



Framework for an Effective Statewide System of Support

Information Tools Training

Positive results for students will come from changes in the knowledge, skill, and behavior of their teachers and parents. State policies and programs must provide the opportunity, support, incentive, and expectation for adults close to the lives of children to make wise decisions.

The Center on Innovation & Improvement helps regional comprehensive centers in their work with states to provide districts, schools, and families with the opportunity, information, and skills to make wise decisions on behalf of students.

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Incentives, Capacity, Opportunity

When a state education agency (SEA) undertakes to provide a statewide system of support for school improvement, it realizes that its organizational structure, resource streams, communication channels, and ways of interfacing with districts and schools fit like a straitjacket. The agency's responsibility for ensuring local compliance with state and federal regulation doesn't go away, but new duties are layered in, often residing within the same departments and performed by the same staff, but calling for new skills and different mind-sets. While compliance monitoring requires precise definition, circumscription, certain boundaries, and standardization, school improvement demands agility, responsiveness, keen judgment, and differentiation.

In 2007, the Center on Innovation & Improvement (CII) released the *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support* (also published by Information Age) to help states construct and operate systems to support school improvement and student learning. The *Handbook* includes a conceptual framework for an effective statewide system of support (SSOS), based on a review of the research literature and a theory of action. This framework centers on three components: Incentives, Capacity, and Opportunity, and these three components rest on a foundation of continuous evaluation and improvement of the system itself. These same three components could describe any system whose purpose is to create an optimal environment to change the behaviors (improve the performance) of clients served by that system. A district system to support school improvement would provide incentives, build capacity, and offer opportunities for the schools in the district. A school would systematically provide the right mix of incentives, capacity, and opportunity for teachers to improve instruction. The three components of the SSOS framework, then, may be applied to any organizational structure that best serves its clients by encouraging and enhancing their *own* improvement.

The CII framework is a theory of action for encouraging and supporting change in districts and schools (through changes in the behaviors of people within them) in order to improve students' learning. The theory of action is behavioral in essence, premised on the notion that institutional improvement is driven by changes in people, resulting from their new understandings, new skills, and new ways of coordinating their work. The closer the person to the student, the greater the leverage for improving the child's learning.

The *Handbook* also includes profiles of the systems of support in four states—Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Washington—each with its own strong elements of the CII framework. Further, the *Handbook*

provides a comprehensive process by which the state can assess its own system of support and plan for its improvement. *Strengthening the Statewide System of Support*, a second publication by CII, is a technical assistance manual to guide a regional comprehensive center in facilitating the SSOS self-assessment process with a state education agency.

The CII framework expands the definition of a statewide system of support beyond the usual focus on compliance-driven regulation leavened by programmatic supports and professional development. The CII framework considers the broader context that the state provides for school improvement, including the incentives and opportunities for constructive change as well as systemic attention to the pre-service preparation and licensing of school leaders and teachers, state data and information systems (including school improvement processes and resources), state initiatives to place high-quality school leaders and teachers in hard-to-staff districts and schools, and the creation of “new space” for innovative schools.

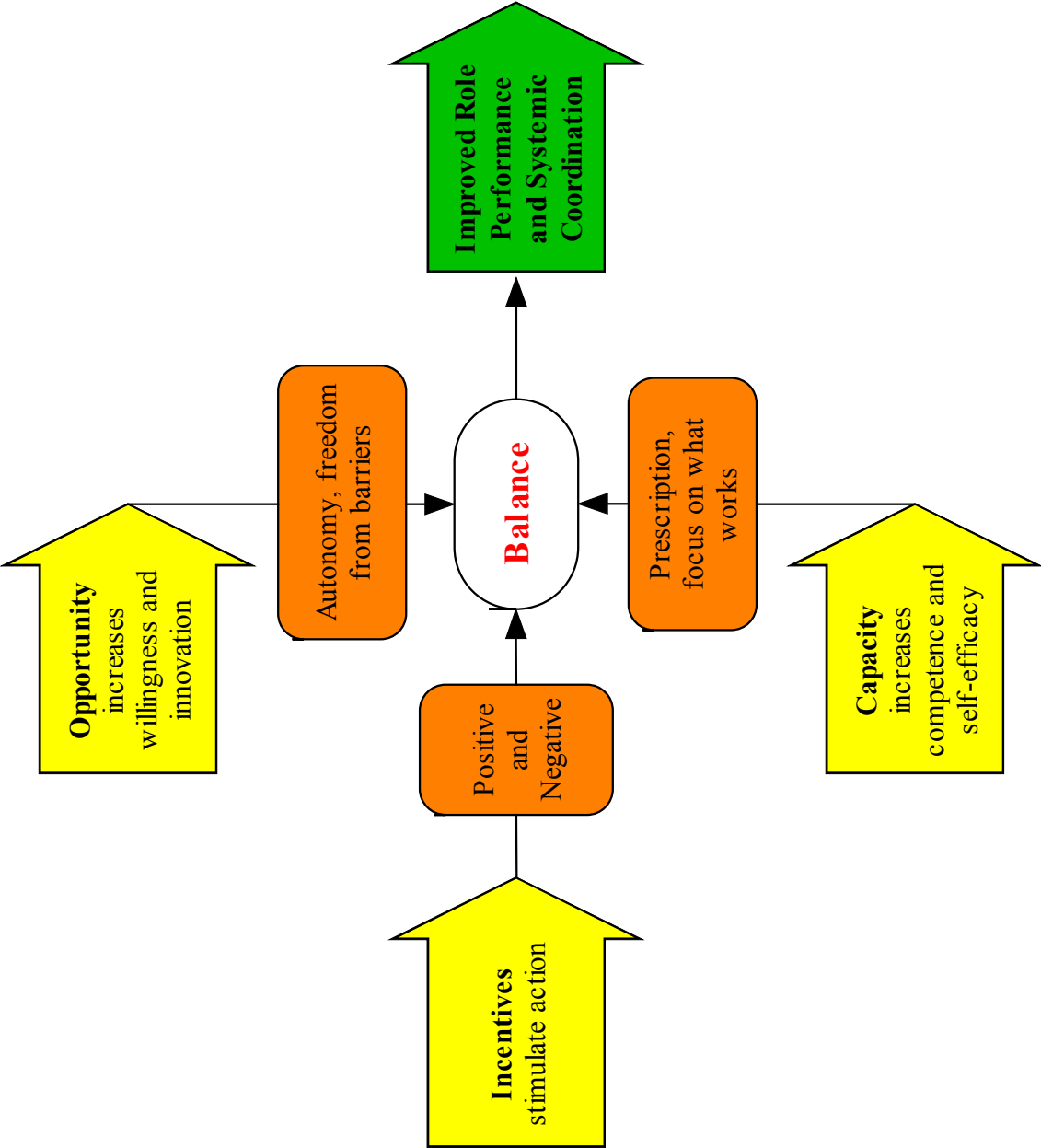
President James A. Garfield is famously quoted as saying that an ideal school is “Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other,” referring to his former teacher, renowned for bringing to his students a rich mastery of the curriculum, an ability to inspire, and an example to be emulated. If only it were so simple in our day and age. The moving parts of a state education system are manifold, a vast array of pieces, all of which must work in concert and to a high level of precision. Modern education bears little resemblance to the simple triad of the log, the student, and the teacher. With complexity comes a tendency toward redundancy, sluggishness, and wasted motion, making functional efficiency and operational fluidity imperative. In education, the system must be trained to efficiency while retaining its devotion to each student’s learning, the same as would Mark Hopkins from the other end of the log.

Theory of Action of the Framework for an Effective Statewide System of Support

A statewide system of support is a system that supports the improvement of districts and schools that are themselves systems. The theory of action of the Framework for an Effective Statewide System of Support for School Improvement (see Figure 1) may be stated as follows:

A system is a group of linked parts, assembled in subsystems that work together toward a common end. Schools, districts, and statewide systems of support are all social systems in which the parts are people who perform roles to fulfill the purposes of their subsystems and the system as a whole. Social systems fulfill their purposes (achieve their ends) when the people within them understand their roles and play them competently. People improve the performance of their roles when provided incentives, opportunity, and capacity, thus enhancing their competence and self-efficacy. A social system functions optimally when the roles played by people within it, and the subsystems they compose, are efficiently coordinated. An effective statewide system of support offers incentives, builds capacity, and provides opportunity to the people in districts and schools so that they might continuously improve the performance of their coordinated roles toward the end of all students meeting or exceeding learning standards.

Figure 1: Theory of Action of the Framework for an Effective Statewide System of Support



Framework for an Effective Statewide System of Support

A. Providing Incentives for Change

States use incentives to motivate district and school personnel to change or improve. Incentives, then, are pressures from the state rather than mandates. They may be pressures that encourage or pressures that discourage certain district or school actions. The following “incentives” are examples of pressures that states may use to influence districts and schools.

1. Publicly Disclosing Low Performance
2. Levying Consequences for Low Performance
3. Providing Positive Incentives for Improvement
 - a. Recognition for Accomplishment
 - b. Funding Contingencies that Encourage High-Leverage Improvement Strategies
 - c. Financial Rewards for Results
 - d. Financial Rewards for Working in Hard-to-Staff Districts and Schools
 - e. Greater Autonomy
4. Providing Market-Oriented Incentives (charter schools, public school choice)

B. Providing Opportunities for Change

States provide opportunities for districts and schools to improve by removing obstacles to improvement and creating new space for schools. The following are some strategies that states may use to remove obstacles and create space.

1. Removing Barriers to Improvement (e.g., waivers; exemptions from rules, regulations; alternate routes to certification)
2. Creating New Space for Schools (e.g., charter schools, pilot schools, lighthouse schools, schools-within-a-school)

C. Building Capacity for Change

1. Building Systemic Capacity
 - a. Creating and Disseminating Knowledge

States create, support the creation of, and disseminate knowledge relevant to district and school improvement processes and strategies as well as effective teaching practices. The knowledge disseminated includes:

- i. Materials created by the state (guides, manuals, syntheses, tools, etc.),

- ii. Materials created with state support or in partnership with the state (state-financed research and practical guides, etc.), and
- iii. Materials created by other organizations but selected by the state for wider distribution to its districts and schools.

b. Enhancing the Supply of Personnel Equipped for School Improvement

States—through statutes, policies, and agreements/partnerships—influence university programs that prepare teachers and school leaders so that graduates of these programs understand the state’s accountability system, school improvement strategies, and evidence-based teaching practices. States also encourage talented students to enter the field of education. States provide programs to directly train teachers and school leaders for service in schools and districts in need of improvement. States report to universities about the workplace experience of teachers and school leaders that have graduated from their programs. States also help channel highly-qualified teachers and school leaders to districts and schools most in need of improvement.

c. Providing a Strong Data System to Assist School Improvement

The information that the state provides schools and districts to assist with their improvement includes web-based access to assessment data, planning tools, and other resources. Also, the state’s data collection policies and procedures determine what information can be organized and made available to schools and districts.

2. Building Local Capacity

a. Coordinating Capacity-Building Structures and Roles

The statewide system of support is indeed a system, with its own boundaries, structures, and roles. In an effective statewide system of support, someone is obviously at the helm, the players and their roles are known, and the system is coordinated, with communication among its players and a coherent approach to its function. Coordination includes both staff within the SEA and organizational

partners, distinguished educators, support teams, and consultants. The system of support has boundaries, as illustrated on an organizational chart and in job descriptions for all parties in the system. The system of support is coordinated through regular, written communication and through periodic face-to-face meetings. Personnel within the system of support (both SEA and external) are selected based upon criteria, trained, supervised, provided ongoing professional development, matched to their purpose and to the needs of districts and schools served, and evaluated.

b. Differentiating Support to Districts and Schools

Based on criteria it has established, a state makes choices about which districts and schools receive services from the statewide system of support, and what services each district or school receives. Typically, districts and schools are selected according to need as determined by their prior performance and the desired trajectory for improvement (incremental or turnaround). Systems of support operate with rubrics and assessment methods for determining which districts and schools receive services, what type of services are received (aligned with assessed need), and the intensity and duration of services provided.

c. Delivering Services to Districts and Schools

The system of support both provides services directly to districts and schools and allocates resources to districts and schools with guidelines for their use of these resources in their improvement.

i. Provide Services

In delivering services to districts and schools in need of improvement, the statewide system of support engages in a four-phase process. First, it must determine the district's or school's current operational and performance status. Second, it assists the district or school in planning specific interventions to address weaknesses. Third, the statewide system of support provides consultation, training, technical assistance, and professional development to support the school's or district's implementation of its planned interventions. Fourth, the statewide system

of support monitors the district's or school's progress with implementation and provides advice for necessary modifications to the plan.

ii. Allocate Resources for Services

In addition to directly providing services to districts and schools, the statewide system of support may allocate resources that enable districts and schools to secure their own services from other providers. When resources are allocated, the statewide system of support provides guidelines for aligning services with the improvement plan, monitoring the delivery of these services, and evaluating their effectiveness.

Evaluating and Improving the Statewide System of Support

To continuously improve the statewide system of support, the system itself needs clear goals, objectives and benchmarks, and a process for monitoring its ongoing operations and for evaluating its effectiveness.

A. Monitoring Ongoing Operations of the Statewide System of Support

1. Goals, Objectives, Benchmarks for Statewide System of Support
2. Periodic Operational Reports (related to goals, objectives, benchmarks)
3. Periodic Implementation Reports (on district and school implementation of improvement plans and SSOS provision of services)

B. Evaluating and Improving the Statewide System of Support

1. Annual Evaluation of Statewide System of Support (components, coordination, effectiveness)
2. Established Criteria to Determine Effectiveness
3. Modifications Based on Evaluation Results
4. Distribution of Evaluation Reports
5. Includes District and School Evaluation of Services Received
6. Includes Measures of Student Learning Outcomes



Building local capacity is one of the three chief levers for change in the CII framework for a statewide system of support. Based on lessons learned over the past two years in working with regional comprehensive centers and state education agencies to design and improve systems of support, CII offers the following action principles to guide a state’s thinking in constructing and operating a coherent system to build local district and school capacity to effect change and improve learning opportunities for all students. Notice that these action principles all begin with verbs—action words. For a statewide system of support, building the capacity of districts and schools to drive their own improvement is a complex array of actions, as people engaged in this work will surely attest.

Action Principles for Building Local Capacity for Change

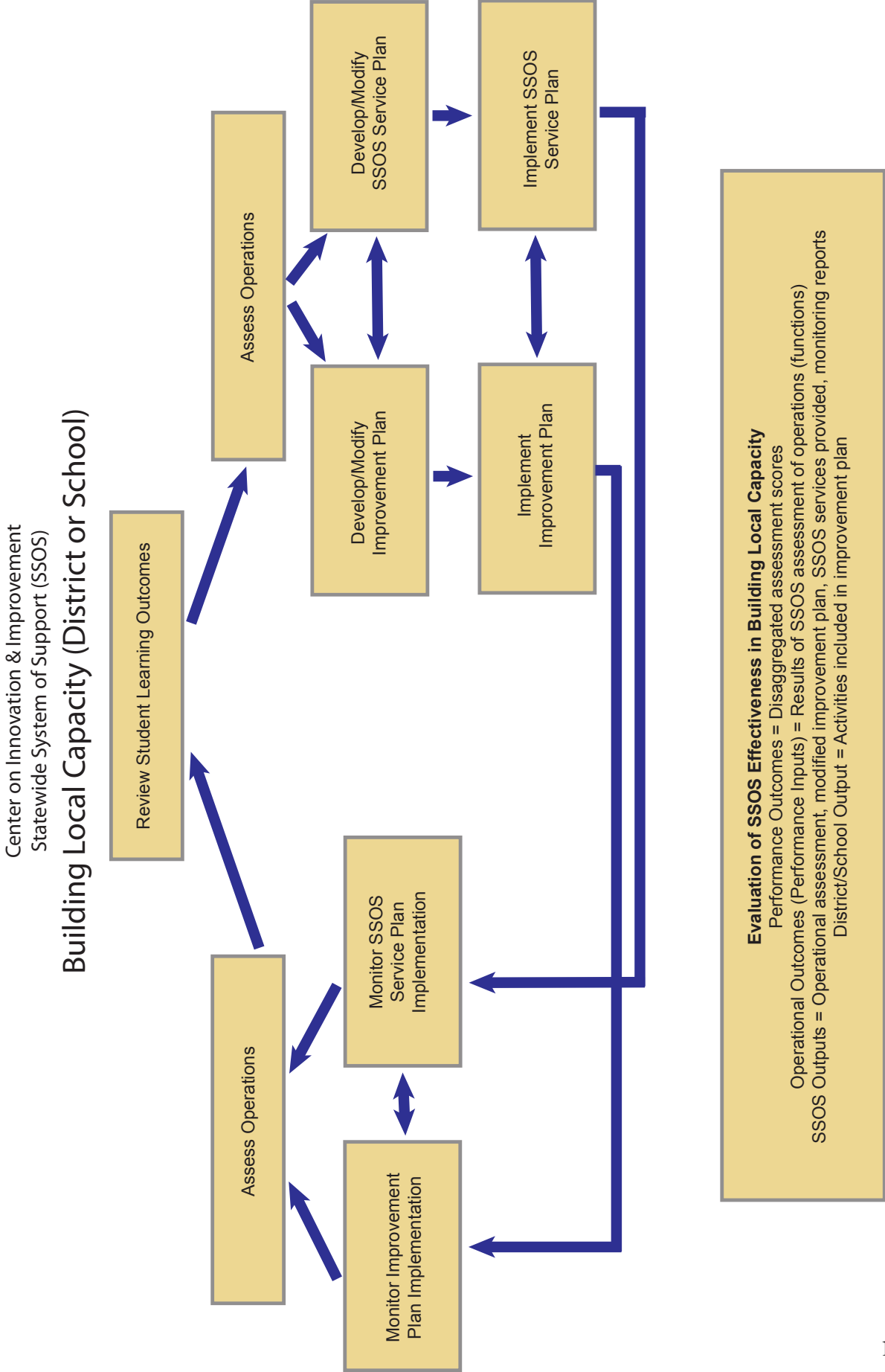
1. Conceive of a system of support as a coherent and coordinated means for supporting people in performing their various roles in children’s education.
2. Build a system of support first from what exists by coordinating components that are extant, adding missing pieces, and achieving coherence.
3. Move past a review of symptoms (poor test scores) to understand causes (district and school operations) in order to apply remedies.
4. Build the capacity of districts to assume greater responsibility for the continuous improvement of their schools.
5. Differentiate the necessary roles of personnel within the system of support, including those who audit/assess district or school operations, those who provide services (training, coaching, consulting), and those who oversee and manage the process (process managers).
6. Create and refine true “systems” of support rather than providing fragmented services.
7. Coordinate SEA personnel, field staff, intermediate centers, organizational partners, distinguished educators, support teams, and consultants in one coherent system of support.
8. Make the transition from compliance only to compliance plus support for improvement.

9. Provide a “big picture” view of a system of support that is coherent and systemic.
10. Bring special education, ELL, Title I, and career education (structurally separated by funding streams and departmental organization) within the tent of a unified system of support.
11. Restructure (redesign) the SEA (and regional centers) to provide for effective coordination and administration of the system of support.
12. Assess district/school operations in addition to examining test scores in order to differentiate and target system of support services.
13. Align the system of support Service Plan with the district or school Improvement Plan and with the results of careful assessment of performance and operational data.
14. Assess district/school operations with an approved set of indicators, procedures, and instruments.
15. Monitor both the implementation of the district or school Improvement Plan and the aligned system of support Service Plan.
16. Evaluate the effectiveness of the system of support’s procedures and services.
17. Intentionally link systems from the state to the district to the school and classroom in order to affect variables that will spawn improvement.
18. Draw a straight line from every state policy, program, and service to the intended result for a student in a classroom.
19. Provide a single, integrated school or district improvement planning process rather than separate ones for each categorical program.

Cycle for Building Local Capacity

Figure 2 on the following page illustrates an effective cycle for building local capacity, showing the relationship between the work of the district or school (Improvement Plan) and that of the statewide system of support (Service Plan) following careful examination of both performance data (student learning outcomes) and operational data (district or school functions).

Figure 2: SSOS Capacity-Building Cycle



Assessing District or School Functions

To differentiate its services and target its supports to specific district or school operations that are in need of improvement, the statewide system of support must include standard criteria, procedures, instruments, and analytical tools for ascertaining the current quality of a host of functions that contribute to student learning outcomes. This process is sometimes called an “audit” or an “operational assessment.” It requires that SSOS personnel (SEA staff, distinguished educators, support teams, consultants, etc.) with the requisite training and expertise conduct an on-site examination of the district and school, analyze the findings, and report them in a way that will inform modifications in the Improvement Plan and SSOS Service Plan.

Detailed sets of indicators and/or rubrics organized within categories form the basis for the operational assessment. Operational assessments typically include examination of documents and artifacts, interviews with leaders, interviews with teachers, classroom observations, and interviews, surveys, or focus groups with parents, students, and other stakeholders.

The Center on Innovation & Improvement presented a set of categories of district and school functions in its *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support*. They are:

A. Leadership and Decision Making

1. Allocation of resources to address learning goals
2. Decision-making structures and processes
3. Information and data systems

B. Curriculum and Instruction

1. Alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment with standards
2. Curriculum
3. Formative and periodic assessment of student learning
4. Instructional delivery (teaching and classroom management)
5. Instructional planning by teachers
6. Instructional time and scheduling

C. Human Capital (Personnel)

1. Performance incentives for personnel
2. Personnel policies and procedures (hiring, placing, evaluating, promoting, retaining, replacing)
3. Professional development processes and procedures

D. Student Support

1. English language learners—programs and services
2. Extended learning time (supplemental educational services, after-school programs, summer school, for example)
3. Parental involvement, communication, and options
4. Special education programs and procedures
5. Student support services (tutoring, counseling, placement, for example)

The charts on the following pages show how specific district or school functions can be clustered within these categories and used to align operational assessments with Improvement Plans and SSOS Service Plans.

SSOS Process to Improve School or District Functions

Please check one: ___ District ___ School

A. Leadership and Decision Making

To see how the delivery of services operates systematically to address key school or district functions, please check each box that describes your statewide system of support.

For **Assess**, check if the statewide system of support uses specific instrument or analytical tool to assess this function.

For **Plan–Imp.**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its improvement planning document.

For **Plan–Service**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its Service Plan of SSOS services provided.

For **Implement**, check this item if the statewide system of support provides assistance (consultation, training, professional development, coaching) to improve this function.

For **Monitor**, check this item if the statewide system of support includes this function in its monitoring reports to document school implementation of the improvement plan and corresponding delivery of system of support services.

For **Describe**, explain exactly what the SSOS does to help a school or district strengthen this function.

SSOS Process (Check)				Key Functions of a School or District	Describe SSOS Services
Assess	Plan–Imp.	Plan–Service	Implement		
				Allocation of resources to address learning goals	
				Decision-making structures and processes	
				Information and data systems	

B. Curriculum and Instruction

To see how the delivery of services operates systematically to address key school or district functions, please check each box that describes your statewide system of support.

For **Assess**, check if the statewide system of support uses specific instrument or analytical tool to assess this function.

For **Plan–Imp.**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its improvement planning document.

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For **Describe**, explain exactly what the SSOS does to help a school or district strengthen this function.

SSOS Process (Check)					Key Functions of a School or District	Describe SSOS Services
Assess	Plan–Imp.	Plan–Service	Implement	Monitor		
					Alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment with standards	
					Curriculum—description, scope, focus, articulation, organization	
					Formative and periodic assessment of student learning	
					Instructional delivery (teaching and classroom management)	
					Instructional planning by teachers	
					Instructional time and scheduling	

C. Human Capital (Personnel)

To see how the delivery of services operates systematically to address key school or district functions, please check each box that describes your statewide system of support.

For **Assess**, check if the statewide system of support uses specific instrument or analytical tool to assess this function.

For **Plan–Imp.**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its improvement planning document.

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For **Describe**, explain exactly what the SSOS does to help a school or district strengthen this function.

SSOS Process (Check)				Key Functions of a School or District	Describe SSOS Services
Assess	Plan–Imp.	Plan–Service	Implement		
				Performance incentives for personnel	
				Personnel policies and procedures (hiring, placing, evaluating, promoting, retaining, replacing)	
				Professional development processes and procedures	

D. Student Support

To see how the delivery of services operates systematically to address key school or district functions, please check each box that describes your statewide system of support.

For **Assess**, check if the statewide system of support uses specific instrument or analytical tool to assess this function.

For **Plan–Imp.**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its improvement planning document.

For **Plan–Service**, check if the statewide system of support includes this item in its Service Plan of SSOS services provided.

For **Implement**, check this item if the statewide system of support provides assistance (consultation, training, professional development, coaching) to improve this function.

For **Monitor**, check this item if the statewide system of support includes this function in its monitoring reports to document school implementation of the improvement plan and corresponding delivery of system of support services.

For **Describe**, explain exactly what the SSOS does to help a school or district strengthen this function.

SSOS Process (Check)				Key Functions of a School or District	Describe SSOS Services
Assess	Plan–Imp.	Plan–Service	Implement		
				English language learners—programs and services	
				Extended learning time (supplemental educational services, after-school programs, summer school, for example)	
				Parental involvement, communication, and options	
				Special education programs and procedures	
				Student support services (tutoring, counseling, placement, for example)	

For more information about Statewide Systems of Support
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