated system to help districts achieve their own goals. The effectiveness of the SSoS is measured not only by whether districts improve over time, but also by whether the support provided is timely, coordinated, expert, and responsive to district needs.

When a district is classified for COE-led Differentiated Assistance, the goal is to help district leaders better understand the underlying factors contributing to their improvement challenges and provide the coordinated support needed to address them. The process begins with the systemic review (described in [Strategy F](#)), through which the COE brings together existing information, support providers, and improvement efforts, reducing duplication and creating a shared understanding of the district's strengths, existing improvement efforts, and barriers to success.³⁰ Rather than serving as a compliance review or evaluation, the review is intended

³⁰ The ability of COEs to effectively coordinate multiple support providers around a single district improvement strategy depends on broader state-level efforts to create coherence across the SSoS. As described in [Part I](#), this includes aligning and streamlining planning, reporting, monitoring, and intervention processes across Differentiated Assistance, DTA, CIM, CSI, ATSI, LCAP requirements, and other state and federal improvement initiatives. Without greater alignment of timelines, expectations, diagnostic processes, and reporting requirements, districts and support providers will continue to navigate overlapping and sometimes competing improvement processes. The coordinated, case-managed support model described in this memo assumes that these broader system-alignment efforts are implemented, allowing support providers to focus on district improvement rather than managing fragmented administrative requirements.

to help district leaders identify the root causes of persistent challenges and co-develop, with their COE and other support providers, a coordinated approach to overcoming them. Findings from the review inform the development of a focused, multi-year district improvement plan that is explicitly aligned to the district's LCAP.³¹ Rather than replacing the LCAP, the improvement plan serves as its implementation companion by operationalizing the district's highest-priority LCAP goals, establishing implementation milestones, and defining how the district and its support partners will work together to overcome barriers to achieving those goals. The purpose of the improvement plan is to focus and coordinate implementation—not to create an additional planning requirement.

The COE then serves as the district's primary improvement partner throughout implementation. In addition to providing direct improvement support, the COE coordinates other providers and helps districts access expertise, resources, and services available across the county, region, and SSoS. The model does not assume that COEs possess greater expertise than district leaders or have the capacity to address every improvement challenge independently. Rather, COEs leverage their understanding of regional context and their relationships across the support system to help districts identify the assistance they need and connect them with the individuals and organizations best positioned to provide it. The COE coordinates these resources around a shared district improvement strategy, helping align the work of multiple providers, reduce fragmentation, remove barriers to implementation, and ensure that districts experience the system as a coordinated partnership. As district needs evolve, the COE continues to monitor progress, coordinate adjustments to support, and help determine when additional expertise—or a more intensive level of assistance—is needed (as described in [Strategy H](#)).

This redesigned approach is grounded in reciprocal accountability, meaning that responsibility for improvement is paired with responsibility for providing effective support. Districts are responsible for engaging in improvement efforts and implementing agreed-upon strategies, while support providers are responsible for delivering timely, coordinated, and high-quality assistance. As district needs evolve, the SSoS responds by refining the support provided, drawing on additional expertise, and ensuring districts have access to providers whose strengths and experience best match their needs. Likewise,

“As a member of the Design Team, our goal was to create a shared definition of success that organizes accountability and support, while preserving local flexibility and innovation.”
—Rubén Aurelio, Vallejo City Unified School District

³¹ Many districts also utilize strategic plans or other local planning documents to guide improvement. Where these exist, the district improvement plan should be developed in alignment with these documents, ensuring that it supports the district's broader improvement priorities while serving as a coordinated implementation plan for the highest-priority improvement work.

when districts are unable to make progress despite coordinated support, the system provides increasingly intensive levels of assistance, expertise, and intervention to help remove barriers and ensure that students have access to the conditions necessary for success. As described in [Strategy H](#), this escalation is not intended as punishment, but as a mechanism for ensuring that the system responds appropriately when local capacity is insufficient to achieve needed improvement.

Strong mechanisms for quality assurance and system learning are essential to ensuring that the SSoS provides consistently high-quality, effective support and continuously improves over time. Information about district progress, implementation challenges, and emerging needs would be regularly shared across county, regional, and state levels. This information would allow the SSoS not only to strengthen district improvement efforts, but also to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of support provided across the system, identify common challenges, improve support strategies, and inform future policy decisions (see [Part I](#), Strategy D). As described in [Part I](#), Strategy C, these functions require clear statewide leadership responsible for maintaining statewide standards, overseeing implementation support, routinizing quality assurance, and using system feedback to continuously strengthen the quality and consistency of COE-led Differentiated Assistance over time.

Implementation actions

G.1 Establish statewide expectations for high-quality improvement planning and case-managed support.

Improving the quality and consistency of district support begins with establishing clear, statewide expectations for how the improvement plan is created and how support is provided. California has lacked a formal, consistently applied definition of what high-quality support should include, resulting in considerable variation in district experience across counties. Recent changes to the COE funding model create an opportunity to establish a shared statewide understanding of how COEs should provide Differentiated Assistance to identified districts, and to build the structures to ensure consistent implementation statewide.

Building on California's existing frameworks, tools, and guidance documents—as well as current efforts being led by the county offices to create definitions and best practices³²—the next step would be to define the core elements of both high-quality improvement planning and case-managed COE-led Differentiated Assistance so districts experience consistent, coordinated, and effective support regardless of location, available expertise, or local coordination structures. These core elements

³² The California County Superintendents' Curricular and Improvement Support Committee (CISC) is currently developing definitions and implementation guidance for universal and targeted assistance in response to state policy changes.

would serve to create a shared understanding of high-quality practice, providing a foundation for implementation, professional learning, continuous improvement, and quality assurance across the SSoS. These expectations should define the essential elements of high-quality support without prescribing a single improvement strategy, recognizing that district needs vary considerably, and improvement approaches must reflect local context, capacity, and challenges.

The core elements should also include guidance about how COEs access and connect districts to the expertise needed to address the specific challenges identified through the improvement process. Because no individual COE can reasonably maintain deep expertise across all instructional, organizational, governance, operational, and fiscal domains, the standards should establish clear expectations for when and how COEs engage regional and statewide expertise when district needs exceed locally available capacity. Building on the universal support infrastructure described in [Strategy E](#)—and the original intent of the Geo Lead structure—California should clarify and formalize the roles, referral pathways, and coordination structures that enable expertise to be shared across county, regional, and state partners. In this way, the case-managed support model helps ensure that districts receive the right expertise, at the right time, through a coordinated support team organized around district need.

Specific tasks:

- Adopt statewide expectations for quality case-managed support, developed in partnership with districts and COEs, that define the required elements of the COE-led Differentiated Assistance process, including coordinated entry, systemic review, improvement planning, implementation support, progress monitoring, and review.
- Establish required components of district improvement plans, including how they align to and operationalize district LCAP priorities through clear goals, measurable milestones, defined provider responsibilities, evidence-informed improvement strategies, and processes for monitoring implementation and progress.
- Clarify the responsibilities of COEs as both providing direct assistance and the primary coordinator of district support by establishing clear expectations for case management. This includes maintaining a single district support plan, coordinating contributions from multiple support providers, monitoring implementation, supporting districts in overcoming barriers to improvement, and adjusting supports over time as district needs evolve.
- Develop common tools, protocols, and planning templates that support

consistent implementation across counties while allowing flexibility for districts to address local needs and priorities.

- Aligned with [Strategy E](#), establish regional and statewide networks of specialized expertise that can be accessed through the case-managed support process, ensuring districts receive timely support aligned to identified needs in areas such as instructional improvement, governance, organizational development, fiscal management, labor-management relations, leadership development, and student support.
- Clarify expectations for reciprocal accountability by defining the responsibilities of districts, COEs, regional partners, and state agencies throughout the improvement process.
- Use these expectations as the basis for training, provider oversight, quality assurance reviews, provider selection decisions, and determinations about whether support is being delivered effectively (described in Strategies [G.2](#) and [G.3](#)).

G.2 Build COE and regional capacity to deliver high-quality support.

The redesigned model depends on COEs serving as trusted partners to districts, by aligning and coordinating support across the system, connecting districts to the resources and expertise they need, and actively participating in regional improvement efforts. While many COEs have developed strong expertise and effective approaches to district improvement, this new role will require additional capacity, infrastructure, and support. Capacity and experience currently vary across the state, and if California is to establish consistent expectations for COE-led Differentiated Assistance, it must ensure that county offices have the tools, expertise, and resources necessary to meet those expectations.

Design Team members emphasized that high-quality support should not depend on geography. Districts across the state should be able to expect access to knowledgeable support providers, specialized expertise when needed, and consistent implementation of statewide quality expectations. Achieving this vision will require sustained investments in COE capacity, supported by a stronger regional infrastructure for professional learning, calibration, coaching, and continuous improvement. Geo Leads would contribute to this work as regional collaborators and connectors, helping COEs share expertise, learn from one another, support implementation of statewide priorities, and strengthen the quality and coherence of support across regions. To fulfill this role effectively, Geo Leads themselves would require clearer, more focused responsibilities, along with structures that ensure quality, consistency, and coordination across sites.

Specific tasks:

- Leverage existing statewide professional learning opportunities and networks to support county office staff engaged in COE-led Differentiated Assistance activities and strengthen shared understanding of the statewide quality expectations described in [Strategy G.1](#).
- Build on the existing Geo Lead structure to facilitate collaboration, support implementation of statewide quality expectations, and promote shared approaches to high-quality targeted assistance across regions.
- Ensure each Geo Lead has the resources, staffing, training, and knowledge necessary to effectively support COEs in building local capacity, recognizing that staffing models, scope, and priorities vary across regions.
- Develop the capacity of COEs to engage regional and statewide networks of specialized expertise that can complement and expand local efforts to support districts in addressing identified needs.

G.3 Create stronger quality assurance, accountability, and system learning structures.

The redesigned system establishes clearer expectations not only for districts, but also for the agencies and organizations responsible for supporting district improvement. Design Team members emphasized that reciprocal accountability requires stronger mechanisms for assessing the quality and effectiveness of support, understanding whether districts are receiving the assistance they need, and using implementation experience to strengthen the system over time.

A redesigned support system should create regular opportunities to assess support quality, learn from implementation across counties and regions, gather feedback from districts, identify recurring barriers to improvement, and strengthen support strategies based on evidence from practice. These structures should be designed not as compliance exercises, but as mechanisms for continuous improvement, transparency, and shared accountability. Information gathered through these processes should support continuous improvement at both the local and statewide levels, helping strengthen district support efforts while informing the ongoing evolution of the SSoS.

Specific tasks:

- To ensure these functions are carried out consistently over time, California should make clear which statewide entity is responsible for leading quality assurance, coordinating system learning, maintaining statewide standards, and using implementation evidence to continuously strengthen the SSoS (see [Part I](#), Strategy C for more detail).

- Establish a statewide quality assurance process through which this lead entity regularly reviews district improvement plans, implementation progress, and support quality to ensure alignment with statewide quality expectations, identify areas where additional support or intervention may be needed, and inform decisions about changes in support arrangements (further discussed in [Strategy H](#)).
- Develop mechanisms for gathering and analyzing district feedback, implementation data, and support outcomes to assess the quality, responsiveness, and effectiveness of COE-led Differentiated Assistance across counties and regions.
- Create regular statewide and regional learning processes that identify promising practices in COE-led Differentiated Assistance, recurring implementation challenges, and emerging district needs, and share those lessons across the SSoS.
- Use findings from quality reviews and implementation data to inform COE capacity-building, strengthen support strategies, and identify when changes to policy, guidance, funding, or system design may be warranted.
- Connect these learning and quality assurance processes to the broader practice-to-policy review cycle described in [Part I](#), Strategy D, ensuring that lessons from district improvement efforts inform continuous improvement in both the SSoS and the larger policy system.

Early success measures

- **More consistent, high-quality district support.** Districts experience targeted assistance as coordinated, responsive, and focused on addressing local needs, removing barriers, and strengthening local capacity, with greater consistency across the SSoS.
- **Increased county and regional capacity to support district improvement.** COEs, including Geo Leads, increasingly strengthen their capacity to coordinate support, facilitate improvement planning, and connect districts with specialized expertise when additional capacity is needed.
- **Stronger system learning.** Regular review of district improvement plans, implementation progress, and support quality generates actionable information that strengthens district support while building a statewide understanding of effective improvement practices, recurring implementation challenges, and opportunities to refine policies, supports, and system structures.

Strategy H. Mobilize Increasingly Intensive State Support for District Improvement

Core idea: If California creates a structured process for escalating support and intervention in response to persistent challenges and unmet needs, then every district will receive the help needed to improve and every student will have access to educational opportunity.

The challenge

A core responsibility of any statewide support system is ensuring that districts receive the level of support, expertise, and intervention necessary to improve outcomes for students. Most districts can be effectively supported through universal assistance, Differentiated Assistance, and local improvement efforts. However, some districts face challenges that exceed local capacity, require specialized expertise, or persist despite sustained support. In some cases, the challenge lies within the district itself. In others, the support provider may lack the capacity, expertise, authority, or trust necessary to help the district improve. In these situations, the system must be able to respond in a way that is timely, coordinated, and proportional to the level of need, ensuring that districts receive the support and expertise necessary to improve.

The Working Group concluded that California's SSoS lacks a clear and consistently applied process for responding when districts are unable to improve despite sustained support. Historically, the state relied on a series of quantitative performance thresholds to trigger movement between different levels of assistance. Districts could be identified for COE-led Differentiated Assistance, escalated to Geo Lead Differentiated Assistance, and ultimately become eligible for DTA based on separate sets of performance criteria.

While these classifications created formal escalation pathways, the pathways themselves were often difficult to understand and did not correspond to meaningful differences in the type of support, level of authority, or expectations placed on districts and support providers. As districts moved through the system, it was often unclear what about the support they were receiving had changed, why it had changed, or what additional actions would occur if improvement did not follow. In practice, escalation frequently meant a change in designation rather than a meaningful change in the system's response.

Most importantly, the system has lacked an operational mechanism for responding when improvement did not occur. If a district remains unable or unwilling to improve despite years of support, there has been no clearly defined process for increasing expertise, coordination, authority, or intervention to address the underlying barriers. Similarly, there have been few mechanisms for responding when the existing support arrangement was not effectively meeting district needs. Compounding this challenge, responsibility for escalation was fragmented across multiple agencies, programs, and statutory provisions. CCEE's role in DTA has largely been to advise and assist districts, while state-level intervention authority resided with the SSPI. However, although law (Education Code sections 52072.1 and 52072.6) provided authority for the SSPI, with SBE approval, to intervene in underperforming districts, these pathways have not been operationalized within the SSoS. The Working Group concluded that these gaps could allow districts to remain in prolonged cycles of underperformance while students continued to experience inequitable educational opportunities.

Recent policy changes have significantly altered the context in which these recommendations are being considered. New investments in universal support have shifted COEs toward a more proactive role focused on helping districts address challenges before performance declines (see [Strategy E](#)). At the same time, the criteria for identifying districts for Differentiated Assistance have been substantially modified, allowing COEs to focus targeted support on a smaller number of districts with the greatest need. The quantitative triggers previously associated with Geo Lead support have been eliminated, leaving DTA as the state's primary formal escalation mechanism for academic improvement. At the same time, state-level academic intervention authority remains in statute and, under the recently-enacted governance reforms, will transition from the SSPI to the Education Commissioner. Together, these changes create an opportunity to integrate existing support and intervention authorities into a coherent escalation continuum with clear pathways for increasing support, expertise, coordination, and authority when improvement does not occur.

The vision for California

In the redesigned system, escalation functions as a structured process for ensuring that districts receive the level of support, expertise, coordination, and authority necessary to improve outcomes for students. Rather than serving as a punitive response to poor performance, escalation is a mechanism for responding when district needs exceed the capacity of the current support arrangement. The goal is to ensure that districts receive the support they need, with increasing levels of assistance, expertise, and intervention when necessary, so that all students have access to the educational opportunities they deserve. In this way, escalation reflects

reciprocal accountability: when improvement is not occurring, the responsibility does not rest solely with the district, but also with the state to identify the barriers to improvement and mobilize the resources needed to help the district overcome them.

At the center of this vision is the idea that support should become more intensive as need becomes more acute. Most districts will be effectively served through universal supports, targeted assistance, and local improvement efforts (as described in Strategies [E](#) and [G](#)). When those efforts are insufficient, however, the system should be able to bring additional expertise, stronger coordination across agencies and providers, increased attention to implementation, and, when necessary, the authority and tools to address barriers that districts cannot overcome on their own. For example, a district may seek to redesign a high school program to better meet student needs but be constrained by outdated policy requirements, struggle to recruit and retain qualified teachers because of regional labor market challenges, or may need to consolidate schools to remain financially solvent but face significant political resistance. In these circumstances, the state should be able to provide policy flexibility, remove bureaucratic barriers, craft regional solutions, or reinforce sound local decisions so districts can successfully implement needed changes.

The Design Team envisioned replacing the current collection of academic escalation classifications with a single, coherent escalation pathway integrated with systemic reviews and the improvement planning process (depicted in **Figure 2** above). Decisions about escalation would no longer be driven solely by quantitative performance thresholds. Instead, they would be informed by evidence gathered through systemic reviews, district improvement plans, implementation progress, district feedback, and assessments of support quality. This approach recognizes that the need for escalation may arise because district challenges exceed local capacity, because barriers persist despite sustained support, or because the existing support arrangement is not effectively meeting district needs.³³

COEs would continue to serve as the primary providers of Differentiated Assistance. Following identification, districts would enter a coordinated support process that includes a systemic review, development of a district improvement plan, and ongoing case-managed support aligned to identified needs. In some cases, it may be determined, by the district, the county, or CCEE, that districts would benefit from additional expertise, coordination, or support beyond what is available through their COE. When this occurs, a Geo Lead may partner with the local county office to coordinate and strengthen targeted support or, where appropriate, provide targeted

³³ It is important to note that if future state policy continues to utilize quantitative indicators for referral to more intensive intervention (currently DTA), the diagnostic and intervention processes could still be streamlined so that districts experience a single, unified escalation pathway.

support directly. Or, in more severe cases, district support could be escalated directly to CCEE. This determination could be made at the time of identification, at the request of the district, COE, or CCEE, or later in the process as information from systemic review and improvement planning helps clarify the types of support that would be most beneficial.

For districts facing severe, persistent, or system-level challenges that substantially interfere with student learning, the Design Team envisioned a clearer mechanism for escalation, led in partnership between CCEE and CDE. Rather than treating intensive support and state intervention as separate processes, the redesigned system would integrate them into a single escalation pathway. As districts move into more intensive levels of support, CCEE would continue to provide DTA while state-level authorities become increasingly engaged in addressing barriers that cannot be resolved through support alone.³⁴ This could include coordinating specialized expertise, facilitating cross-agency problem-solving, identifying opportunities for regulatory flexibility, elevating policy issues that require state action, aligning resources to district needs, or helping districts navigate challenges that cannot be resolved through local efforts. Rather than operating as a separate intervention track, state-level intervention authorities would be integrated into the same review, planning, support, and monitoring structures that guide DTA, allowing support and intervention to function as parts of a single improvement continuum.

The goal in exercising these authorities is not for the state to take over district decision-making, but to ensure that local leaders have the support, authority, and conditions they need to improve schools. In most cases, these authorities would be used to help district leaders implement necessary changes by providing additional leverage, resolving barriers that extend beyond district control, and reinforcing difficult decisions that are essential to improving outcomes for students. Only in the rare circumstance where persistent leadership or governance dysfunction has itself become the primary barrier to improvement would the most significant actions, such as appointing an academic trustee, be considered. Even then, these actions would be time-limited and designed to restore the conditions for effective local leadership, not replace it. As districts build greater capacity and demonstrate sustained improvement, responsibility would gradually transition fully back to local leadership, reflecting the district's increased ability to lead its own continuous improvement efforts.

³⁴ Under California's recently adopted governance reforms, the intervention authorities assigned in Education Code §52072 transition from the SSPI to the Education Commissioner. In extreme cases, these authorities may be utilized to compel change within districts and include directing changes to a district's LCAP; requiring aligned budget revisions; staying or rescinding local actions that impede academic improvement; and appointing an academic trustee.

Ultimately, escalation reflects reciprocal accountability in practice. When improvement is not occurring despite sustained support, the SSoS has a responsibility not only to expect improvement, but also to strengthen the support, expertise, coordination, and authority available to help districts achieve it.

Implementation actions

H.1 Establish a unified escalation pathway for academic improvement.

Design Team members emphasized that escalation should function as a structured process for ensuring that districts receive the level of support, expertise, coordination, and authority necessary to improve outcomes for students. The redesigned system would establish a single, coherent escalation pathway that integrates support and intervention into a unified support continuum. As district challenges become more severe, persistent, or complex, the system would provide progressively greater levels of assistance, expertise, coordination, and authority while maintaining continuity in review, planning, support, and monitoring activities.

Specific tasks:

- Create a unified escalation pathway that combines COE-led Differentiated Assistance, DTA, and state-level intervention authorities within a common review, planning, support, and monitoring structure, ensuring that support and intervention operate as parts of the same improvement process.
- Use evidence from systemic reviews, district improvement plans, implementation progress, district feedback, support quality reviews, and student outcomes to inform escalation decisions, rather than quantitative indicators alone.³⁵
- Ensure escalation decisions consider both district conditions and the adequacy of the support currently being provided.
- Create pathways for districts to move to more intensive levels of support when local capacity is insufficient, implementation barriers persist, or the current support arrangement is not producing improvement.
- Establish clear pathways for returning districts to less intensive levels of support as local capacity and performance improve.

³⁵ As discussed in more detail in [Strategy F](#), the Design Team recommends eliminating the quantitative identification for DTA to create streamlined identification pathways more aligned with district needs.

H.2 Clarify responsibilities, decision-making authority, and coordination within the escalation system.

A unified escalation pathway will only function effectively if responsibilities, decision-making authority, and coordination structures are clearly defined. Consistent with the broader role-clarity and coordination principles described in [Part I](#), Strategy C, California should identify which entity is responsible for key escalation functions, establish clear decision rights, and create communication routines that support coordinated action across agencies and support providers. The goal is to ensure that all participants understand their responsibilities and can act in a coordinated manner when districts require increasingly intensive support or intervention.

Specific tasks:

- Define responsibility for key escalation functions, including the following:
 - Oversight of the systemic reviews and improvement planning process, and assessing the quality and effectiveness of Differentiated Assistance.
 - Determining when escalation or de-escalation is warranted and exercising state-level intervention authorities when necessary.
 - Monitoring the overall effectiveness, consistency, and continuous improvement of the escalation system.
- Define more clearly the respective roles of COEs, Geo Leads, CCEE, CDE, FCMAT, and other support partners when providing increasingly intensive support and applying escalation criteria.
- Establish formal communication, consultation, and coordination routines between CCEE and CDE/Education Commissioner in particular to support districts receiving intensive support and ensure alignment between support and intervention activities.
- Define how state-level resources, specialized expertise, regulatory flexibility, and cross-agency problem-solving approaches may be mobilized as part of intensive intervention efforts, and how the SBE and the legislature will be involved.
- Establish recurring cross-agency learning reviews that center district feedback alongside evidence of escalation decisions, intervention activities, district progress, and support quality to strengthen implementation, promote consistency and calibration, and continuously improve the escalation process.

H.3 Establish transparency, oversight, and safeguards for escalation decisions.

Because escalation decisions may affect district governance, support responsibilities, and intervention authority, the process must be transparent, fair, evidence-based, and consistently applied. California should establish clear decision rules, oversight structures, and procedural safeguards that promote statewide consistency, protect due process, and build confidence in the redesigned escalation pathway. Ultimately, that confidence will be earned not through the design of the process alone, but through districts' and communities' experiences receiving timely, coordinated, and high-quality support, coupled with transparent decision-making and ongoing opportunities for feedback and learning.

Specific tasks:

- Establish clear statewide criteria and decision rules for escalation, continuation, de-escalation, and reassignment of support responsibilities.
- Require that escalation decisions be supported by documented evidence from systemic reviews, improvement planning processes, implementation progress, support quality reviews, and other relevant information.
- In addition to approving specific escalation actions, charge the SBE with providing oversight of the escalation system, including review of escalation policies, implementation outcomes, and the consistency of decision-making across districts.
- Establish transparent review, complaint, and appeal processes that provide districts with clear avenues to raise concerns regarding escalation decisions, support quality, or application of decision criteria.
- Establish transparent feedback and learning processes that enable districts and support providers to share their experiences with support quality, implementation challenges, and support decisions, using that information to strengthen support quality, improve consistency, and build confidence in the redesigned escalation process over time.

Early success measures

- **Role clarity and coordination.** Districts, COEs serving in both local and Geo Lead roles, and state agency partners have greater clarity regarding roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority within the escalation process, with a shared understanding of how support is coordinated and intensified when districts need additional expertise, resources, or system-level assistance to improve student outcomes.
- **Confidence in the system.** Leaders in identified districts report confidence that support providers have the expertise, resources, and authority necessary to help address the challenges they face, and that escalation decisions are transparent, evidence-based, and focused on improving outcomes for students rather than compliance or punishment.
- **Timely, coordinated support.** Districts receive more timely access to specialized expertise, additional resources, and stronger coordination when existing support arrangements are insufficient.
- **Shared responsibility for improvement.** The SSoS operates with a shared responsibility for student outcomes, with state leaders, support providers, and districts working together to strengthen supports, address barriers, and advance continuous improvement across California.

“ No system is perfectly designed, however we can and should continue to iterate towards something that we are proud of; a system where all students are learning at high levels and all educators feel supported to do their very best work. The honest conversations and real, actionable recommendations from this group can make a big impact for our state.
—Annie Sharp, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

Conclusion

California now has an opportunity to build on its strengths to create a more proactive, coherent, and responsive SSoS—one intentionally designed to help districts address challenges earlier, access meaningful assistance when needed, and receive increasingly intensive support when local challenges exceed local capacity. The vision and implementation ideas emerging from the Core Working Group and Design Team are ultimately about ensuring that every district has access to the expertise, coordination, resources, and support necessary to improve outcomes for students. Through stronger universal support, clearer performance classification and diagnostic processes, higher-quality targeted assistance, and more coherent pathways for escalating support and intervention, California can create a system that is both more responsive to local needs and more accountable for helping districts succeed.

Equally important, the Working Group and Design Team processes demonstrated what is possible when people across roles, perspectives, and institutions come together in a spirit of shared learning and collective responsibility. By creating space for honest reflection, collaborative problem-solving, and shared vision-setting, these processes helped illuminate both the challenges within the current system and the opportunities to build a stronger path forward. Implementing this vision will require sustained partnership, disciplined attention to coherence, and a continued willingness to simplify rather than add to the work of districts and schools. If successful, the result will be a system that is easier to navigate, more coherent in its actions, and better able to help local educators improve outcomes for students. That is both possible and necessary—and it is what California's students deserve.

Appendix A: SSoS Design Team Participants

Table A1. Design Team Members

Name	Role and Organization
Rubén Aurelio	Superintendent, Vallejo City Unified School District
Dr. Daryl F. Camp	Superintendent, San Lorenzo Unified School District and 2025-26 President, Association of California School Administrators (ACSA)
Mindy Fattig*	Deputy Executive Director, California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
Kathryn Ferreira	Executive Director, Educational Innovation and Support, Placer County Office of Education
Corey Greenlaw	Assistant Superintendent, Educational Innovation and Support, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools
Stephanie Gregson*	Deputy Executive Director, California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
Jose Guzman	Assistant Superintendent, Business and Educational Operations, Kings Canyon Unified School District
Jeff Harris	Superintendent, Del Norte County Office of Education and Del Norte County Unified School District
Shayleen Harte	Deputy Executive Officer, Fiscal Crisis & Management Assistance Team (FMCAT)
Jennifer Hicks	Associate Superintendent, Educational Services, Placer County Office of Education
Caryn Lewis	Assistant Superintendent, Educational Services, Monterey County Office of Education
Michelle Magyar*	Senior Advisor, Policy Engagement and Impact Initiatives, California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
Matt Navo*	Executive Director, California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
Christine Olmstead*	Senior Advisor, MTSS, Orange County Department of Education/ California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
Michelle Ramirez	Senior Director, Strategic Improvement, Monterey County Office of Education
Annie Sharp	Executive Director, System Innovation & Improvement, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools
Sujie Shin*	Deputy Executive Director, California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)

*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 Design Team.

Table A2. Participant Observers

Name	Role and Organization
Audrey Boochever	Senior Policy Director, State Board of Education (SBE)
Katie Hardeman	Chief Deputy Executive Director, State Board of Education (SBE)
Ingrid Roberson	Chief Deputy Superintendent, California Department of Education (CDE)
Erika Torres	Deputy Superintendent, California Department of Education (CDE)
Michelle Valdivia	Assistant Policy Director, State Board of Education (SBE)

Appendix B. Direct Financial Support to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) that Intend to Build Professional Capacity

Each row is a funded program passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor that contained explicit guidance that funds were to be used to support the professional development, training and technical assistance of professionals in local school systems. The amount of funding listed in each year indicates the fiscal year in which those funds were initially allocated. In some cases, these funded programs allocated the funds to LEAs in subsequent fiscal years, i.e., funds were appropriated in 2020–21 and LEA allocated funds occurred starting in 2021–22. The following acronyms are used in the table below: Block Grant (BG), Professional Development (PD), Education (Educ), Technical Assistance (TA), and English Learner (EL).

Funded Program ¹	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	2025–26	2026–27	Total
Total Allocated Funds (\$ in millions)	\$2,526,773	\$2,030,162	\$182,439	\$11,287	\$1,823,807	\$2,152,337	\$849,098	\$9,575,903
Total California Student Enrollment ²	6,002,523	5,892,240	5,852,544	5,837,690	5,806,221	5,731,260	5,662,000	
Allocated Funds Per Student (\$) ³	\$420	\$344	\$31	\$2	\$314	\$376	\$150	\$1,637
Educator Effectiveness BG	1,498,208							1,498,208
Literacy Coaches Grant Program	250,000	250,000						500,000
National Board Incentive Grant	250,000					30,000		280,000
A–G and College Readiness Grant Program ⁴	136,878							136,878
Kitchen Infrastructure and Training Grants ⁵	75,000					150,000	50,000	275,000

¹ California Department of Finance. (2022). 2022–23 state budget: Education (6100 Department of Education). [State of California. https://ebudget.ca.gov](https://ebudget.ca.gov)
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 California Department of Finance. (2026). 2026–27 state budget: Education (6100 Department of Education). [State of California. https://ebudget.ca.gov](https://ebudget.ca.gov)

² California Department of Education. (n.d.). *Census Day enrollment data* [Data set]. Multiple years including 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/files/enrcensus.asp> The figure for 2026 is a straight line, average projection and is an estimate.

³ The calculation for the amount per student is the total allocated funds for that year divided by the total enrollment. This figure does not represent the amount allocated to each LEA because different eligibility rules result in different allocated funds per student.

⁴ Amount is modified to be 25% of the total allocated funds in the state budget as an approximate estimate that is allocated to professional development.

⁵ Amount is modified to be 50% of the total allocated funds in the state budget as an approximate estimate that is allocated to professional development.

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Building a More Coherent, Responsive, and Effective State Education System
 Part II. Redesigning California's Statewide System of Support

Funded Program¹	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	2025–26	2026–27	Total
Inclusive Early Education Expansion Program	62,500							62,500
Professional Dev Infrastructure Accelerated Learning	50,000							50,000
Educ Workforce Investment Grant	30,000	5,000						35,000
Behavioral Health Training	25,000					15,000		40,000
Ethnic Studies Curricula BG	25,000							25,000
Statewide Social Emotional Learning Resources	25,000							25,000
21st Century School Leadership Academies	25,000							25,000
California Early Math Initiative	18,837							18,837
Supporting Inclusive Practices Project	15,000					30,000		45,000
Prof Learning Reading Instruction Intervention	10,000							10,000
Anti-Bias Training Program	10,000							10,000
Ethnic Studies Professional Development	5,000							5,000
Dual Language Immersion Grant Program	5,000							5,000
Medi-Cal Billing Professional Learning Network	5,000							5,000
Dyslexia Initiative	2,000							2,000
Environmental Climate Change Educ Resources	1,500							1,500
Distance Learning Curriculum Instructional Guidance	750							750
Model Curricula Funding	600	7,000						7,600
Holocaust and Genocide Educ Grant Program	500					2,500		3,000
Learning Recovery BG		1,406,412	179,939			94,663		1,681,014
Universal Pre-Kindergarten Plan Implement Grant		150,000				125,000		275,000

California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)
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 Part II. Redesigning California's Statewide System of Support

Funded Program¹	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	2025–26	2026–27	Total
Community Engagement Initiative (Round 2)		100,000						100,000
Math and Science PD		85,000						85,000
Bilingual Teacher PD Program		20,000						20,000
Anti-Bias Education Grant		5,000						5,000
Restorative Justice Practices		1,750						1,750
Anti-Bias Education BG			2,500		2,500	2,500	2,500	10,000
Std Support Professional Dev Discretionary BG				11,287	1,028,982	1,215,424	792,748	3,048,441
K–12 Literacy Coaches and Mathematics Support					215,000	400,000		615,000
Literacy Instruction PD					200,000			200,000
Emergency Learning Recovery BG					189,325			189,325
Financial Literacy Resources					80,000			80,000
Reading Difficulties Screening PD					65,000	40,000		105,000
Mathematics PD					20,000			20,000
Reading Difficulties Screener Support					10,000			10,000
CYBHI K-12 School-Linked Partnership Grants					10,000			10,000
Inclusive College TA Center					2,000	2,000	2,000	6,000
Instructional Continuity					1,000			1,000
Support Newcomer Students						25,000		25,000
Support Youth Experiencing Homelessness						17,500		17,500
Transitional Kindergarten EL Assessment						2,500		2,500
ELA/ELD Instruction Materials Supplement Guide						250		250
Reading Difficulties Screener							1,250	1,250
California Educators Together							600	600

Appendix C: Abbreviations and Acronyms

ATSI	Additional Targeted Support and Improvement
CARS	Consolidated Application and Reporting System
CCEE	California Collaborative for Educational Excellence
CDE	California Department of Education
CIM	comprehensive improvement monitoring
COE	county office of education
CSI	Comprehensive School Intervention
FCMAT	Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team
ILT	interagency leadership team
LCAP	Local Control and Accountability Plan
LCFF	Local Control Funding Formula
PLC	professional learning community
SACS	Standardized Accounting Code Structure
SARC	School Accountability Report Card
SBE	State Board of Education
SCALE	Stanford Center for Acceleration of Learning and Equity
SSoS	Statewide System of Support
SSPI	State Superintendent of Public Instruction
TK	transitional kindergarten
WASC	Western Association of School Credentialing