



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

Part I. Strengthening State-Level Capacity to Lead and Support System Improvement

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. Over the next year, the state will experience a convergence of major governance and policy shifts: the election of a new Governor and State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI) and the enactment of significant state-level governance reforms that will reshape how California's education system is led and coordinated.¹ Together, these changes create a rare opportunity to rethink not only what California expects from its public education system, but 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.²

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 California's Statewide System of Support (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.³

¹ [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. Another suite of bills being advanced by the California School Boards Association, still in the legislative process at the time of publication, would create a committee that makes a plan to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap ([AB 2225](#)), create a commission and process to oversee the state's progress ([AB 2202](#)), require the Legislative Analyst's Office to write a summary report each year ([AB 2149](#)) and create a state-level accountability dashboard ([AB 2514](#)).

² 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).

³ 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.

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 county offices of education (COEs). Built around reciprocal accountability,⁴ 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 I. Strengthening State-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 second memo and companion publication, ***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

⁴ 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.

and district leaders, COE staff, and others who work closely with districts to support 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’ synthesis⁵ 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 able to respond to local needs, and capable of continuously learning, adapting, and improving at the scale that California’s students deserve.

“ Working with other professionals from across the state to improve how California supports students is important! 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

⁵ 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.

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.

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 \(Redesigning California’s Statewide System of Support\)](#).

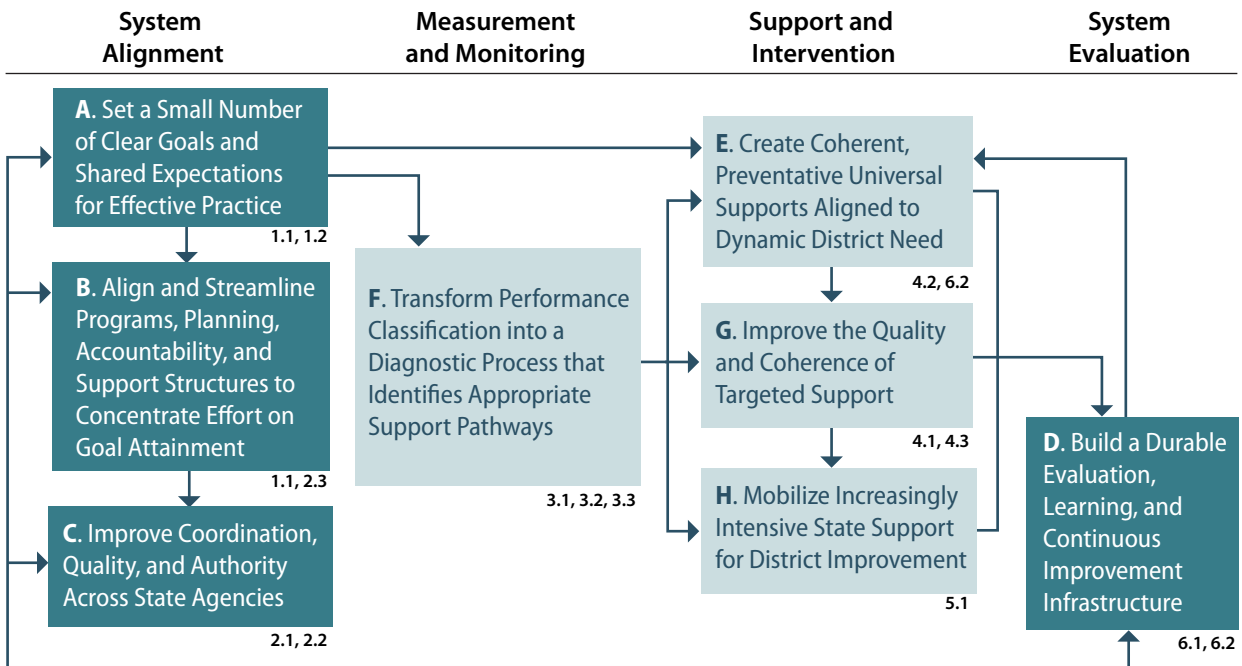


Coherence is not about sameness; it is about making it easier for adults at every level of the system to do the right work for students.
—Christine Olmstead, Orange County Department of Education

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 parts work together as an integrated framework for strengthening California's Statewide System of Support. The lettering (Strategies A–H) corresponds to the relevant sections of the two memos, with Strategies A–D presented in [Part II: Redesigning California's Statewide System of Support](#) 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 partners⁶ 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.

⁶ 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;⁷ and examples from other states and sectors. Through

⁷ 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. 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 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.

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.

Together, the strategies and implementation actions that follow, organized into four interconnected functions, reflect an emerging framework for how to achieve a more coherent, responsive, and improvement-oriented education system:

- [Strategy A. Set a Small Number of Clear Goals and Shared Expectations for Effective Practice](#)
- [Strategy B. Streamline Programs, Planning, Accountability, and Support Structures to Concentrate Effort on Goal Attainment](#)
- [Strategy C. Improve Coordination, Quality, and Authority Across State Agencies](#)
- [Strategy D. Build a Durable Evaluation, Learning, and Continuous Improvement Infrastructure](#)



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

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.

Strategy A. Set a Small Number of Clear Goals and Shared Expectations for Effective Practice

Core idea: If California establishes shared goals and clear expectations for effective professional practice, and aligns policy, accountability, and support around those priorities, then the education system will operate with greater coherence and focus, strengthening its capacity to improve outcomes for all students.

The challenge

California's education system has developed an extensive set of priorities, initiatives, accountability structures, and support programs intended to improve outcomes for students and respond to the state's diverse needs. Over time, however, these efforts have accumulated in ways that can make the system difficult to navigate and challenging to align around a shared vision of success.

Adding to this challenge, California's education system is operating in a rapidly changing environment. Technological advances, shifting workforce demands, demographic changes, and increasing social complexity place new demands on schools and creating growing expectations for what students should know and be able to do. Schools are increasingly expected to respond to these challenges while also serving as a critical connection point to other child-serving systems. As the work of schools and districts becomes more complex, the need for clear priorities, aligned supports, and coherent improvement structures becomes increasingly important. Yet many educators continue to navigate a system characterized by fragmented initiatives, dueling expectations, and competing demands on their time and attention.

Districts are often working across multiple priorities, timelines, and improvement processes at the same time, which can make it challenging to see how these efforts connect to and reinforce one another. This can make implementation more challenging, create competing demands on local capacity, and make it more difficult to sustain a consistent focus on the practices and priorities that have the greatest impact on student outcomes. Over time, these conditions contribute to initiative fatigue, uneven implementation, and a reversion to compliance and process management rather than long-term capacity building that improves teaching and learning.

A related challenge is that the system lacks a shared operational definition of what effective practice looks like at the classroom, school, and district levels. California

already has strong frameworks and standards—including the California Standards for the Teaching Profession and the California Professional Standards for Education Leaders—that describe important dimensions of progression quality and improvement pathways. However, opportunities remain to more fully connect these frameworks with statewide goals and align them across accountability and support structures that demonstrate how individuals’ professional capacities function together in educational environments.

The vision for California

California should establish a small number of clear, durable statewide goals that provide a clear throughline from policy to resource allocation, support, and accountability, creating greater coherence across the education system. These goals should prioritize foundational academic success—particularly literacy, mathematics, and college and career readiness—while recognizing that students achieve strong academic outcomes only when they experience high-quality instruction alongside the conditions that support learning, including engagement, belonging, attendance, well-being, inclusion, and strong academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports. The intent is not to narrow the state’s vision for students or diminish the importance of broader whole-child outcomes. Rather, it is to establish a small number of shared priorities that organize the work of the system while continuing to monitor, value, and invest in the broader conditions that enable students to thrive. These priorities would build from California’s existing state priorities and be complemented by other system components—including the California School Dashboard, local planning processes, and improvement supports—that together promote whole-child development and long-term student success.

Once statewide goals are established, the redesigned system would define what effective professional practice looks like at each level of the education system to reach them, including the following:

- What high-quality instruction looks like in classrooms, aligned to statewide goals and expectations for student learning.
- How effective schools should be organized and led to support high-quality instruction, continuous improvement, and positive student outcomes.



Our goal was never to narrow our focus to just test scores, but 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

- The role of districts in creating the conditions, capacity, and coherence necessary to support effective instruction across schools.
- The role of COEs and the SSoS as a whole in providing timely, high-quality, and coordinated support that responds to district needs and strengthens local improvement efforts.
- The role of state agencies, statewide partners, educator preparation programs, and policymakers in creating the conditions for success by aligning policy, resources, capacity building, and support around statewide goals and continuous improvement.

Design Team participants emphasized that statewide goals and shared expectations are intended to clarify what the system is trying to accomplish, not prescribe a single approach for how districts and schools should accomplish it. The intent is to focus attention on a shared set of outcomes and expectations while preserving local flexibility, professional judgment, and innovation in determining the strategies most appropriate for local contexts and student needs.

Together, clear statewide goals and shared expectations for professional practice would create the foundation for the broader system redesign described throughout this memo, enabling stronger alignment around statewide priorities ([Strategy B](#)), better coordination across agencies and support providers ([Strategy C](#)), and clearer evaluation and feedback loops to understand whether the system is improving outcomes for students over time ([Strategy D](#)).

Implementation actions

A.1. Establish statewide goals through a transparent, collaborative process that builds clarity and shared commitment.

California should undertake a broad statewide vision-setting process focused on defining long-term student success. This process should build broad public understanding of and support for statewide priorities while creating a durable vision that can anchor future alignment efforts across policy, accountability, support, and improvement structures.

Existing efforts in California (including [Scaling Student Success](#) and the [SBE's Portrait of a Learner initiative](#)), as well as vision-setting efforts in states such as Washington, Indiana, and Arizona,⁸ provide important foundations for this work.

⁸ Several states have undertaken statewide vision-setting efforts to define what students should know and be able to do, then used those visions to guide alignment across graduation requirements, instructional models, workforce preparation, and other system functions. Examples include [Washington's Profile of a Graduate](#), [Indiana's diploma redesign](#), and [Arizona's Portrait of a Graduate Initiative](#).

Specific tasks:

- Conduct a statewide engagement process involving educators, students, families, district leaders, higher education, employers, municipal leaders, business leaders, and community partners to collaboratively develop a shared, future-oriented vision for student success building from the SBE's adopted Portrait of a Learner.⁹
- Expand on the SBE's adopted Portrait of a Learner to articulate the knowledge, skills, competencies, and dispositions students should develop through California's public education system, now and into the future.
- Clarify the role of schools and districts in relation to other child-serving systems (e.g., health, social services, housing) and establish clear pathways for coordinating and integrating supports at the local level.¹⁰
- Build from, extend, and align with existing statewide vision-setting efforts across other child-serving systems.

A.2. Prioritize a small number of nonnegotiable student outcomes to focus the system.

Developed as part of the broader statewide vision-setting process, California should identify a small number of nonnegotiable, measurable, and high-priority academic outcomes capable of anchoring system coherence over time. Although there was support across both the Working Group and Design Team for focusing the system around a small number of academic outcomes, members did not reach full consensus on this recommendation. There was, however, broad agreement that sustained improvement requires greater clarity, focus, and stability. To this end, these priorities are intended not to narrow the system to test scores alone, but to provide a stable focal point for aligning accountability, support, intervention, and resource allocation.¹¹ These priorities would provide a coherent framework

⁹ This could be part of the process laid out by [AB 181](#), which requires the Education Commissioner to develop findings and recommendations for a second phase of education governance consolidation and streamlining, submitted in an interim report by June 30, 2027, with a final report due to the Governor and the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the Legislature on October 1, 2027.

¹⁰ Recently enacted policy continues to invest in community schools and the cross-agency coordination to support them. The statutory language finalized in [AB 126](#) directs the state and regional technical assistance centers to expand cross-agency system integration (Education Code section 8902).

¹¹ This practice is similar to the way high-functioning Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) operate within schools. As discussed in the brief, [What Does It Take to Accelerate the Learning of Every Child?](#) (2023) about CCEE's Intensive Assistance Model, PLCs focus on a small number of essential learning outcomes and use them to align instruction, assessment, and intervention. This does not mean teachers stop teaching other content; rather, teams work collectively to ensure all students master key outcomes while continuing to support broader learning goals. At the state level, the same principle applies: a small number of clear priorities can focus the system, align action across agencies, and create shared responsibility for results. Like effective PLCs, statewide priorities should also be subject to continuous learning and refinement. While priorities should remain sufficiently stable to

for aligning broader investments in whole-child development, student supports, and instructional improvement, recognizing that gains in student achievement are most likely when academic and non-academic supports are integrated and mutually reinforcing.¹²

Specific tasks:

- Identify a limited number of measurable statewide student outcomes that will function as long-term system priorities.
- Prioritize foundational academic outcomes—particularly literacy, mathematics, and college and career readiness—while recognizing the importance of engagement, attendance, well-being, and other contributing conditions to student growth.
- Align accountability, support, intervention, and resource allocation structures around these priorities through other implementation actions contained in these memos (as further discussed in Strategies [B](#), [C](#), and [D](#)).
- Maintain sustained focus on those priorities and student outcomes over time at the policy level with the goal of reducing fragmentation and initiative overload at the county and local levels.
- Review and amend existing programs and initiatives to ensure alignment with statewide priorities in coordination with [Strategy B](#).

Because these priorities would influence accountability, support, intervention, and resource allocation decisions across the system, the state will need clear governance structures that define who is responsible for establishing, maintaining, and revising them over time. [Strategy C](#) addresses the roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority necessary to support this work.

A.3. Define and operationalize a shared framework for effective professional practice.

Design Team members emphasized the importance of establishing a shared, practice-based understanding of effective instruction and the school- and district-level practices needed to advance statewide goals. Members emphasized the importance of building from and refining existing California standards, frameworks, and diagnostic tools. The goal is not to introduce another stand-alone framework for districts and schools to navigate, but to align, simplify, and strengthen existing expectations so they operate as a more coherent and mutually reinforcing system.

enable coherent implementation, they should be periodically revisited and adjusted in light of evidence, changing conditions, and what the system learns through implementation.

¹² See the [Learning Policy Institute's Science of Learning and Development resource page](#) for an overview of the research and its implications for education policy and system design.

Existing foundations provide important building blocks for creating a more coherent shared framework. These include the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, the Western Association of School Credentialing (WASC) high school accreditation process, the California Community Schools framework, school improvement resources and frameworks published by CDE, professional learning community (PLC)-based improvement frameworks, and diagnostic tools actively used by CCEE and the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) with participating school systems.

Specific tasks:

- Conduct a comprehensive inventory of existing guidance documents, diagnostic tools, assessments, and SSoS resources, and build from that inventory to develop shared expectations for high-quality instructional, school, and district practice aligned to statewide goals, creating a common understanding of the practices the system is seeking to strengthen through policy, accountability, support, and improvement efforts.
- Clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of schools and districts in supporting instructional improvement, while recognizing that these functions may be organized differently across local contexts, including districts of varying size and organizational structure.
- Operationalize these shared expectations into concrete “look-fors,” implementation guidance, and self-assessment tools that support local implementation and continuous improvement.
- Align and refine existing guidance documents, accreditation processes, and diagnostic tools around this shared vision of effective instructional, school, and district practices so that educators, support providers, and policymakers have a common understanding of what good practice looks like and how it contributes to statewide goals.
- Ensure frameworks are actively embedded in reflection, diagnosis, and continuous improvement procedures rather than compliance-oriented evaluation.

Early success measures

- **Broad awareness and understanding of statewide priorities.** Surveys and interest holder engagement processes should indicate that educators, families, policymakers, and system leaders can identify the statewide vision, priority student outcomes, and expectations for effective practice.
- **Greater clarity about system direction and roles.** State agencies, COEs, and districts should report a stronger shared understanding of the state's priorities, how their work contributes to those priorities, and how success will be measured.
- **Visible alignment of new policies to statewide goals.** New initiatives, guidance, funding proposals, accountability structures, and support efforts should increasingly demonstrate explicit alignment to the adopted statewide goals and expectations for practice.

Strategy B. Streamline Programs, Planning, Accountability, and Support Structures to Concentrate Effort on Goal Attainment

Core idea: If California transitions from layered programs and reporting tracks to a single district-facing improvement cycle aligned with shared statewide goals, high-quality support, and reciprocal accountability, then districts will experience the system as more coherent, coordinated, and efficient in the use of limited time.

The challenge

The Working Group and Design Team shared the view that, since the inception of LCFF, the education system has developed a complex network of programs, initiatives, reporting requirements, competing and misaligned support and accountability systems, and data submission requirements. Although each was established to address an important need, together they have created a system that is increasingly difficult for districts to navigate. Further complicating this landscape is an imbalance in the use of statute, regulation, and guidance that can unnecessarily limit local flexibility.

From a district perspective, the result is multiple entry points for support, differing timelines, overlapping planning requirements, and uneven guidance. Although public officials are motivated by duty and the common good, their organizations often adopt formal procedures from these state and federal programs that can become loosely coupled to the actual work of improving instruction.

Many of the compliance tasks required by the system serve important public purposes, including protecting certain classes of students and ensuring fiscal stewardship. At the same time, as new programs and funding have been added over the last decade it has made it more difficult for districts to reinforce common goals at the local level and systematically integrate additional funding over time. Recent research makes this problem concrete, showing that a substantial amount of education administrator's time is spent on compliance, with major drivers of burden attributable to duplication and layering requirements on top of one another.¹³

In streamlining compliance and reporting requirements, the aim is not to weaken accountability; it is to preserve the governance value of requirements while reducing duplicate proof of accountability so time can be maximized at the local level to focus on improving teaching, learning, and improving system conditions.

The vision for California

The Design Team strongly supported a system that would organize programs, planning, accountability, monitoring, and support around the statewide goals and shared expectations of effective practice described in [Strategy A](#). Once the system has established clarity about what it is trying to achieve and what effective practice looks like, the next step is ensuring that policies, programs, resources, and improvement structures are aligned to support those priorities. State programs and initiatives would be mapped to the outcomes and practices they advance, rather than merely listed by funding stream or statutory label. Planning and reporting would operate as a unified improvement cycle, with one front door, one integrated calendar, one coordinated support team, and one Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)-aligned improvement plan that satisfies multiple requirements wherever law allows.

In the redesigned model, state agencies and programs would be aligned around a common set of goals, expectations, timelines, and improvement processes. Planning, reporting, accountability, monitoring, and support activities would

“ The design team recognized that “new” ideas, new initiatives and many priorities are likely to have the unintended consequences of slowing academic progress. California scholars will benefit from having a more coherent, aligned education experience that focuses on a few academic priorities. More priorities = less focus = slow/no progress.
—Dr. Daryl F. Camp, San Lorenzo Unified School District

¹³ Central office administrators reported spending roughly 20 hours per week on compliance (about 39 percent of a typical workweek) with special education, fiscal and budget reporting, LCAP work, student support programs, and human resources—this accounts for 42 percent of compliance time overall. Administrators also identified duplication as a major driver of burden, with 80 percent citing redundant requirements and 82 percent reporting that new requirements are added without removing old ones. For additional information on findings, see the 2026 Getting Down to Facts III research brief [California's Balance Between State and Local Control](#).

increasingly reinforce one another rather than operate on separate tracks. While CDE, CCEE, FCMAT/California School Information Services,¹⁴ COEs, and other entities would continue to exercise their distinct responsibilities and authorities, their work would be better coordinated and organized around a shared improvement framework. Research and experience from California and other states suggest that coherence at the local level is difficult to achieve when state agencies, policies, funding streams, and support structures send inconsistent signals or operate independently. Creating greater alignment at the state level helps establish the conditions for districts and schools to align their own improvement efforts around a common set of goals and expectations.¹⁵

Importantly, this vision is as much about better aligning existing programs and requirements as it is about eliminating activities that no longer contribute to those goals. Doing so would require deliberate efforts to identify and reduce unnecessary redundancy, duplication, and competing requirements in service of greater coherence for districts. From a district perspective, the system would feel less like a collection of separate programs and requirements and more like a coherent strategy for improving outcomes for students. This greater alignment at the state level would also create the conditions for COEs and other support providers to coordinate assistance more effectively around district needs (as further described in [Part II](#)).

Implementation actions

B.1 Align and consolidate state programs and initiatives around statewide goals.

Design Team members strongly agreed that, following the development of clear goals (in [Strategy A](#)), California should make alignment to statewide goals explicit, visible, and enforceable. The first action here would be the creation of a public alignment map that can be used as a management tool; it should show which outcomes and practices each initiative advances, where programs overlap, and where guidance, funding, or reporting requirements pull districts in competing directions. The state should use this map to make consistent “adopt, adapt, or abandon” decisions about new and existing policies and programs over time.

¹⁴ Note the California School Information Services (CSIS) group is formally a part of the FCMAT organization, but each serve distinct roles in this context and therefore are separately identified.

¹⁵ A growing body of research and practice has highlighted the relationship between state-level coherence and local improvement efforts. See, for example, [Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems](#) by Fullan and Quinn; TNTP’s [Coherence by Design](#); and Instruction Partners’ [The State of Instructional \(In\)coherence](#). Across these efforts, a common lesson emerges: districts are more likely to develop coherent instructional and improvement strategies when state goals, accountability systems, support structures, and funding mechanisms reinforce rather than compete with one another.

Specific tasks:

- Publish a statewide map of major programs, initiatives, content leads, grants, support providers, and required plans, organized by the goals and effective practices they advance.¹⁶
- Require new legislation, regulation, initiatives, grants, budget proposals, and guidance to include two implementation requirements: (1) an alignment statement explaining the statewide goal served, local educator implementation burden, evidence base, and relationship to existing work; and (2) a plan for minimizing new reporting requirements by identifying how existing reporting and planning mechanisms can be used to satisfy the new requirement and, if additional reporting is necessary, what existing requirements will be eliminated, consolidated, or otherwise streamlined to maintain a net-zero administrative burden.
- Build and implement ongoing and annual legislative, regulatory, and cross-agency alignment to adopt, adapt, consolidate, or sunset programs, with public documentation of decisions and rationale. [Strategy D](#) further describes how feedback loops can be built and utilized to monitor whether the system is becoming less burdensome and more useful.
- Require new programs and initiatives to include a sustainability and exit strategy that clarifies how the work will be integrated into existing systems, sustained through ongoing funding, or phased out if it is no longer needed.

B.2 Streamline planning, accountability, and support structures.

California should move toward a single district-facing improvement structure that integrates planning, monitoring, accountability, and support into a unified cycle. This work should begin with processes most closely tied to academic improvement, including:

- the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP),
- district support services in the SSoS (e.g., universal assistance, Differentiated Assistance, and Direct Technical Assistance),

¹⁶ Several recent statutory changes create opportunities to support this work. Education Code sections §§33112 and 33302 direct the Education Commissioner to identify statewide support entities and develop recommendations for a second phase of education governance consolidation and streamlining. In addition, Education Code section §8902 creates additional opportunities for the Community Schools State Technical Assistance Center (STAC) and regional centers to identify duplicative reporting requirements and recommend opportunities for streamlining. Together, these efforts provide natural opportunities to map, align, and simplify California's statewide support infrastructure.

- comprehensive school intervention (CSI) and Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI),
- comprehensive improvement monitoring (CIM),
- federal progress monitoring (FPM),
- WASC accreditation,
- required financial reporting in the Standardized Accounting Code Structure (SACS), and
- the Consolidated Application and Reporting System (CARS) for federal grant reporting.

Rather than expecting districts to navigate multiple state and federal planning, reporting, and accountability requirements independently, the state should take greater responsibility for aligning and integrating these requirements into a more coherent, district-facing structure wherever possible. In turn, this state-level alignment enables the coordinated, case-managed reimagining of Differentiated Assistance described in [Part II](#), Strategy G.

Specific tasks:

- Create a unified district-facing calendar that coordinates identification, intake, evidence requests, planning deadlines, monitoring visits, and progress reviews.¹⁷
- Design a single LCAP-aligned planning and reporting mechanism that can satisfy multiple requirements including, but not limited to, COE-led Differentiated Assistance, CSI/ATSI, CIM, and other planning requirements wherever possible, replacing rather than adding artifacts.
- Establish COEs as regional integrators and primary points of contact for district, with a differentiated model for small and rural COEs that may need shared services or Geographic Lead Agency support.

B.3 Address statutory, regulatory, and guidance barriers to coherence.

Over time, California's child- and family-serving policy-making process has often added new programs, initiatives, reporting requirements, and accountability structures as a form of assurance that emerging priorities are implemented locally. However, these new compliance activities rarely specify how those additions interact with existing requirements. Although these individual decisions may be well-intentioned, they have also been implemented through an uneven mix of

¹⁷ For example, currently the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools consolidates a large majority of these timelines and deadlines and requirements into a single place on their web-hosted pages.

policy tools. California has relied heavily on statute and agency guidance to shape system functions, while making comparatively limited use of regulations to establish consistent statewide expectations and implementation. Together, these patterns have produced a system that is increasingly complex, duplicative, and difficult for districts to navigate. As a result, fragmentation is embedded not only in statute, regulation, funding rules, and legacy reporting routines, but also in how these policy tools interact with one another. California should create a recurring review process to identify mandates that are duplicative, outdated, misaligned, or low value relative to their burden. This should be paired with a “new-mandate gate” so the state stops adding new policies or requirements without considering current coherence, cost, and implementation capacity.

Specific tasks:

- Institute a recurring statutory, regulatory, and guidance review focused on planning, reporting, monitoring, and support requirements that eliminate unnecessary duplication and identifies opportunities to make more strategic use of statute, regulation, and guidance based on their intended purposes.¹⁸
- Develop a legislative agenda to identify duplicative, outdated, or misaligned provisions in the Education Code with the goal of identifying opportunities for consolidation, modernization, or repeal of statutes that undermine coherence.
- Develop a legislative effort that identifies conflicting, redundant, and misaligned provisions across child- and family-serving code that can be modernized through consolidation or repeal.¹⁹
- Establish a process for reviewing proposed legislation, grants, initiatives, and regulatory changes to document alignment to goals, estimated local burden, implementation supports, and what existing requirements will be retired or consolidated to make way for new requirements.

¹⁸ This could be part of the process laid out by [AB 181](#), which requires the Education Commissioner to develop findings and recommendations for a second phase of education governance consolidation and streamlining, submitted in an interim report by June 30, 2027, with a final report due to the Governor and the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the Legislature on October 1, 2027.

¹⁹ Willis, J., Estes, E., Francis, L., Lieberman, T., & Wright, K. (2026). [Integrated policymaking for California's youth: Keeping the whole child central from the start](#). Breaking Barriers California.

Early success measures

- **Reduced duplicate evidence requests.** Districts should report fewer separate submissions for the same data, narrative, fiscal evidence, or improvement milestones across programs.
- **Fewer disconnected planning artifacts.** An increasing number of required plans and attachments are integrated into the LCAP-aligned improvement structure, while separate planning artifacts are retired, reducing time spent on reporting and compliance.
- **Districts experience greater clarity and coherence.** Districts and COEs have more clarity of expectations, consistency of guidance, and usefulness of coordinated support.
- **Reduced statutory and regulatory complexity.** The state should make measurable progress in consolidating, modernizing, aligning and retiring outdated statute, regulation, and guidance.

Strategy C. Improve Coordination, Quality, and Authority Across State Agencies

Core idea: If California clarifies how state and regional agencies work together, strengthens coordination and decision-making across entities, and builds stronger internal coherence within agencies, then districts will experience the education system as more coordinated, responsive, and improvement-oriented.

The challenge

California operates the largest public education system in the country. Creating state-level structures that can support educational quality and improvement at scale is necessary but inherently challenging in a state as large and diverse as California geographically, demographically, economically, and linguistically. Over time, the state has developed a network of complementary agencies and entities with distinct roles assigned by the Legislature and state leadership to support districts and improve student outcomes. These include FCMAT's role in fiscal oversight and support, CCEE's role in advancing district and school improvement, and COEs' role in providing localized assistance, among others. Together these entities complement CDE's responsibilities for monitoring, oversight, and program administration while supporting the implementation of the educational priorities established by the Legislature, the Governor, and the SBE.

Across the SSoS, these various agencies play important and complementary roles in policy, implementation, accountability, improvement, fiscal oversight, and district support. At the same time, Design Team members identified opportunities to clarify how agencies work together, how authority is exercised in key situations, how statewide priorities are translated into coordinated action, and how agencies can be more responsive to districts' needs. Recent governance changes and broader statewide discussions about coherence and accountability create an opportunity to strengthen coordination, clarify complementary roles, and better align the work of existing entities around shared statewide priorities and improving outcomes for students.

The vision for California

As envisioned by the Design Team, California's state and regional agencies would operate as a more coherent and coordinated system, with clearer role definition, stronger coordination across entities, and more consistent district-facing responsiveness. Building on the statewide goals and shared expectations described in [Strategy A](#) and the alignment efforts described in [Strategy B](#), agencies would have greater clarity about what they are collectively trying to accomplish and how their work should contribute. Agencies would continue to contribute distinct expertise and statutory responsibilities, while operating with greater alignment around statewide goals, implementation priorities, and continuous improvement, so that districts experience the system as coordinated rather than fragmented.

Establishing shared goals and aligning programs is necessary but not sufficient to create coherence. By building on existing strengths and partnerships, agencies have an opportunity to further strengthen how they work together through clearer structures for collaboration, aligned implementation, and shared decision-making processes. This approach is about ensuring that statewide priorities are implemented coherently, that roles and responsibilities are clearly understood, and that school districts experience the system as connected, responsive, and supportive. Districts should know who is responsible for what, where to go for assistance, how decisions are made, and how concerns can be elevated when support is not meeting their needs.

Statewide coherence cannot be achieved if agencies remain internally siloed; instead districts ultimately experience the system through the quality, consistency, and coordination of each agency's internal operations. For this reason, Design Team members emphasized that achieving greater coherence depends not only on coordination across agencies, but also on agencies' abilities to operate internally as aligned, improvement-oriented organizations. This includes stronger coordination across divisions and initiatives, clearer routines for implementation and

communication, improved responsiveness to district needs, and more consistent support to the field. Participants emphasized that coherence is not a one-time organizational effort, but an ongoing management responsibility requiring regular review, calibration, and continuous improvement over time.

Implementation actions

C.1 Clarify roles, responsibilities, and authority across state agencies.

Design Team participants noted that California's education agencies generally bring deep expertise and important statutory responsibilities to the system. However, when roles, decision-making authority, and coordination expectations are not clearly defined, districts can experience the system as fragmented, receive inconsistent signals, or struggle to understand where responsibility resides for key decisions and support functions. The goal is to create greater clarity about how agencies work together through mutually reinforcing activities in service of shared statewide priorities and a more coherent district experience.

Specific tasks:

- Conduct a systemwide review of roles, organizational structures, and implementation capacity to identify opportunities to reduce duplication and strengthen coherence and coordination through targeting of unclear expectations, responsibilities, and improvement protocols. Ensure those issues are embedded with alignment efforts described in [Strategy B](#).
- Develop a statewide roles and responsibilities framework that defines complementary functions, decision-making authority, communication and coordination expectations, escalation protocols, and expectations for warm handoffs across SBE, CDE, CCEE, FCMAT, COEs (including those serving in regional or statewide leadership roles), and other key partners.²⁰
- Clarify where authority resides in key functions and implementation scenarios, while honoring the distinct statutory responsibilities and expertise of participating agencies, and establish a common framework for decision-making (e.g., RAPID²¹) that specifies which decisions each entity makes independently and which require consultation or approval (and with whom).

²⁰ A cross-state mapping of governance shows how California spreads supervision, administration, and implementation across an unusually complex set of actors. For more information, see the 2026 Getting Down to Facts III report [Who Governs California's Schools? A Cross-State Map](#).

²¹ "RAPID" distinguishes who **R**ecommends, who must **A**gree, who **P**erforms/executes the decision, who provides **I**nput, and who **D**ecides who provides Input, and who Performs/Executes the decision.

C.2 Build the infrastructure for sustained cross-agency coordination and alignment.

Design Team members emphasized that clarifying roles and decision-making authority is an important first step, but not sufficient on its own. Building toward collaboration over time requires aligning the policies, organizational structures, staffing models, funding mechanisms, workflows, and operational routines that shape how work is carried out in practice. Without this alignment, agencies may continue to experience coordination challenges even when roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.

Specific tasks:

- Review organizational structures, staffing configurations, and funding streams to assess alignment with statewide priorities and agency responsibilities.
- Develop formal cross-agency governance structures to support joint planning, implementation, shared accountability, and coordinated decision-making.²²
- Align implementation timelines, communication routines, operational workflows, and funding mechanisms across agencies wherever possible to reduce fragmentation and improve the district experience.
- Incentivize braided or blended funding approaches where collaboration across agencies or initiatives is necessary.
- Ensure state agencies and COEs have the staffing, expertise, and operational capacity necessary to fulfill their responsibilities effectively.
- Formalize coordination structures through tools such as memoranda of understanding, aligned planning processes, and shared implementation expectations that reinforce the statewide roles and responsibilities framework discussed in [Strategy C.1](#).
- Establish recurring cross-agency implementation reviews to assess implementation alignment, district experience, and continuous improvement and identify opportunities to strengthen coordination over time.

²² This could look something like the structure of an interagency leadership team (ILT)—which builds on the mandated councils under AB 2083—utilized at the county level. ILTs include agency directors, superintendents, parent/youth representatives, and, ideally, community partner organizations. In the state context this could include agency directors, deputy directors, and/or Cabinet secretaries. For more detail see San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools' [Ecosystem of Care Implementation Guide](#).

C.3 Build stronger internal coherence and continuous improvement within agencies.

Design Team members emphasized that improving statewide coherence also depends on agencies' ability to operate internally as responsive, coordinated, and improvement-oriented organizations. Although many agencies have already begun work in these areas, Design Team members identified opportunities to build on existing efforts, strengthen consistency across the system, and establish more systematic approaches to continuous improvement.

Specific tasks:

- Strengthen improvement-oriented and customer-service-oriented cultures within state agencies and across the SSoS.
- Conduct structured internal assessments of state agencies and COEs to examine coherence, coordination, and organizational effectiveness through the lens of the district user experience. In this work, assess how programs, initiatives, guidance, timelines, funding streams, communication routines, and support structures align to identify opportunities to improve workflow, coordination, and responsiveness to school systems.
- Develop organizational improvement and capacity-building plans aligned to statewide priorities and agency responsibilities.
- Create stronger feedback loops between state agencies, districts, and COEs regarding the clarity, quality, and usefulness of state guidance and support, including mechanisms to regularly incorporate feedback into agency improvement efforts.

Early success measures

- **Improved coordination across agencies.** Agencies demonstrate stronger alignment in timelines, communication, guidance, and implementation support.
- **More rapid, high-quality responsiveness and problem-solving.** Districts experience faster resolution of implementation challenges and more coordinated responses to local needs.
- **Stronger reciprocal accountability.** Agencies regularly review coordination, implementation, and district experience data and use findings to improve system functioning over time.

Strategy D. Build a Durable Evaluation, Learning, and Continuous Improvement Infrastructure

Core idea: If California builds a robust continuous improvement infrastructure that surfaces the impacts and challenges of the redesigned education system, then state statute, regulations, guidance, funding, accountability and support systems will be continuously adapted to strengthen local implementation and improve student outcomes.

The challenge

The preceding actions are intended to create greater clarity, coherence, and coordination across California’s education system. Yet even a well-designed system will need to adapt over time. Statewide goals may need refinement, implementation challenges will emerge, and changing conditions will create new demands on schools, districts, counties, and state agencies. Thus, the challenge is not simply designing a more coherent system, but creating the capacity for that system to learn from experience and improve over time.

California already generates extensive data through the California School Dashboard, Cradle-to-Career Data System, LCAPs, Federal Program Monitoring, Differentiated Assistance, Direct Technical Assistance, fiscal reporting via SACS, grant and program reporting such as CARS, and support provided through the SSoS, in addition to a substantial research infrastructure within universities and research centers statewide. The weakness is not the absence of data, but rather the lack of reliable structures for turning that data into information that contributes to broad-based system learning, policy adjustment, and continuous improvement. As a result, opportunities to identify recurring challenges, emerging needs, or successful practices across regions are often missed.²³

The absence of these learning structures also limits the system’s ability to assess whether state, regional, and local improvement efforts are producing the intended results. Accountability often flows more clearly to districts and schools than to the state, county, and regional entities responsible for creating the conditions that support improvement. Districts and schools are held responsible for outcomes, but state, regional, and county actors also need structured processes for examining whether the educational system is coherent, timely, useful, and genuinely responsive to local needs.

²³ Fuller, J. (2026). [Education data needs, availability, and access in California](#). Getting Down to Facts III. Stanford Center for Acceleration of Learning and Equity.

The vision for California

A redesigned system would establish formal, recurring, and actionable practice-to-policy feedback loops. Implementation experience from districts, county offices, and support providers would flow up through structured evidence routines to inform state guidance, tools, funding, and policy decisions. At the same time, effective local practices, research findings, and evaluation evidence would be shared through ongoing learning cycles in other vertical levels of the system (e.g., regional, state, etc.), creating a continuous improvement system in which policy and practice evolve together over time.

The primary purpose of these feedback loops would be twofold: (1) to assess whether policies, investments, and regulations are producing their intended effects and (2) to identify emerging challenges, barriers, and unintended consequences that may require adjustments to policy, implementation, or support. Evidence would be drawn from a combination of research, evaluation, implementation experience, district reporting, and support activities to develop a more complete understanding of how policies are operating in practice. Wherever possible, these learning processes would be embedded within existing structures (see Strategies [A](#), [B](#), and [C](#) for further details) rather than creating new reporting requirements. Additional data would only be collected when it is needed to inform a specific decision or action.

For example, if evaluation and implementation evidence showed that a major state investment was not producing the intended improvements in district practice or student outcomes, or if districts across multiple regions began reporting a new barrier to improvement that existing programs were not designed to address, the learning cycle would identify the pattern, examine underlying causes, and determine what changes are needed. The response might include refining program design, strengthening implementation support, developing new tools or guidance, adjusting funding strategies, or redirecting resources toward approaches with greater demonstrated impact. The point is that feedback would not simply be received—it would be synthesized, acted on, and reported back to the field. Through accessible, visible public meetings and reporting, the interest holders would clearly understand the action(s) taken.

The Design Team process makes clear that the very idea of reciprocal accountability relies on this infrastructure; without it, the state risks designing promising components that still operate as disconnected initiatives with limited ability to adapt, improve, or reinforce one another over time.

Implementation actions

D.1 Establish a sustained TK-12 practice-to-policy review cycle.

California should create a formal cycle through which policymakers, state agencies, COEs, districts, families, students, advocates, and research partners identify a statewide learning agenda: a focused set of high-priority questions about how the education system is functioning and what changes to policy, implementation, and system design would most improve outcomes. Research, evaluation, and implementation evidence should then be aligned to that learning agenda to inform decisions about what improvements should be made to the system. The cycle should align with statewide goals discussed in [Strategy A](#) and the district support infrastructure (further described in [Part II](#)) to promote coherence across the system.

Specific tasks:

- Name the statewide entity responsible for the learning agenda, then clarify the roles of SBE, CDE, CCEE, COEs, the SSPI, and research partners.²⁴
- Adopt a public multi-year learning agenda focused on a limited number of implementation and policy questions linked to the goals established in [Strategy A](#).
- Use existing statewide and regional convenings, reporting cycles, and support structures to gather feedback and inform continuous improvement before creating new processes.
- Publish a public research and evaluation agenda aligned to the statewide learning priorities and establish mechanisms to commission, coordinate, or support research partnerships that generate actionable evidence on implementation, outcomes, emerging challenges, and opportunities for improvement.
- Require a transparent record of responses showing what the system learned, what changed, what was retained, and what improvements require statutory, regulatory, budget, or guidance action.

²⁴ The Legislature passed and the Governor signed AB 181, which strengthened the role of the SSPI in overseeing public education's overall performance, including substantive roles in research, evaluation, and continuous improvement activities. The Design Team viewed these functions as most effective when positioned to provide objective system-level assessment and learning, rather than being embedded solely within the entities primarily responsible for implementation; this is consistent with the goals of the new policy. This new law enables California to identify clear responsibility for stewarding the statewide learning agenda, synthesizing evidence across the system, and ensuring that findings inform future policy and implementation decisions.

D.2 Build local and regional capacity for system-level analysis.

Continuous improvement must become a distributed capability, not a state-level function alone. In order for the statewide learning infrastructure to be maximally effective, districts, COEs, and regional partners need common routines for using quantitative and qualitative evidence to understand what is working, why implementation varies across contexts, and have a public venue in which they showcase that learning and adopt evolved approaches that improve the system's goals. This work should build on California's existing independent research capacity. By engaging researchers and organizations with expertise in studying implementation and outcomes, the state can ensure that learning is credible, practical, and not limited to self-reporting by funded providers.

Specific tasks:

- Provide districts and COEs with calibrated tools, protocols, and training to evaluate local implementation, assess the quality of supports, and identify system barriers.
- Create regional and cross-regional learning networks where practitioners test strategies, compare implementation experiences, surface recurring barriers, and document lessons learned to support future learning.
- Engage California universities and research organizations as learning partners to support local districts and COEs in rapid-cycle studies, implementation research, independent synthesis, and methodological support.
- Pool data analysis and review capacity so that small and rural districts and COEs can leverage their time to fully participate in the statewide learning infrastructure.

D.3 Monitor the performance of the SSoS itself and realign over time.

California should treat coherence, coordination, support quality, and system burden as performance outcomes that must be monitored and improved. The SSoS should be evaluated not only by district outcomes, but by whether state, regional, and county actors are providing timely, clear, aligned, and useful support. Findings should inform decisions about how to further incentivize program effectiveness through funding, guidance, role clarity, and statutory or regulatory cleanup.

Specific tasks:

- Conduct periodic cross-agency reviews of roles, workflows, funding incentives, district experience, and support quality, using [Strategy C](#) role clarity as the baseline.
- Use structured feedback loops and targeted interviews to understand district and COE experiences with burden, clarity, utility, timeliness, and responsiveness in interacting with state agencies.
- Assess district and COE experience of burden, clarity, usefulness, timeliness, and responsiveness through structured feedback loops and targeted interviews.
- Create a formal mechanism for sharing learning about system performance before major budget and legislative cycles so findings can shape new initiatives rather than arrive after decisions are made.
- Establish a public mechanism that draws a direct line between feedback and what actors and agencies in the system have committed to do to address it.
- Use findings to consolidate, redesign, or retire programs and requirements that do not reinforce statewide goals or that create unnecessary burden.

Early success measures

- **Public learning agenda followed by visible evidence of response.** The field should know which questions the state is studying, why they matter, who is responsible for answering them, and when findings will affect decisions. Each learning cycle should result in a transparent record of the changes made and the evidence informing those decisions.
- **Improved support quality.** District feedback should demonstrate that support is becoming more responsive, timely, and coherent, with improved coordination across agencies and greater consistency in the quality of support available to districts.
- **Strategic use of data and research.** The state has identified a clear set of priority learning questions, aligned data collection and research investments to those priorities, improved researcher access to relevant data, and institutionalized the routine use of independent, objective evidence to inform policy, implementation, and continuous improvement.

Conclusion

California now has an opportunity to build on its strengths and advance toward a more connected and improvement-oriented education system—one intentionally designed to support success at every level. The vision and implementation ideas emerging from the Working Group and Design Team are ultimately about creating the conditions for students, schools, districts, and counties to succeed through greater coherence, clearer roles and responsibilities, stronger implementation support, reciprocal accountability, and continuous learning across the system. Equally important, the Working Group and Design Team processes showed 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. That work is complex and requires sustained partnership, but it 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: 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