COLORADO
Department of Education

Unified Improvement Planning Handbook:

Best Practices and Requirements for Schools and Districts

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Office of Continuous Improvement

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This handbook describes Colorado's approach to school and district improvement planning and provides guidance to school and district stakeholders and improvement planning teams as they engage in an iterative, unified improvement planning process.

This handbook aims to answer the following fundamental questions:

- **Why does Colorado have a Unified Improvement Planning (UIP) process?**
- **What is involved in improvement planning and what resources are available to support the improvement planning process?**
- **What must be included in the improvement plan?**
- **What school and district specific requirements and flexibilities apply?**

Use this handbook with other CDE resources to support improvement planning processes. The following documents and/or web pages are referenced and hyperlinked throughout the handbook:

Table 1: Complementary CDE Improvement Planning Resources & Web Pages

CDE Resource	Description
Unified Improvement Planning (webpage)	Provides general information about improvement planning with announcements and links to assistance and resources.
UIP Quality Criteria & Rubric	Outlines the requirements for school-level, district-level, and combined UIPs, based in state and federal statute and improvement planning best practice. Guides the state and local review of UIPs.
UIP Workbook	Outlines an improvement planning process that school leaders can use or adapt to create their improvement plans. Includes recommended meetings or activities for each phase of planning, along with planning templates, annotated agendas for meetings, guiding questions for reflection, and other resources.
UIP Online System (webpage)	Online portal where all schools and districts develop and submit UIPs. Access must be granted by the district Local Access Manager (LAM) through CDE's Identity Management. See UIP/ACI System Set Up & Management For Local Access Managers (LAMs) for guidance related to access to the online portal.
UIP Online System User Guide	Provides a step-by-step guide for completing the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) template via the UIP Online System.
District Accountability Handbook	Outlines the requirements and responsibilities for state, district, and school level stakeholders in the state's accountability process. Federal requirements and responsibilities under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) pertaining to accountability are also included.

CDE Resource	Description
District Accountability Handbook: Identification Supplement	Provides information about CDE's identification processes and accountability requirements, timelines, and available supports for schools and districts that are identified through the state (i.e., Priority Improvement, Turnaround, On Watch, On Hold) and/or through the federal process (i.e., Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CS) - Lowest 5% or Low Graduation, Targeted Support and Improvement (TS), Additional Targeted Support (A-TS).
District and School Performance Frameworks (webpage)	Describes how performance is measured, important information about performance frameworks and provides access to the district and school dashboard.
Performance Framework Reports & Improvement Plans (webpage)	Access publicly posted school and district performance framework reports and UIPs.
SchoolView (webpage)	Explore school and district data. This page also includes links to additional CDE-provided data tools and resources.
ESSA Improvement Planning Requirements (webpage)	Additional assistance and resources for identification and planning requirements for identified schools accepting federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Title funds.

Important Dates

CDE recommends that the improvement planning process start in late winter or early spring with a budget review and analysis of current implementation and performance data. The work of drafting or revising plans should begin in the spring or early summer and refining and confirming plans using state data happens in late summer or early fall, with adjustments made as necessary based on state-level assessments and/or Performance Frameworks results.

CDE releases UIP templates for the next school year by April 15th. While near final drafts of plans should be used to guide implementation at the start of the school year, CDE requires sites to submit plans for public posting on SchoolView no later than October 15th to accommodate for a late August release of Performance Frameworks. At the discretion of the district, newly identified sites (i.e., Priority Improvement, Turnaround, ESSA Comprehensive Support) or sites that participate in CDE's Request to Reconsider process may be granted flexibility for submission no later than January 15th. See the table below for CDE's suggested timeline for improvement planning.

Table 2: Suggested Timeline for Improvement Planning & CDE Important Dates

Months	Recommended Planning Process	CDE Important Dates
March	Use local student performance and implementation data to reflect on current year progress towards meeting targets and milestones. Highlight potential Student Performance Priorities (SPPs) for next year.	
April	Analyze current year local student performance data, adjust SPPs and targets.	Release new UIP templates for the following school year by **April 15th**.
May	Solidify current year data analysis, SPPs, Root Causes, and Major Improvement Strategies (MISs).	
June	Develop detailed student performance Targets and Action and Implementation Plans.	
July	Adjust data analysis based on preliminary state data.	Release state assessment initial data.
August	Launch implementation of plan with the start of the new school year.	Release State Performance Frameworks by **late August;** implications for data analysis, planning requirements, and submission flexibilities.
September	Confirm and finalize the draft plan using final state growth data and performance frameworks.	
October	Submit UIP to CDE no later than **October 15th** (unless eligible for biennial flexibility or January submission flexibility).	Post submitted plans on SchoolView. Review select plans and provide feedback.
November	Progress Monitor Student Performance and Implementation; adapt plan, if necessary.	
December		
January	Sites with eligibility for plan submission extension (e.g., newly identified, Request	Post submitted plans on SchoolView. Review select plans and provide feedback.

Months	Recommended Planning Process	CDE Important Dates
	to Reconsider) submit UIP no later than **January 15th**. Connect budget planning to Major Improvement Strategies.	
February	Progress Monitor Student Performance and Implementation; adapt plan, if necessary.	

Districts and schools that earn a Performance plan type (and Distinction for districts) may be eligible for biennial flexibility, or the option to submit UIPs every other year. This flexibility is not available to sites that are considered to be "On Watch," nor sites that have an Insufficient State Data rating. If submitting biennially, the plan must cover at least two academic years (the current school year and the next). All other sites must submit annually for public posting.

See the Additional Requirements and Flexibilities section later in this handbook for more information about state and federal identification and biennial flexibility.

Overview

Improvement science is a structured approach to making continuous improvements in organizations, especially in fields like education and healthcare, using a scientific method. It focuses on understanding a system, testing changes, and learning from data to achieve specific goals.

The purpose of continuous improvement planning in education is to foster a culture of ongoing reflection, data-informed decision-making, and strategic action to enhance student achievement, educator effectiveness, and organizational performance. This process ensures that schools and systems remain responsive, equitable, and aligned with the evolving needs of learners and communities. The improvement planning terminology used throughout this handbook is specific to Colorado's Unified Improvement Plan (UIP), but the improvement planning concepts discussed throughout are universal. Colorado's UIP effectively leverages both a template and a process, serving multiple purposes, including alignment of shared planning expectations, documentation for the state's accountability system, transparency in decision-making, monitoring, and prioritization of support.

UIP History

In 2008 the *Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids* (S.B. 08-212) established the primary purpose of improvement planning as aligning efforts to ensure all students exit the K-12 education system ready for post-secondary education, and/or to be successful in the workforce, earning a living wage immediately upon graduation. To support this purpose, the *Education Accountability Act of 2009* (S.B.

09-163) requires each Colorado district and school to submit an improvement plan that addresses how they will improve their performance.

Implementing state policy, in 2009, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) introduced the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) to streamline school and district efforts to meet a variety of state and federal improvement planning requirements. The UIP reduces the total number of separate plans schools and districts are required to complete, with the intent of creating a single plan that creates efficiency and has true meaning for local stakeholders. Over time, several state and federal programs and grants (e.g., EASI grants, Gifted Education, READ Act) have been integrated into UIP processes, allowing schools and districts to simultaneously fulfill additional state compliance requirements and align improvement efforts (see the Additional Requirements and Flexibilities section of this handbook for more information).

Adopting a common improvement planning approach enables the state to shift from planning as an "event" to planning as a critical component of the process of "continuous improvement," as evidenced by the list of multiple UIP purposes outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: Multiple Purposes for the UIP

Purposes	Intended Outcomes
Alignment	A system to align improvement planning requirements for state and federal accountability into a single plan focused on improving results for students.
Best Practice	A statewide framework to promote best practices in improvement planning, including using state and local data, engaging in a continuous improvement cycle, and prioritizing a limited number of strategies.
Documentation	A common format for all schools and districts to document improvement efforts. Schools and districts on the state accountability clock (i.e., Priority Improvement and Turnaround) must demonstrate a coherent plan for dramatic change over time and reviews of these plans are conducted by CDE and the State Review Panel.
Transparency	A process for including multiple voices, including staff, families, and community representatives in the planning, implementation, and progress monitoring process. Plans are posted publicly on SchoolView.
Support	A mechanism for triggering additional support through CDE, especially for schools/districts on the accountability clock.

Most recently, in 2025 the UIP process and template was codified in state law through *Data Reporting Requirements for Kindergarten Through 12th Grade Schools* (H.B. 25-1210). This legislation formalized the UIP process, including:

- developing a streamlined plan format that consolidates various state, federal, and grant reporting requirements;
- allowance for local school boards or institutes to attach locally developed action portion of the plan that addresses action steps, resources, and any other plan components identified in state board rule; and
- maintenance of a centralized system for plan submissions so that CDE can conduct statewide analysis that informs distribution of state resources and supports.

In 2024 CDE implemented changes in alignment with this policy through releasing a streamlined plan template that completely replaced the previous UIP template as of April 2025. With this streamlined plan template, sites have the option to upload a locally developed Action and Implementation Progress Monitoring plans (e.g., 90-day plans).

The Role of Improvement Planning in Colorado's Accountability System

Colorado's education accountability system is based on the belief that every student should receive an excellent education and graduate ready to succeed. As described in CDE's District Accountability Handbook, the accountability system consists of local, state, and federal accountability processes. Figure 1 outlines the elements of the state's accountability system. Improvement planning is one of eight interconnected elements of Colorado's accountability system.

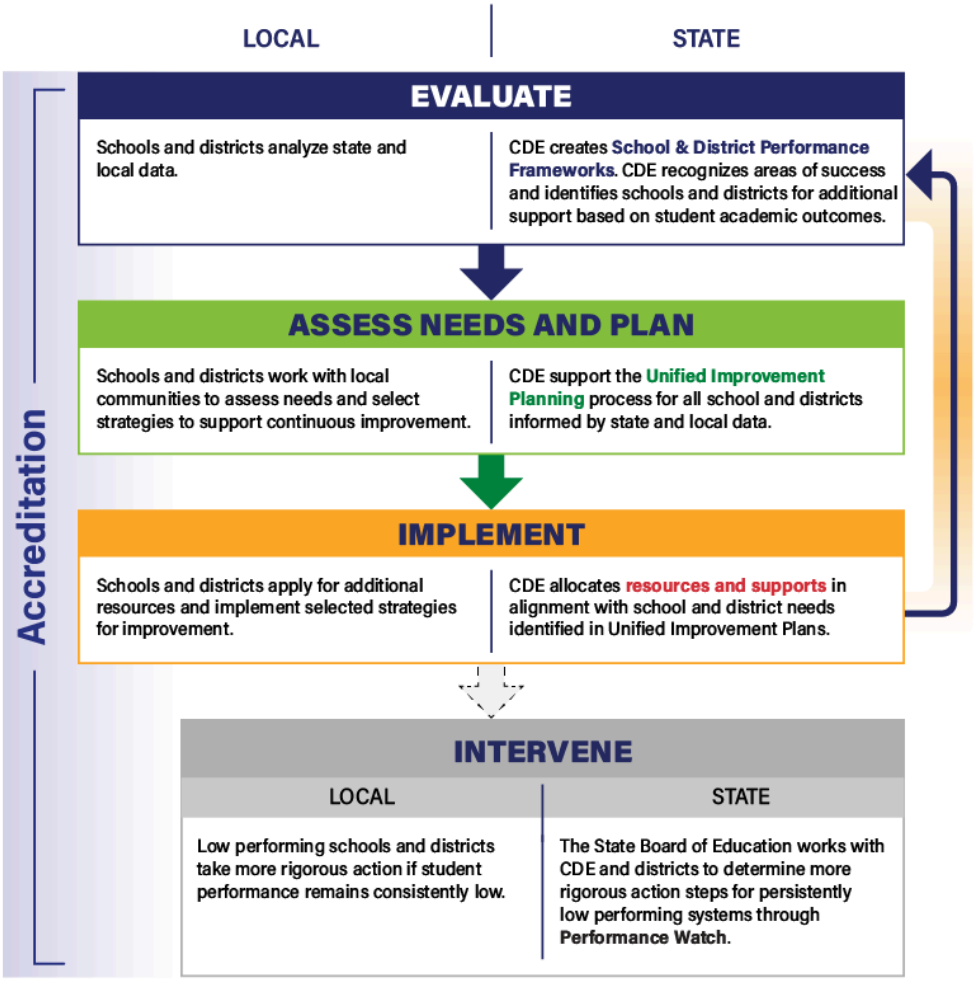
Figure 1: Elements of the Current State Accountability System



Figure 2 below summarizes the state's theory of action by visualizing how the elements of Colorado's

Accountability System interact on an annual basis to ensure that all students exit the K-12 education system ready for post-secondary education, and/or are successful in the workforce, earning a living wage immediately upon graduation.

Figure 2: Colorado's Accountability Theory of Action



The UIP process and template serves as a critical component of the accountability system, aimed at establishing high leverage planning expectations for schools and districts in Colorado and aligned with state and federal accountability requirements. It empowers schools to articulate specific efforts geared towards transitioning from current performance levels to desired outcomes. CDE accreditation ratings assigned in District Performance Frameworks (DPFs) determine the type of improvement plan that each district must develop. Since local school boards accredit schools, CDE assigns school plan types in each School Performance Framework (SPF). Requirements for each site's plan and CDE's support and review of plans differ based on the specific district's accreditation category or school plan type. These and other program expectations are detailed later in the Additional Requirements & Flexibilities section.

General Improvement Planning Guidance

This section provides universal guidance for continuous improvement planning. While the improvement planning terminology used throughout this handbook is specific to Colorado's UIP template and process, the school improvement planning concepts described in this handbook are universally applicable. While this guidance can support all approaches to planning, improvement plans will be referred to as UIPs throughout.

A Continuous Improvement Cycle

Improvement planning is a critical phase within a school or district's continuous improvement cycle, serving as the bridge between identifying areas of need and implementing meaningful change. After data is collected and analyzed to assess performance, the insights gained inform the creation of an improvement plan. This plan outlines specific goals, strategies, timelines, and resources needed to address the gaps or priorities identified.

The improvement plan provides a structured approach to achieving desired outcomes, ensuring that efforts are intentional and measurable. As the plan is implemented, progress is monitored regularly to assess the effectiveness of the strategies. This feedback loop allows sites to make necessary adjustments in real time.

Once the plan has been executed and evaluated, the results feed back into the cycle—informing the next round of analysis and planning. In this way, improvement planning is not a one-time event but a recurring, essential component that drives sustained growth and refinement over time.

The theory of action underlying CDE's UIP is that by engaging in a *continuous improvement cycle* to manage performance, districts and schools will become more effective and student outcomes will improve. This cycle describes four key activities of continuous improvement:

- *Focus* attention on the right things (Student Performance Priorities),
- *Evaluate* student performance by gathering, analyzing, and interpreting performance data,
- *Plan* Major Improvement Strategies based on performance data and Root Cause analysis, and
- *Implement* planned Major Improvement Strategies.

Then, repeat the cycle again throughout the school year to:

- *Progress Monitor* the implementation of Major Improvement Strategies and their impact on student performance at least quarterly,
- *Adjust* planned improvement strategies, and
- *Implement* revised strategies, as needed.

This cycle continues with ongoing evaluation, grounded in the focus areas, which serve as performance indicators for local, state, and federal accountability.

Each year, UIP authors should engage stakeholders in a reflection on the progress made towards meeting annual targets and implementation milestones and decide whether they need to rewrite or update their improvement plans. The guidance below provides an overview of conditions that need to be in place and the work to be done with each option.

Rewrite the Plan

Rewriting applies to sites that have had a plan in previous years and have student performance data to draw on. This approach requires planning teams to fully engage in every planning step as if they did not have a plan the prior year. Conditions that could lead a planning team to rewrite their UIP include:

- New leadership at the school that is not invested in the prior plan,
- Limited or no staff involvement in development of the prior plan,
- Performance results that suggest insufficient improvement or a decline in performance,
- A plan that is out of step with current Major Improvement Strategies as enacted in the school or district,
- Significant changes in resources (positive or negative) available to implement Major Improvement Strategies,
- Re-configuration of the school (e.g., combining two schools or grade level re-configuration), or
- Feedback from the district, CDE, or community stakeholders suggesting that the plan needs substantial revisions.

Update the Plan

Updating the UIP entails adjusting, fine-tuning, or building upon the plan from the prior year. This approach is a good fit for sites that have determined that some or all of the same Student Performance Priorities, Root Causes, and/or Major Improvement Strategies remain the focus. This approach requires planning teams to reflect on barriers or challenges encountered during implementation then update the plan elements to address those challenges. CDE provides sites with an option to “Continue Previous Plan” which will copy over content from the previous year’s plan that does not have a date associated with it (e.g., Description and some elements of Student Performance Priorities, Root Causes, and Major Improvement Strategies).

Create a New Plan

If the site did not have a prior UIP (e.g., new schools), the team will create a new plan. Given some of the unique circumstances of creating a UIP for a new school (e.g., limited or no trend data), there is additional guidance for new schools.

CDE Resources and Tools

- UIP Workbook: see Pre-Planning guidance

- UIP Online System User Guide: see "Continue Previous Plan" guidance

Levels of Planning

There are different types of planning that sites may need to take into account when designing their planning system (see Figure 4). Typically, districts will invest in a long-term strategic plan that articulates a vision of development over a five-to-ten-year period. The district and school improvement plans should operate in alignment to that strategic vision and provide a one- to two-year tactical plan that is nimbler and more responsive to performance data and emergent implementation issues. Short cycle planning is even more responsive, because it often looks about three months down the road and names very specific action steps to ensure there is urgency and high accountability in implementation activities.



Figure 4: Levels of Improvement Planning

Districts are encouraged to think broadly about how to leverage the improvement planning process to build consistent practices for all schools. School UIPs may be reviewed by multiple individuals at the district level to ensure that key strategies are included. School UIPs may also be used as a data source to inform district-level improvement planning.

Stakeholder Engagement

School and district leaders, teachers, staff, families, School and District Accountability Committees (SACs and DACs), local school boards, and community partners play a crucial role in school improvement efforts. Because plan implementation is necessarily a team effort, improvement planning should always be a collaborative process, involving multiple teams of stakeholders. The makeup of these planning teams will look different based on the school's or district's unique needs and structures, and they should include representation from internal (e.g., leadership district and school staff, students) and external stakeholders (e.g., community members, families) whenever possible.

Different stakeholder groups will be involved in different ways and at different times throughout the planning process (e.g., a small leadership team writes the full plan, department teams work on collecting and analyzing data, all staff participate in root cause analysis, and families and community partners participate in surveys or focus groups to gather support for identified root causes and major improvement strategies).

Best Practices

- Effective stakeholder engagement requires careful preparation, facilitation, and follow up.

- Stakeholders should receive regular updates on planning progress and key plan elements, should have opportunities to provide input at key junctures in the planning process, and may even be included in the consideration of key decision points.
- After getting input from stakeholders and using it to inform decision-making, follow up with those contributors so they know how their input influenced those decisions. This is especially important when received feedback is not reflected in changes or contradicts the direction taken. It is important to acknowledge this feedback and give rationale for why it was not taken.

In general, planning teams should consist of building leaders and teachers, and they should include or seek input from parent, student, community, and district representatives. CDE recommends that sites engage stakeholders in the improvement planning process throughout the year.

Table 4: Recommended Calendar of Stakeholder Engagement Activities

When	Stakeholder activities
Winter	Contribute to progress monitoring of plan implementation and progress towards meeting interim and annual student performance targets.
Late winter/ Early spring	Provide input on local data analysis and priority and target setting. Engage in budget discussions and how that connects to Major Improvement Strategies.
Late spring	Identify and validate root causes and inform the selection or modification of Major Improvement Strategies that will address root causes.
Early Fall	Provide input on and confirm finalized plans before October 15th submission.
Fall-Winter	Contribute to progress monitoring of plan implementation and progress towards meeting interim and annual student performance targets.

See Table 1 on page 4 to consider how these recommended stakeholder engagement activities align with the planning process throughout the year.

State and federal expectations include specific roles for stakeholders in the planning and implementation process. The engagement of specific stakeholder groups that is required by state statute and state rule is summarized below. See the Additional Requirements & Flexibilities section of this handbook for federal requirements and state requirements based on assigned plan types.

School and District Accountability Committees (SACs and DACS)

Within the state accountability system, significant attention is given to District and School Accountability Committees (DACs and SACs). While DACs advise local boards and SACs advise building

leadership, they generally have similar responsibilities for engagement with the improvement planning process (listed below).

- Make recommendations concerning the preparation of the district/school Performance, Improvement, Priority Improvement, or Turnaround plan (whichever is applicable).
- Monitor progress on a quarterly basis throughout the school year.

Local School Boards

The review and adoption of UIPs by specific stakeholder groups is required by statute and State Board rules. Overall, districts are expected to review all school plans before submitting them to CDE for review and/or public posting. Per statute, the local Board of Education must adopt the UIP of the district and schools implementing Priority Improvement and Turnaround Plans. The principal and superintendent must adopt the plans for schools implementing a Performance or Improvement plan. A resource outlining best practices for engaging Boards of Education is available on the CDE website.

Schools Accepting ESSA Title Funds

Schools accepting ESSA Title funds are required to develop plans in partnership with stakeholders and guarantee that stakeholders play a meaningful role in the plan development process in an ongoing manner. Schools accepting ESSA Title funds that are identified as needing support and improvement (e.g., Comprehensive, Targeted, or Advanced Targeted) are also required to include a description of the stakeholders involved, as well as how, when, in what way, and how often stakeholders partnered in plan development in their plans.

Specific CDE Resources and Tools for Stakeholder Engagement

- UIP Workbook: see “Roles and Teams in the Planning Process” and “General Guidance for Working with Stakeholders” for practices to engage in before, during, and after stakeholder engagement.
- District Accountability Handbook: provides more details on the role of Accountability Committees and local boards.
- District Accountability Handbook: Identification Supplement: provides specific requirements regarding the adoption of plans for schools and districts that are on the state Accountability Clock and/or are federally identified.
- Stakeholder Engagement in Federal Programs: provides detailed information about federal stakeholder engagement requirements, using evidence-based principles of strong family, school, and community partnerships.

Data Types for Planning

CDE recommends that different types of data should be integrated into different phases of the improvement planning process. For instance, performance and demographic data are used early in the process to reflect on progress made during the current year's Student Performance Priorities. Process and perception data are utilized later in the process with the analysis of Root Causes, Major Improvement Strategies/Action Steps, Implementation Benchmarks. See Tables 6 and 7 later in this handbook for more detailed information about each category of data as they correspond to subsequent stages of the planning process.

While the state's School and District Performance Frameworks (SPF/DPF) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) identification categories (see Additional Requirements & Flexibilities) contain some of these data sources, the planning team should begin improvement planning using local data as early as late winter or early spring of the preceding year. Data from state sources, coming later in the improvement planning process (July and August), should be used to verify or refine the improvement plan.

Table 5: Recommended data types

Data Type	Purpose
Performance	Focused on student outcomes and includes measures like student assessment achievement and growth results, in addition to educational outcome measures like dropout or graduation rates.
Demographic	Describes school characteristics and could include student measures such as "the percentage of students who qualify for free/reduced lunch" and staff measures such as "how many teachers are first- or second-year teachers."
Process	Describes programs, strategies, and practices that may impact performance data as well as measures such as attendance and behavior that are predictive of other outcomes.
Perception	Reflects the opinions and views of stakeholders and may include climate surveys, implementation surveys, or information from focus groups.

CDE Resources and Tools

- CDE Data Tools & Reports: provides a brief overview of the data visualization tools and resources that are available from CDE that may support improvement planning work.

- Using Non-Assessment Data for School Improvement: describes how to adopt and use non-assessment data to inform school improvement efforts and highlights key considerations for data use, data sources that may not have previously been considered for improvement planning, and use cases related to improvement planning.

Unified Improvement Plan Elements

The following guiding questions outline the major elements of the improvement planning process. The guiding questions build upon each other and facilitate alignment across the entire plan.

1. Does the plan identify high-leverage performance priorities and targets?
2. Does the plan focus on evidence-based strategies to resolve systemic root causes and drive improvement on identified priorities?
3. Does the plan outline a coherent approach to implementation and adjustment of the identified strategies?

Figure 5 illustrates different ways of understanding how these elements fit together.

- Planning Process: Use identified priorities and targets to create a road map for improvement efforts during the year.
- Implementation: Sites implement the actions outlined in the plan to meet milestones, put strategies into practice, and ultimately improve student outcomes in prioritized performance areas.

Figure 5: Elements of School Improvement Planning



School improvement plans should build a vision for improvement that remains coherent across each section of the plan: the root causes and strategies are aligned to identified priorities and targets, and the action plan is deliberately sequenced to put the identified strategies into practice. The following guidance provides an overview of sequential improvement planning activities based on the three guiding questions above. Additional guidance for the planning process is covered in CDE's UIP Workbook which provides recommendations for how to complete each phase of the improvement planning process.

Priorities & Targets

Effective school improvement planning is grounded in a thorough reflection on available student performance data and the deliberate selection of high-leverage, data-driven Student Performance Priorities that emerge as a result of that reflection. The initial phases of planning involve completing an analysis that helps summarize current performance, identifying notable trends within that data, and prioritizing areas of focus, and setting improvement targets.

Data Analysis and Reflection

Any strong improvement plan is grounded in a clear understanding of the current state of the system. While school data should be regularly reviewed to inform both current-year adjustments and larger scale changes needed for the upcoming plan cycle, this initial grounding in performance and demographic data analysis forms the foundation for the remainder of the improvement planning process. It is necessary to establish a strong foundation in the current state of the school or district and identify notable trends.

As noted in the preceding Gather and Organize Relevant Data section, CDE recommends analyzing different types of data for different phases of the improvement planning process. To understand current performance and notable trends, CDE recommends analyzing performance and demographic data, with examples for each type of data identified in Table 6.

Table 6: Examples of Performance and Demographic Data

Data Types	Examples
Performance	● Academic Achievement and Growth from State and Local Measures ● Graduation, Completion Rate ● Matriculation to Higher Education ● Credential Attainment Rate ● Dropout, Reenrollment, Recidivism Rates ● Promotion, Credit Accrual ● Grades, Course Failure Rate
Demographic	● Age of Students ● Enrollment and Grades Served ● Gender ● Socio-economic status (e.g., Free and Reduced-Price Lunch) ● Race/Ethnicity ● Learning needs (e.g., English Learners, Students with Disabilities, More than 3 years behind in credit attainment) ● Length of time in school/program ● Mobility Rates

Planning teams should rely on an analysis of local performance and process data to begin their planning process. Beginning in the year prior to the plan implementation (ideally in late winter or early spring), planning teams should begin to review student demographics and performance on local measures to assess current performance and determine whether previously established expectations were met. Local measures can include both assessment and non-assessment data.

As for state data, preliminary District Performance Frameworks (DPFs), School Performance Frameworks (SPFs), and ESSA identifications are available through CDE accountability contacts in late August/early September of each year. The data included in DPF and SPF ratings, such as assessment scores and graduation rates, are updated in the District and School Dashboard. Analyze state-level data to: 1) verify the findings suggested by local data analysis, 2) identify where state expectations were met, and 3) reflect on areas where the school or district is not yet meeting state expectations.

When building a plan based on local data or a combination of state and local data, state assessment data plays a confirmatory role – that is, state assessment data could either serve to confirm the plan based on local data, or it will indicate that some adjustments are needed to that plan. See Appendix A: UIP State Data Resources for more information about sources of state-level data.

The ultimate outcome of data analysis is the identification of student performance trends over time that will support the planning team's selection of Student Performance Priorities.

CDE Resources and Tools

- UIP Workbook: see Phase 1: Data Analysis and Reflection
- Using Non-Assessment Data for School Improvement: describes how to adopt and use non-assessment data to inform school improvement efforts and highlights key considerations for data use, data sources that may not have previously been considered for improvement planning, and use cases related to improvement planning.
- Data Analysis for Small Student Populations: provides guidance on how to include analysis of data with small populations of students in the UIP for all sites that need to report on small student groups, either due to size of the school/district or disaggregated data analysis.
- Learning Environment District Profile Reports: includes chronic absenteeism, discipline, student behavior, other actions, service provider ratios, school climate surveys, and other measures.

Student Performance Priorities

If the emerging plan is to have a clear direction, it is crucial that focused priorities are identified at the outset of the planning process. After planning teams complete a thorough analysis of data and

stakeholder input, they move on to prioritize areas of student performance that the team will primarily focus on changing or improving over the coming year. Student Performance Priorities (SPPs) lay the groundwork for targeted efforts and strategic actions. They are the student-focused priorities or data trends that serve as the compass guiding the site's efforts toward academic excellence.

Connections to Other Parts of the Plan

SPPs inform the selection of root causes, the choice of Major Improvement Strategies that will address priorities, and the actions that are implemented. They are challenges or areas of growth the site wants to overcome through the plan.

Establishing clear SPPs helps the planning team to maintain focus on what is most important throughout the process of plan development, and these priorities can help inform decisions about how to allocate resources and team member efforts.

Best Practices

- Identify no more than 1-3 SPPs based on student-focused performance.
- Identify student-focused SPPs that are within the realm of control for your school. Do not include priorities or conditions that are not possible for your school to impact.
- Use SPPs to address areas where the school is not meeting expectations at the local, state, or federal level.
- Ground each SPP in performance data and with a clear rationale that explains why a particular performance priority has been singled out for attention. The rationale provides transparency in decision-making and can support alignment with broader improvement objectives .
- Contextualize the magnitude of change represented by SPPs. Whether impacting students across all content areas or specific groups of students, SPPs must align with the scale of transformation required.

Common Misconceptions

- SPPs are not limited to only addressing where the site is not meeting state expectations. In fact, sites are encouraged to use both state and local data to define performance priorities, including non-assessment data.
- SPPs do not address adult actions. Instead, SPPs should be specific statements about student performance. They are not action steps that need to be taken or concerned about budget, staffing, curriculum, or instruction. For example, the performance priority is not a lack of teacher instructional time in math; instead, the SPP might be students' declining performance across state and local math assessments. Adult actions will be addressed in other areas of the UIP.

- An individual SPP does not need to focus on one student data trend at a time. A single SPP may synthesize multiple concerning trends. For instance, both the growth and achievement of students with disabilities in English Language Arts may be combined as a single SPP.

In sum, SPPs focus improvement efforts on the priorities the site most needs to improve, frame the planning team's investigation into root cause analysis, define clear performance efforts, and support strong target setting and interim measures and targets.

Targets

After identifying one to three Student Performance Priorities, the next step in the planning process is to establish annual and interim targets for student performance. Target setting is a strategic means to determine the degree of improvement a site aims to achieve each year and it allows us to understand the impact of improvement strategies on addressing the identified SPPs over time. This phase of the planning process not only sets the plan's trajectory but also serves as a yardstick for measuring progress. Target setting offers a crucial feedback loop on the impact of selected improvement strategies, facilitating adjustments as needed, ensuring equitable benefits for all students, and fostering collective investment in student progress.

Connections to Other Parts of the Plan

Targets serve as annual anchors, to provide concrete touchstones for student progress and reflect the success of implementation efforts. These desired student outcomes should be directly aligned with Student Performance Priorities. For instance, if the priority is low English language arts (ELA) achievement, targets might aim to meet or exceed state-defined expectations for ELA achievement.

While annual targets are directly aligned with the identified Student Performance Priorities, interim targets reflect the metrics associated with performance priorities over time. Interim targets enable us to track student outcomes in relation to annual targets, offering insights into changes in performance over time and the effectiveness of our implementation strategies. Regular monitoring of targets using interim assessments provides continuous feedback on progress to inform mid-year adjustments if these are needed throughout the school year.

Common misconceptions

- Target setting should not be limited to state assessment data alone. It can encompass a holistic array of metrics, and may include non-assessment data like attendance, engagement levels, and survey data.
- Targets should be established in relation to the groups identified by the Student Performance Priority. Depending on the SPPs, targets may need to be developed for specific student groups to reflect their diverse needs.
- Targets are not static. Targets can evolve in tandem with the shifting student needs and chosen educational priorities.

- The same target is not appropriate for all monitored outcomes. Improvement strategies impact assessment outcomes differently with annual results impacted by fidelity of implementation.
- Growth on state assessment is not incremental so targets should not be based on arbitrary increments. Student growth percentiles on state assessment are determined using a normative approach. Thus, growth targets are better defined in relation to state-defined expectations. To learn more about the state's growth model, see Colorado Growth Model FAQs.

In sum, targets allow sites to determine if our strategy is working for all students and/or certain groups of students. Interim measurement allows sites to track progress while providing a signal to adjust strategies if necessary. Monitoring of targets with interim measures and targets allows us to determine if Major Improvement Strategies are having a potential impact on SPPs by addressing the identified root causes.

CDE Resources and Tools

- UIP Workbook: see Phase 2: Identify Priorities and Targets

Root Causes & Strategies

Conducting a thorough root cause analysis of each Student Performance Priority plays a crucial role in the improvement planning process. Root cause analysis helps planning teams identify Major Improvement Strategies that will eliminate or significantly reduce the impact of identified root causes, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for students. This intermediate phase of the planning process involves identifying the root cause of each Student Performance Priority and then validating selected root causes.

Root Causes

A "root cause" is defined by the following criteria:

- The problem would not have happened if the root cause were not present.
- The problem would not reoccur if the cause were effectively corrected or dissolved.
- Correction or dissolution of the cause would not lead to the same or similar problems.

Determining underlying root causes and then validating them is one of the most important steps that planning teams can take in school improvement work. A thorough root cause analysis enables the planning team to determine which system, practice, or set of behaviors they will directly target for changes. If the root cause analysis has successfully identified the root of the identified Student Performance Priority, addressing the root cause should positively impact outcomes for students.

Connections to Other Parts of the Plan

Root causes serve as the intersection between the data analysis and action planning elements of the improvement planning process. Root causes are defined as the deepest underlying cause of the Student Performance Priority (SPP) challenges determined in the previous step of the improvement planning process. In other words, root causes are the problems that need to be solved to improve student outcomes.

Best Practices

Root cause analysis calls for a second phase of data analysis and reflection. As noted in the preceding Data Types for Planning section of this handbook, CDE recommends analyzing different types of data for different phases of the improvement planning process. To understand current root causes of Student Performance Priorities (SPPs), CDE recommends analyzing process and perception data, with examples for each type of data identified in Table X.

Table 7: Examples of Process and Perception Data

Data Type	Examples
Process	● External Reviews (e.g., Diagnostic Review, Connect for Success, Turnaround Network) ● Structures/supports and External Partners (e.g., MTSS, PLCs, student support team, turnaround partner) ● Staffing Patterns (e.g., turnover rates, years of experience) ● Stakeholder Involvement (e.g., SAC) ● Course Offerings and Student Course Taking Patterns (e.g., AP enrollment) ● Budget (e.g., total grant/federal dollars received) ● Program Offerings and Enrollment (e.g., transition services, counseling, apprenticeships, credit recovery, intervention) ● Professional Development offerings ● Dropout prevention policy/practices review
Perception	● Student perception (e.g., safety, engagement) ● Community perception of school/students (e.g., parent surveys, focus groups) ● Staff perceptions of teaching and learning conditions (e.g., TLCC) ● Staff perception of student emotional and cognitive engagement ● Observations of instructional practices

After initially identifying root causes, it is essential to verify that the identified root causes of a problem are indeed the true underlying cause, and not just a symptom or contributing factor. Root cause validation ensures that root causes analysis efforts are effective and lead to sustainable solutions. Validation involves using data and evidence to confirm that the identified cause is both accurate and

relevant to the problem. It is crucial to leverage the expertise and perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders in the root cause validation process as they can help the planning team identify potential flaws and/or uncover additional evidence.

Common misconceptions

- Don't identify root causes that are outside the control of the school (e.g., "The district doesn't pay teachers enough"). Focus on identifying root causes that the school or district by itself can resolve.
- Don't focus on student demographics as a root cause (e.g., "The school has a high population of English learners, particularly newcomers") because they are not something that the school has control over changing.
- Don't name root causes that are not logically connected to the Student Performance Priority identified earlier in the planning process. Root causes need to explain the existence of the Student Performance Priority; therefore, a logical progression needs to be established.
- There might not always be a single root cause for each Student Performance Priority. In fact, there can be multiple root causes that might need to be addressed.
- Do not choose root causes to fit a strategy that has already been decided. It's very important that root causes are identified based on both qualitative and quantitative evidence, and that strategies target the problems that most need to be addressed to effectively impact student outcomes.

CDE Resources and Tools

- UIP Workbook: Phase 3: Conduct Root Cause Analysis and Select Strategies
- Root Cause Analysis (webpage)

Major Improvement Strategies

Once the root causes of each Student Performance Priority are identified, the planning team should begin to brainstorm possible or likely improvement strategies to address them. After careful consideration, planning teams select Major Improvement Strategies that sites will implement in an effort to address root causes and ultimately improve student outcomes. Each Major Improvement Strategy in the UIP includes a corresponding Action Plan with action steps, responsible parties, start and end dates and an Implementation Plan with Implementation Milestones that outline how a site will track the degree to which strategies are being successfully implemented over time.

Major Improvement Strategies are not the only strategies that a school is implementing in a given planning period and many elements of school systems, practices, and routines will be maintained over many years. Major Improvement Strategies name the particular systems and practices that the school is focused on changing, designing or enhancing in a given year.

Connections to Other Parts of the Plan

Major Improvement Strategies are change specific. They set the vision for the improvement planning process, serving as evidence-based interventions aimed at resolving the root causes of Student Performance Priorities. They encapsulate targeted approaches tailored to the specific needs of each educational community, grounded in empirical evidence and informed by data analysis.

Most of the remaining improvement plan will focus on creating concrete action plans to implement selected strategies; therefore, before determining the Major Improvement Strategies for the coming year, planning teams should take time to fully research strategies (including their resource and capacity requirements, conditions for success, contextual fit, and any downstream impacts) and collect stakeholder input. Not all improvement strategies will address a given root cause or priority. Similarly, even the best improvement strategies may be unsuccessful if they are wrong for the context or the community, or if they don't have support and buy-in from school leaders, teachers, staff, students, and families. Fully researching potential strategies and collecting stakeholder input before selection will set the planning team up for a strategy selection process that truly integrates the best thinking available.

Best Practices

- Define the appropriate scope of selected major improvement strategies. Selected Major Improvement Strategies should be capable of adequately addressing and resolving identified root causes or key components of the root causes in one to two years.

- Identify at least one but no more than three major improvement strategies. This limitation supports the school team in maintaining adequate focus on those strategies and increases the likelihood that each strategy will get the attention and resources it needs to be effective.

  For example, if the plan identifies one strategy that makes a system-wide change requiring the focused attention of the entire site team for a full year or two, then this might be the only major improvement strategy in the plan. In this case, identifying additional strategies could pull focus in too many different directions and dilute the implementation team's effectiveness.

  On the other hand, if identified root causes indicate a need for multiple smaller-scale strategies, such as strategies that require the time and attention of teachers serving a single grade, then the plan may include a list of up to three different strategies. In this situation, identifying too

few strategies could result in the school making less progress than needed towards its ultimate improvement goals.

- Ground each major improvement strategy in research that demonstrates a track record of success for that strategy or support the selection with a clear rationale indicating a reasonable expectation of success. Planning teams need to document this evidence base or rationale in the plan, so keep track of any consulted research or other resources while developing major improvement strategies.

- Target an identified root cause and aim at improving outcomes on a Student Performance Priority with each major improvement strategy. Resolving the root causes should result in increased performance on your Student Performance Priority.

Common Misconceptions

- Avoid selecting strategies that are too broad to be accomplished in the plan period (1-2 years) and pull energies in too many directions. On the other hand, avoid selecting strategies with too narrow a scope that will not have the scale of impact needed.

- Don't proceed with vague strategies. Lack of clarity makes it difficult to create strong action plans and increases the likelihood of misunderstandings or confusion.

- Ensure strategies are: grounded in a strong data reflection and site-specific root cause analysis; a good fit for the site's existing systems or context; and based in research or strong evidence-base.

Selecting a strong set of Major Improvement Strategies enables the implementation team to focus their attention, gives them clarity about their focus for a given year, enables them to prioritize their time and energy, and supports them in making decisions about midcourse corrections as necessary throughout the year.

Strong Major Improvement Strategies are the basis for establishing strong progress monitoring measures. Knowing very clearly what practices and systems the strategy aims at shifting will enable the planning team to determine how to set implementation milestones and interim measures. These, in turn, help the team determine whether the strategy is being implemented as planned and whether that strategy is having the intended effect on student outcomes. Each of these functions is crucial to increasing the likelihood of improved outcomes for students.

Action Plan & Progress Monitoring

Action Plan

Action steps are the most granular level of detail in the planning process. They describe the activities that will bring the strategy to life at the daily or weekly level, enabling the school to change its practices, meet the implementation milestones and interim measures, and finally reach its end-of-year targets. Strong action planning identifies both the key steps and the ongoing processes needed to put a given strategy into practice. For each of these activities, an Action Plan identifies who will be responsible or involved, when the activity should take place, and any additional resources necessary to support it.

Connections to Other Parts of the Plan

If the strategy describes the key approach to shifting practices and systems in order to address Student Performance Priorities, then the action steps are the detailed activities that must take place during the year to ensure that those shifts actually take place.

Action steps provide the school with an overall roadmap for the implementation of the strategy. The strongest action steps are backwards planned from the target date for full implementation. This allows school teams to focus on the weekly or even daily tasks needed to shift their practices while establishing a deliberate pacing of tasks to ensure that the strategy has enough time to impact student outcomes.

Short Cycle Plans

CDE provides sites with a flexibility within the UIP system to accommodate short-cycle plans (e.g., quarterly plans, 90 Day or 100 Day plans). These short-cycle plans can be uploaded directly to the online system in place of implementation milestones, interim measures, and action steps, as long as those elements are covered in the short-cycle plan. If you choose to upload short-cycle plans, be aware that the UIP must span the full plan posting one to two years throughout the plan. As new short-cycle plans are created, upload these to the online system so that your overall UIP remains up to date.

Implementation Progress Monitoring

Just as the best strategy will be ineffective if it's not the right fit for the site or its context, the right strategy for a site will fall flat if it is not effectively implemented. Creating a progress monitoring plan for implementation is a crucial – but too often neglected – element of the planning process. Implementation milestones enable sites to monitor whether implementation is happening as planned, and they can help identify issues or gaps in implementation when milestones are missed or when challenges arise in meeting them. Challenges with implementation that are identified through progress monitoring signal a need to step back, reflect on the plan as a whole, and make necessary mid-course corrections, rather than waiting for student outcome data to confirm that progress is not being made. Using missed milestones as an opportunity to adjust improvement efforts enables schools to respond to their ever-evolving contexts and ensure the strongest possible outcomes for students.

Connections to Other Parts of the Plan

Progress monitoring Implementation plays an essential role in the improvement planning process. Analysis of performance informs the selection of Student Performance Priorities, and end-of-year targets identify the expected improvement in outcomes for that performance area over the course of the year. The major improvement strategy describes the actions and system changes that will be made within the site in order to move the site from the current state and meet the end-of-year targets. Implementation milestones are key success indicators or checkpoints in the progression of implementing major improvement strategy components. These milestones, together with student performance interim targets, make it possible to progress monitor the rollout of the major improvement strategy and to evaluate whether the strategy is having the intended effect on student outcomes.

Best Practices

- Implementation milestones should name specific, measurable adult or school systems changes that are key to measuring the progress of implementing a strategy or initiative. Effective implementation milestones identify what teams expect to see at specific phases of strategy implementation to know that they are on track. They identify:
    - What the change will look like at a certain stage,
    - Who is responsible for making sure this change is in place (an actor),
    - How it will be measured (a target and/or tool measurement),
    - What success indicators or checkpoints will be monitored along the way (implementation milestones)
    - When the change is expected to be in place (a date).

  Leaving out any of this information in the improvement plan will make it difficult to use implementation milestones to gauge progress or to follow up on missed milestones. For example, if a milestone lacks a target measurement event, it will be difficult to determine whether that milestone has been met or missed. If a milestone lacks an actor, it will be difficult to determine who needs additional support in their role in implementing a strategy. Note that these four pieces of information may not all be stated in the milestone, but they should be implied or clear within the site's context.

- Implementation milestones should highlight the major success indicators or checkpoints for phases in a significant or system-wide change, or they should highlight points in the strategy rollout by which changes should be implemented. Identifying how progress will be measured is crucial to identifying whether implementation is on track or off track, and how far from the target the current state is. Implementation milestones must be carefully crafted in order to provide strong and meaningful checkpoints that can reliably be used to assess the rollout of a strategy.

Common Misconceptions

- Implementation milestones measure how adult actions and systems are changing over the course of the year. They measure whether a strategy is being implemented as planned. Interim

targets specifically look at student outcomes and measure how student performance is changing over the course of the year. They measure whether the strategy is having the intended impact on student outcomes, that is, whether the strategy itself is effective.

- Unlike implementation milestones and interim targets, action steps do not measure anything. Rather, they pace out and detail the specific tasks or actions that will be needed to implement the strategy within the larger context of the Unified Improvement Plan.

CDE Resources

- UIP Workbook: Phase 3: Conduct Root Cause Analysis and Select Strategies; Phase 4: Implementation and Action Plans; Phase 5: Validate and Refine UIP
- Current UIP Major Improvement Strategy Guides: web based collection of strategy guides that provide information about what research says about strategies that are commonly used in the UIP that can be used for strategy selection or to determine areas of focus and action plans.
- Guidance for Short Cycle Planning in the Unified Improvement Plan: outlines requirements, a checklist of short cycle plan components, examples of short cycle planning tools, and online system guidance

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Additional Requirements & Flexibilities

All public schools and districts in Colorado are required to complete a unified improvement plan with the elements outlined in the preceding section. However, as noted above, there are different requirements for plan content, submission, review, and adoption based on the state and federal identifications and other state program expectations.

In general, higher performing schools and districts are granted autonomy and flexibility in the planning process, while those that are lower performing are eligible for targeted CDE support and have additional planning requirements. In addition to universal planning requirements, some CDE programs have specific planning requirements that pertain to participating or identified schools and districts, including: READ Act, Improving Mathematics Outcomes (HB23-1231), Early Learning Needs Assessment (K-3), Empowering Action for School Improvement (EASI) Grant, Title I, and ESSA Comprehensive Support. Accordingly, certain district and school plans may be reviewed - and even approved - at the state level depending on state and federal identifications and other state program expectations.

For schools and districts identified through the state and federal accountability system, the UIP documents evidence of the school's or district's proposal for improvement and dramatic change. Therefore, the plan should convey the system's sense of urgency for improvement, communicate the progress on previous years' action plans, and detail a specific direction for the future. While CDE will review select state- and/or federally-identified plans, the UIP acts as an archive of the school's or district's actions over time for the State Review Panel and the State Board of Education as they consider directed actions at the end of the Accountability Clock.

State Identification

Each year, the state reports on the performance of all public schools, all districts, and the state through School and District Performance Frameworks. The Performance Framework reports are based on the key Performance Indicators: academic achievement, growth, and postsecondary and workforce readiness. For more information about this aspect of the Accountability System, see District and School Performance Frameworks.

The District Performance Frameworks (DPF) guide the Commissioner in accrediting school districts and determine the type of improvement plan that the district should write. Districts Accredited with Distinction and Accredited need to write a Performance Plan. The remaining district

Figure 6: State Accreditation and Plan Type Categories



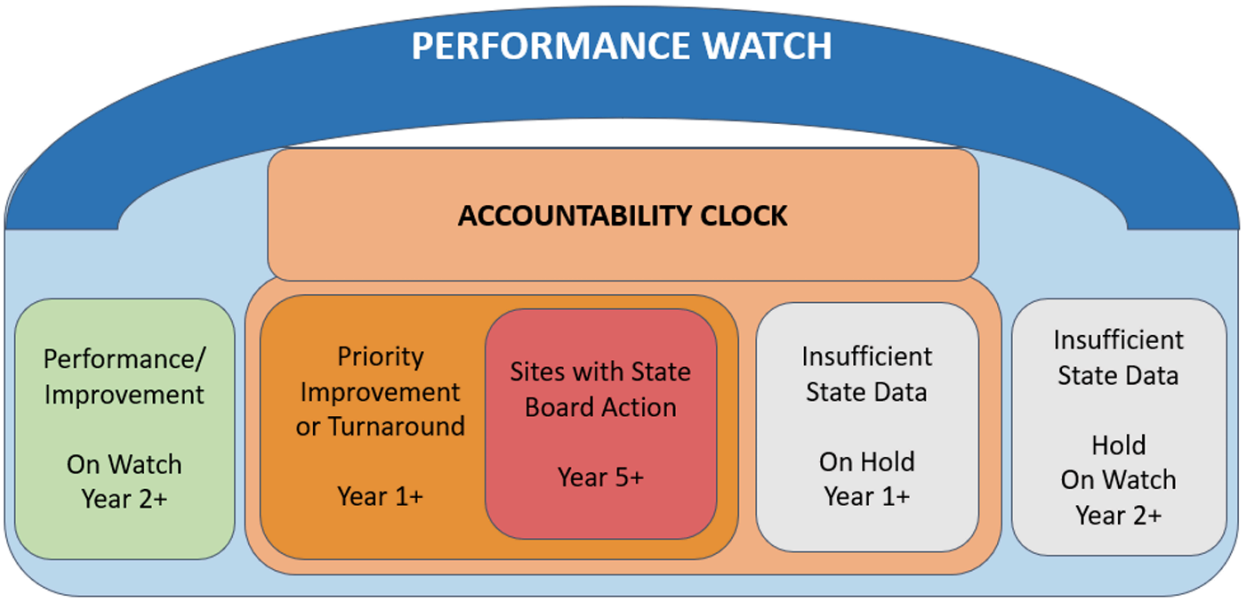
accreditation ratings include the name of the plan the district should write (e.g., districts that are "Accredited with Improvement Plan" will write an Improvement Plan) as outlined in Figure 6.

Because local school boards accredit their schools, the department does not provide an accreditation rating for schools and instead only assigns school plan types based upon the School Performance Frameworks (SPF). Every school and district receives one of the ratings/plan types as outlined in Figure D.

Performance Watch and Accountability Clock Plans

All schools and districts with an identified need through the state accountability system are considered to be on *Performance Watch*, which is illustrated in Figure 7 below. Performance Watch includes sites on the Accountability Clock (i.e., Priority Improvement or Turnaround at Year 1 or higher), On Watch (i.e., sites that have earned an Improvement plan type or higher after being on the accountability clock for at least two years) or On Hold (i.e., received an Insufficient State Data rating after being on performance watch in the prior year). For information regarding the relationships between the Accountability Clock, On Watch status, and Performance Watch, and an overview of the requirements specific to school identification in these categories, see the District Accountability Handbook: Identification Supplement.

Figure 7: Performance Watch and the Accountability Clock



While all schools and districts are expected to complete an improvement plan, schools and districts on Performance Watch are eligible for additional support (e.g., the Empowering Action for School

Improvement (EASI) grant application and CDE Support Leads) and must complete additional planning requirements which are detailed in Appendix X: Additional State Planning Requirements.

CDE expects that sites on Performance Watch create a Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) that demonstrates an understanding of the magnitude of the issues facing them. The data analysis should consider and respond to the overall Performance Indicators (i.e., academic achievement, academic growth, postsecondary workforce readiness) and indicators by disaggregated groups not met or approaching on the School or District Performance Frameworks. In some cases, this may mean that the school or district must address all Performance Indicators (i.e., academic achievement, academic growth, post-secondary and workforce readiness) and look for an analysis that works across the system, rather than focusing on just one area. Furthermore, the action plan should be appropriate in scope and intensity. This is an acknowledgement that for sites to exit Performance Watch status, dramatic change is necessary.

Schools and districts on Performance Watch have additional planning requirements and will participate in a formal review and feedback process managed by CDE. Customized directions are available on the first page of the Online UIP template for each site. In addition to the universal planning requirements described in the previous Universal Elements of the Improvement Planning Process (e.g., Student Performance Priorities, root causes, major improvement strategies) section of this handbook, CDE assigns additional plan requirements based on state identifications (e.g., Improvement, Priority Improvement, Turnaround, 4th Year on the Accountability Clock) that are detailed in CDE's District Accountability Handbook: Identification Supplement - see Appendix B: State Identification Additional Planning Requirements for a checklist of additional planning requirements for each level of state identification.

Insufficient State Data Ratings

There are unique considerations for districts and schools that do not have enough available data for the state to assign a rating. For planning purposes, these identified schools or districts must follow the requirements connected to their most recently assigned plan type. Sites with an ISD rating are not eligible for biennial flexibility. Additional information can be found in the Insufficient State Data Ratings Fact Sheet.

ESSA Identification

While the state and federal identification processes emphasize different aspects of student performance, they work in tandem. For the most part, the state identification process gives a broader sense of how the overall system is operating, whereas the federal identification process shines a light on historically underserved populations. Any state that accepts funds under the federal legislation called the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), must annually identify and assign plan types to schools that accept ESSA funds for support

and improvement. Plan submission, content, and review requirements differ based on the category of federal identification.

ESSA requires that identified schools develop and implement an improvement plan that addresses the reasons for the school's identification and will result in improvement of student outcomes. Regardless of category, ESSA requires that all plans for schools accepting ESSA funds and identified for support and improvement share the following requirements:

- Develop plans with stakeholders (including school leaders, teachers, and parents).
- Make stakeholders aware of reasons for ESSA identification to inform plan development.
- Plans must be informed by student performance against state-determined long-term goals on each accountability indicator in ESSA.
- Include evidenced-based interventions.
- Approval and adoption at the LEA level.

See CDE's District Accountability Handbook: Identification Supplement - Appendix C: ESSA Identification Additional Planning Requirements for a checklist of additional planning requirements for each level of state identification.

Additional State Requirements

In addition to the universal planning requirements for all schools, some state policies and programs have specific requirements that pertain to some sites. The following types of sites that must meet additional planning requirements include:

- Schools and Districts serving grades K-3 (READ Act and Early Learning Needs Assessment),
- Schools and districts serving grades 9-12,
- Schools and Districts that have received an *Exploration* or *Transformation Network* grant through Empowering Action for School Improvement (EASI)

See Appendix F: Additional State Planning Requirements for a checklist of program-specific additional planning requirements that are not related to state or federal identification.

Flexibilities

CDE provides the following flexibilities to schools and districts that may require process efficiencies or additional time in order to develop high-quality plans that are responsive to local needs. These flexibilities acknowledge the diverse challenges schools and districts face and aim to reduce administrative burden, allowing sites to focus on meaningful planning, stakeholder engagement, and data-driven decision-making. Ultimately, the goal of the following flexibilities is to support more effective implementation and improved student outcomes, without compromising accountability or compliance.

Combined Plans

The option to write a combined plan is a flexibility offered to small districts (less than 1,200 students). District administrators must indicate in the UIP Online System if the district is submitting a combined

plan and identify which schools are included within the combined plan. Eligibility to submit a combined plan is based on the district's enrollment, as measured by the prior school year's Student October Count (for example, eligibility to write a combined plan for the 2025-26 school year is based on the 2024 Student October Count). Information regarding the district's eligibility to submit a combined plan can be found in the district's current Online UIP template.

Table 8: Combined Plan Eligibility

District's Student Count	Eligibility Determination
Less than 1,000	Automatically eligible to submit a combined improvement plan without approval from CDE.
1,001-1,200	Eligible to submit a combined improvement plan with approval from CDE. Email uiphelp@cde.state.co.us to request approval.
Greater than 1,200	Not eligible to submit a combined improvement plan.

January Submission

At the discretion of the district, sites that have been newly identified (i.e., Priority Improvement, Turnaround, ESSA Comprehensive Support) or sites that choose to participate in the request to reconsider process may have flexibility for a January 15 submission.

Biennial Submission

In 2016, the Colorado legislature expanded flexibility around biennial (every other year) submission of the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) through HB 16-1440. This flexibility is available to all schools assigned a Performance plan type and districts that are Accredited or Accredited with Distinction. Schools and districts must not be On Watch to qualify for biennial submission.

This flexibility is not available to sites that have an Insufficient State Data rating. If submitting biennially, the plan must cover at least two academic years (the current school year and the next). All other sites must submit annually for public posting.

CDE Resources

- Biennial Flexibility for the UIP
- Guidance for Combined Plans

The UIP is Complete and Submitted, Now What?

After planning is complete, implementation is the next essential and recurring component of a school or district's continuous improvement cycle. During implementation, the site's focus shifts to effective implementation and responsibility shifts to an implementation team. The following are key actions that school or district leaders and implementation teams can take to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of major improvement strategies.

Celebrate & Share

Begin by acknowledging the completion and submission of the UIP by sharing this annual milestone with all key stakeholders. Key stakeholders should have been engaged throughout the planning process, so this should not come as a surprise to them. However, notifying staff, students, parents, school board members, and community partners of plan completion and submission gives meaning to the planning process, fosters transparency, and creates a sense of shared progress and ownership going forward. The plan should be publicly accessible and shared broadly and regularly with the school community.

Communicate & Engage

To support effective implementation of the UIP, clear communication and meaningful engagement are essential. Two goals of communication efforts would be to inform everyone of the Major Improvement Strategies and how they will address the root cause of identified Student Performance Priorities and to identify and support champions for each major improvement strategy. Key stakeholders should have been engaged throughout the planning process, so the plan decisions and content should not be new to them. However, efforts should be made to communicate this complex information in a clear and accessible format, ensuring everyone understands the major improvement strategies, action plans, and expected outcomes for the year ahead.

Communicating information about the plan to school staff is essential. Hold dedicated staff meetings to ensure all team members are aligned with the plan's goals and to foster a shared sense of purpose and ownership. In addition to current staff, be sure to include information about the improvement plan in teacher induction training and materials.

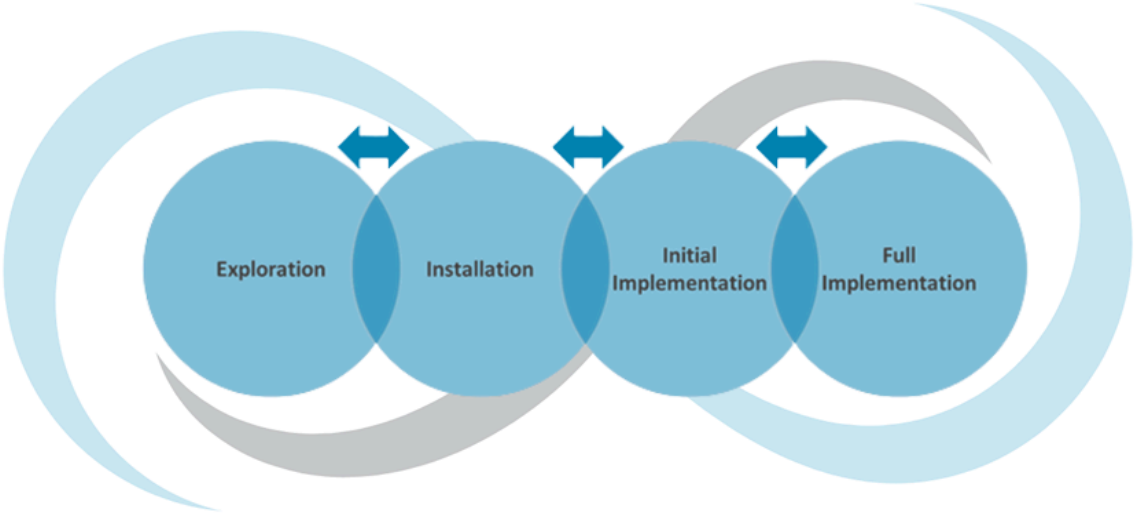
Beyond staff, it's equally important to engage students and families by clearly showing how they meaningfully support communication efforts and implementation activities. By highlighting their role in achieving the plan's objectives, sites strengthen the partnership between school and home, making improvement a collective effort. Further, students and families should be engaged as partners in sharing their experience of implementation efforts. This can look like presentations to the community, school board, or staff; publishing student reflections in newsletters; or integrating student feedback into end-of-year reports. Consider tapping into pre-established student groups to make these efforts more efficient and effective.

Approach Implementation as a Staged Process

As with planning, implementation is a complex and incremental process. Implementation is most efficient and effective when treated as a series of consecutive and overlapping stages that involve

multiple decisions, actions, and corrections. These elements are accomplished through a set of four Implementation Stages - Exploration, Installation, Initial Implementation, Full Implementation - that outline the integrated, non-linear process of deciding to use an effective intervention and finally having it fully in place to realize the promised outcomes. The stages and process are illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Implementation Stages, National Implementation Research Network



To learn more about Implementation Science, visit the National Implementation Research Network's Active Implementation Hub.

Exploration

During Exploration, implementation teams assess the assets and needs of the focus population, the fit of the program or practice with those needs and assets and feasibility of implementation. The activities and outcomes for the Exploration stage are covered earlier in the General Improvement Planning Guidance section of this handbook.

Installation

During installation, implementation teams use action plans to make practical preparations and develop processes and structures (e.g., strengthening competencies, removing barriers) that will facilitate the successful implementation of each major improvement strategy. Changes must often be made in multiple settings and systems to accommodate and fully support effective implementation. For instance, leaders and implementation teams should work with budget and finance teams to refine annual budgets, hiring plans, and to make purchases that will support implementation.

Developing practitioners' and leaders' knowledge, skills, and abilities related to Major Improvement Strategies is also vital during this stage. Well-prepared practitioners are more likely to feel confident and implement new practices or programs with fidelity. Thus, those who are expected to implement the new practices or programs must receive the necessary training and support to carry out new

practices or programs as intended. During this stage, training, coaching, and data systems are conceptualized, created, or purchased.

Initial Implementation

During initial implementation a group of practitioners begins using new practices or programs. Examining the infrastructure planned during installation and formed during initial implementation will give implementation teams the opportunity to course-correct and pinpoint inequities that need correcting before implementation progresses further.

Key activities during this stage include intensive coaching to help practitioners through a potentially awkward period of change. As problems emerge, the implementation team can develop and engage in strategies to promote continuous improvement and problem solving. Teams should use data to assess the quality of implementation, identify problems and solutions, and inform decision-making.

Often, attempts to implement a new practice or program falter (or end) during installation or initial implementation. Implementation may be challenging because everyone is learning, and challenges emerge as the status quo gradually changes. As the most fragile stage, initial implementation requires staff to remain intentional and purposefully choose not to revert to previous practices. As with every stage of implementation, communication is vital to the success of a practice or program. Providing feedback loops and communicating progress and improvement strategies to a varied group for critical perspective will help the decision-making process expand the practice or program that much easier.

Full Implementation

Full implementation is defined as the stage in which practitioners skillfully implement the new practices or programs and outcomes are achieved. The changes introduced by the Major Improvement Strategies become the status quo, lessons learned are integrated, and the system is mostly recalibrated as processes and procedures are in place to support the new status quo. The time it takes to move from initial implementation to full implementation will vary depending upon the complexity of the new practice or program, the development of the infrastructure to support practitioners, and the availability of implementation support and resources.

Progress Monitor & Adjust

Implementation of the UIP will be supported through consistent progress monitoring, a commitment to ongoing improvement, and readiness to adjust the plan if implementation challenges or barriers arise. Use data tracking systems aligned with the Student Performance Priority interim measures and targets and each Major Improvement Strategy Implementation Milestones in the UIP to monitor key indicators of progress. Implementation teams should review formative data regularly to assess progress and inform necessary adjustments, ensuring that strategies remain effective and responsive to student needs. Throughout the year, both successes and challenges should be documented and shared to provide a clear picture of implementation efforts and to support meaningful mid-year and end-of-year reflections and updates.

CDE welcomes updates and resubmission of adjusted or revised plans throughout the year. If requesting CDE review and feedback on resubmitted materials, please request this through uiphelp@cde.state.co.us.

CDE Resources and Tools

- UIP Workbook: Phase 6: Finalize, Share for Approval, and Submit UIP for Public Posting; Post-Submission: Implement and Progress Monitor
- Implementation Guide- Planning for Improvement Strategy Implementation: designed to help sites design a site-specific school improvement action plan and to implement any well-defined educational strategy.

Appendices

Appendix A: UIP State Data Resources

CDE maintains a variety of data sources for state level data. These resources can be accessed through summary documents or through the links below:

- Helpful data sources for Improvement Planning: http://www.cde.state.co.us/uip/accessingdata
- CDE Data Tools and Reports: https://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/2019-5-15-data-tools-and-reports

Common UIP State Data Resources

Schoolview This is a centralized hub with access to a wide variety of state level data and tools that schools and districts can use to analyze current performance and create improvement plans.

School and District Performance Frameworks The frameworks are official annual reports produced by CDE that are used for accountability and planning purposes. This is the same location where district and school UIPs are publicly posted.

TLCC survey The Teaching and Learning Conditions in Colorado survey is a statewide, anonymous survey intended to support school, district, and state improvement planning, as well as research and policy. Statewide results are posted if schools reach 50% participation and at least 5 respondents, while districts need 40% participation and 5 respondents to receive results.

School and District Dashboard The two dashboards provide multiple years of data including achievement and growth data, post-secondary readiness data, demographics, and enrollment/attendance data.

PWR Data Sources (PDF) This historical document contains a compiled list of data sources that are state collected and reported as well as local data that could be collected by the district that can be valuable in assessing high school students' progress and post-secondary workforce readiness.

Colorado Education Statistics: This is a centralized hub with access to certain educational data that is mandated by the state General Assembly, including attendance, mobility and stability statistics, and graduation/completion.

Appendix B: Improvement Planning Terminology

Term	**Definition**
Accountability Clock/ Performance Watch	Refers to the number of consecutive years a school/district has remained in the two lowest accountability categories (Priority Improvement or Turnaround, or PI/T). After receiving two consecutive PI/T ratings, a school or district must receive an Improvement rating or higher for two consecutive years to exit the state identification system (Performance Watch). After five years of consecutive or nonconsecutive PI/T ratings while on Performance Watch, the state board must direct the school, district or Institute to take one of the actions, or pathways, outlined in statute. More details, including actions directed by the State Board of Education at the end of the Accountability Clock, are detailed in the Priority Improvement and Turnaround Supplement to the Accountability Handbook. See also: *On Watch, Performance Watch.*
Action Step	Something done to implement a strategy and/or make progress toward goals. Action steps are created for each strategy and identify resources (people, time, money) that will be brought to bear so that goals and targets can be reached. This is a component of the UIP process.
Additional Targeted Support (A-TS)	Schools identified for support and improvement under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) based on having at least one student group performing in the lowest 5% for that student group are designated Additional Targeted Support (A-TS). If the school does not exit this category within 3 years of identification and is supported with Title IA funds, the school would be identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CS) under ESSA.

Term	**Definition**
Biennial Flexibility	In 2016, the Colorado legislature expanded flexibility around biennial (every other year) submission of the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) through HB 16-1440. This flexibility is now available to all schools assigned a Performance plan type and districts that are Accredited or Accredited with Distinction. Schools and districts must not be On Watch to qualify for biennial submission. Previously, only small, rural schools and districts were eligible for biennial UIP submissions. The following schools and districts are eligible to take advantage of the flexibility and submit the UIP every other year: ● All schools with a 'Performance' plan type ● All districts that are 'Accredited' or 'Accredited with Distinction.'
Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS)	Colorado's assessments that measure the Colorado Academic Standards. They include assessments in ELA, math, science, and social studies.
Combined Plans	
Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CS)	Schools that are identified for support and improvement under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), based on one of the 3 following categories, are designated Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CS): ● Performing in the lowest 5% of Title I schools (must be Title I school); ● Having a graduation rate below 67% (based on 4- and 7-year graduation rates over a three-year period); or ● Having at least one chronically underperforming student group See also *Additional Targeted Support*.
Disaggregated Group	A demographic group of students. Colorado reports student academic growth, on the performance framework reports, for four historically disadvantaged student groups: students eligible for free/reduced cost meals, students of color (e.g., "minority" students), students from major races/ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners/English learners. Additional disaggregation is reported by race, ethnicity, gender, and gifted identification.

Term	**Definition**
District Performance Framework (DPF)	The framework with which the state evaluates the level to which districts meet the state's expectations for attainment on the performance indicators, and makes an accreditation level determination.
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act, the version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorized in 2015.
Improvement Plan	The Educational Accountability Act of 2009 requires all schools and districts in Colorado to implement one of four plan types: Performance, Improvement, Priority Improvement, or Turnaround. Schools that earn 42% - 52.9% of their SPF points will be assigned to the "Improvement Plan" category.
Implementation Milestone	A measure (with associated metric) used to assess the effectiveness with which a strategy is implemented at a certain point in time. Also considered a success indicator or checkpoint in the implementation process.
Interim Measure	A measure (and associated metric) used to assess student performance at various times during a school year. This is a component of the UIP process.
LEA	Local Educational Agency; this can be a School District, BOCES or the lead school district in a multi-school district consortium.
Major Improvement Strategy	An overall approach that describes a series of related maneuvers or actions intended to result in performance improvements. Strategies should be chosen based on considerations of coherence, affordability, practicality, and efficiency and should be research-based. This is a component of the UIP process.
On Watch	Schools on the Accountability Clock that improve their performance and earn a rating of Improvement or Performance are considered "On Watch." These schools will "exit" the state identification system (Performance Watch) the following year, as long as they are not re-identified as Priority Improvement or Turnaround. See also: *Accountability Clock, Performance Watch.*
Performance	General term used to encompass growth and achievement. Used to discuss both student and school level of attainment.

Term	**Definition**
Performance Indicator	A specific component of school or district quality. Colorado has identified three performance indicators to evaluate all schools and districts in the state: student achievement, student academic growth, and postsecondary/workforce readiness.
Performance Plan	The type of plan required for schools that already meet the state's expectations for attainment on the performance indicators. Schools that earn at least 53% of their SPF points are assigned to the Performance plan category.
Performance Watch	Schools and districts that are on the Accountability Clock or "On Watch" are all considered to be on Performance Watch. See also: *Accountability Clock, On Watch.*
Priority Improvement Plan	One of the types of plans required for those schools that do not meet the state's performance standards. Schools that earn 34% - 41.9%, of their SPF points are assigned to a Priority Improvement Plan category.
Rating	On the performance framework reports, CDE's evaluation of the extent to which the school/district has met the state's standards on the performance indicators and their component parts. The rating levels on the performance framework reports are: Does Not Meet, Approaching, Meets, and Exceeds.
Root Cause	These are the "problem statements" that identify the factors under the control of the school that are most likely contributing to or driving challenges in student performance. This is a component of the UIP process.
School Performance Framework (SPF)	The framework used by the state to provide information to stakeholders about each school's performance based on the key performance indicators: student achievement, student academic growth, and postsecondary/workforce readiness. Schools are assigned to a type of improvement plan based on their performance across all indicators.
School Plan Type	The type of plan to which a school is assigned by the state on the SPF report. The school plan types are Performance, Improvement, Priority Improvement, and Turnaround. This is also the type of plan that must be adopted and implemented, for the school, by either the local board (Priority Improvement or Turnaround) or the principal and superintendent (Performance or Improvement).
SEA	State Education Agency (Colorado Department of Education)

Term	**Definition**
State Review Panel	A panel of education experts appointed by the commissioner to assist the Department and the state board in implementing the Education Accountability Act of 2009. The State Review Panel may review Priority Improvement Plans and Turnaround Plans for schools and districts, a process that includes site visits. The State Review Panel must review all schools and districts nearing the end of the Accountability Clock.
Student Performance Priorities (SPPs)	Specific statements about the school's or district's student performance challenges that are deemed to be priorities by the school or district. (Does not include statements about budgeting, staffing, curriculum, instruction, etc.). This is a component of the UIP process.
Target	A specific, quantifiable outcome that defines what would constitute success in a particular area of intended student improvement, within a designated period of time. This is a component of the UIP process. Annual targets indicate the level of performance in areas of the Student Performance Priority that the site intends students to reach by the end of the specified school year (1- or 2-year targets). Interim targets indicate the level of performance on mid-year measures that will indicate students are on track to meet annual targets.
Targeted Support and Improvement (TS)	Schools identified for support and improvement under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), based on having at least one student group that is consistently underperforming on at least 3 of the ESSA indicators.
Turnaround Plan	One of the types of plans required for schools that do not meet state expectations for attainment on the performance indicators. Schools that earn 33.9% or less of their SPF points are assigned to a Turnaround plan category.

Appendix C: State Accreditation Ratings and Improvement Planning Requirements & Flexibilities

District Accreditation Ratings

	Plan Type	Additional State Plan Requirements	CDE Review of Plan	Eligible for Biennial Submission Flexibility	Local Board Reviews and Adopts Plan*
Distinction	Performance	NO	On Watch	YES	YES
Accredited	Performance	NO	On Watch	YES	YES
Improvement	Improvement Plan	YES	On Watch	NO	YES
Priority Improvement	Priority Improvement Plan	YES	YES	NO	YES
Turnaround	Turnaround Plan	YES	YES	NO	YES
ISD: Small Tested Population	Most recently assigned plan type	NO	On Watch	NO	YES
ISD: Low Participation	Most recently assigned plan type	NO	On Watch	NO	YES

* For district plans, local boards review and adopt the plan regardless of the rating type.

School Accreditation Ratings

	Plan Type	Additional Plan Requirements	CDE Review of Plan	Biennial Submission Flexibility	Local Board Reviews and Adopts Plan*
Performance	Performance	NO	On Watch	YES	NO
Improvement	Improvement Plan	NO	On Watch	NO	NO
Priority Improvement	Priority Improvement Plan	YES	YES	NO	YES
Turnaround	Turnaround Plan	YES	YES	NO	YES
ISD: Small Tested Population	Most recently assigned plan type	NO	On Watch	NO	NO
ISD: Low Participation	Most recently assigned plan type	NO	On Watch	NO	NO

* For schools that earn a Performance or Improvement plan type, the principal and the superintendent or designee may adopt the plan. Local boards are encouraged to review and approve the plans, but that is determined by local policy and practice. For schools that earn Priority Improvement or Turnaround, the local board must adopt the plan. A resource to support Local boards in understanding the UIP review and adoption process is available here.

Appendix D: ESSA School Improvement Planning Requirements within the UIP Process

This table outlines the required components for improvement plans from schools identified under ESSA for support and improvement (CS, TS, and ATS). For more information, see ESSA Improvement Planning Requirements (CDE webpage).

ESSA Planning Requirements	UIP Element	CS	TS	ATS
Plans must be developed with stakeholders (including school leaders, teachers, and parents).	Assurances	X	X	X
Stakeholders were made aware of reasons for ESSA identification to inform plan development.	Assurances	X	X	X
Plan is informed by student performance against state-determined long-term goals on each accountability indicator in ESSA.	Student Performance Priorities	X	X	X
Plan includes evidenced-based interventions.	Root Causes and Strategies→ Major Improvement Strategies	X	X	X
Plan includes a school-level needs assessment.	Assurances; Priorities and Targets → Student Performance Priority Evidence and Rationale	X	Recommended but not required	Recommended but not required
Plan identifies resource inequities.	Root Causes and Strategies → Root Causes	X		X
Plan addresses resource inequities.	Implementation and Actions → Action Steps	X		X

Appendix E: Additional State Planning Requirements

In addition to the universal planning requirements for ALL schools, some state policies and programs have additional specific requirements that pertain to some sites. The following types of sites that must meet additional planning requirements are identified below. ALL

Additional plan content requirements based on federal identifications are pulled from the Quality Criteria Rubric and organized using the Rubric's UIP Process or Element designations, icons, and language for "meets expectations." As a note, all Colorado schools and districts must meet universal content requirements identified in the Quality Criteria Rubric indicated with the "ALL" icon.

Schools and Districts serving grades K-3 K-3

Colorado schools and districts serving grades Kindergarten through 3rd are subject to meeting READ Act requirements in their UIP.

- ☐ *Assurances*: K-3 READ Act assessment performance data from at least the last two school years has been analyzed. Data were disaggregated by grade level, by the percentage of students who have significant reading deficiencies, and by the percentage of students who achieved grade level expectations in reading.
- ☐ *Student Performance Priorities:* The rationale describes performance patterns that led to prioritizing early literacy. If the data analysis does not support prioritizing early literacy, then an explanation is included to document rationale for the school- or district-wide direction.
- ☐ *Evidence & Rationale for Prioritization:* Describe performance patterns that led to prioritizing early literacy. If the data analysis does not support prioritizing early literacy, then an explanation is included to document rationale for the school- or district-wide direction.
- ☐ *Target Setting:*
    - Set target(s) to ensure that each student achieves grade level expectations in reading by the end of grade 3. Targets must be set for READ Act - Grade Level Expectations even if literacy is not identified as a Student Performance Priority.
    - Set ambitious and attainable target(s) for reducing the number of students who have significant reading deficiencies, as measured by the site's READ Act assessment. *Targets must be set for READ Act -SRD even if literacy is not identified as a Student Performance Priority.*
- ☐ *Action Plan:* Include evidence-based Action Steps that can reasonably be expected to have a meaningful impact for K-3 students identified as having significant reading deficiencies.

Schools and districts serving grades 9-12 9-12

- ☐ *Root Causes:* Include an analysis of student course taking patterns by disaggregated groups.

- ☐ *Action Plan*: Include Action Steps to address identified patterns of significant disparity in disaggregated groups taking challenging coursework.

Schools and Districts that have received an Exploration, Transformation Network, or District Strategic Planning Exploration or Transformation Network grant through Empowering Action for School Improvement (EASI) in the past three years EASI

- ☐ *Student Performance Priorities and/or Root Causes:* Integrates the results of a diagnostic review or system needs assessment funded by an EASI Exploration, Transformation Network, or District Strategic Planning Grant.