District Designed & Led: Implementation Support

Introduction

The District Designed and Led (DDL) route of the Empowering Action for School Improvement (EASI) application encourages districts to initiate and expand support for schools in need of improvement. This route includes two services including Implementation Support (DDL-IS) and Major Improvement Strategy (DDL-MIS). DDL options are designed to support improvement implementation efforts.

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Implementation support is designed for districts or individual schools that have a demonstrated need that can be addressed by implementing a focused improvement strategy. Successful grantees can demonstrate the need, show alignment to single improvement strategy, and have a clear plan for implementation.

Districts are encouraged to engage in activities that build long-term capacity to implement and sustain improvements including partnering with external providers from CDE's vetted improvement partner list, building or improving systems to drive school improvement aligned to the Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement, and building staff capacity to implement improvement strategies.

Eligibility & Prioritization

Prerequisites. Districts and their schools must demonstrate the need through either:

- External diagnostic review completed in the last two years from time of application
- Recent completion of another EASI support with a diagnostic review component (Exploration Supports, Connect for Success, Transformation Network).

Note: If meeting the prerequisite through the completion of a recent EASI support, the funded improvement effort must be a continuation of the identified improvement strategy from the prior EASI support. Participation in the prior EASI support alone without alignment to previously identified improvement efforts is insufficient for funding purposes. Strategies must be evidence-based interventions at Tiers 1-3.

Eligibility. Schools that meet the following criteria are eligible to apply:

- Schools identified for improvement under ESSA as Comprehensive Support (CS), Targeted Support (TS), or Additional Targeted Support (ATS); and/or
- Schools with a state identification School Performance Framework plan type of Priority Improvement, Turnaround, or On Watch

Prioritization. If not all EASI proposals can be funded, proposals that meet grant expectations will be funded in the order of the EASI school-level prioritization list. Schools with the highest number of prioritization points will be funded first. District level support requests will use the average prioritization of all EASI eligible

schools. District level supports that serve specific EASI-eligible schools will use the average prioritization of the included EASI eligible schools. Details on how prioritization points are calculated and the points for each EASI eligible school are available on the EASI Resources and Technical Assistance webpage.

Limitations. If prerequisites and eligibility criteria are met, funding decisions may be limited by the following:

- *District capacity*- The EASI Route of District Designed & Led (DDL) depends on the capacity of a district to implement the selected major improvement efforts. If a district has active DDL funded initiatives from prior EASI cohorts or is applying for multiple DDLs, the number of funded DDL awards for a district may be taken into consideration in the final funding decisions.
- *Schools in multiple DDLs*- An individual school may only be included in one DDL application for funding.
- *DDL renewals*- A district or individual school may apply for additional funding to continue an improvement strategy funded through a previous EASI cohort. Up to one continuation is allowed for a given improvement strategy.
- *DDL funding cap*- All DDL (Implementation Support and Major Improvement Strategy combined) awards are subject to a funding cap. A single district with fewer than 20 eligible schools may not exceed the maximum per included school up to $1,000,000 total in EASI Cohort 10 (2026-27 to 2028-29). If a district has 20 or more eligible schools, the DDL funding cap is the maximum per school up to $1,200,000 in EASI Cohort 10 (2026-27 to 2028-29).

Program Considerations & Fit

Program Considerations. DDL-Implementation Support provides funds for improvement strategies not already outlined in a CDE Major Improvement Strategy Guide. If the selected strategy for DDL-Implementation Support has an aligned strategy guide, districts should apply for DDL-MIS.

Program Fit. DDL-Implementation Support is designed to support districts with a fully developed plan to implement a select improvement strategy on behalf of the district or one or more schools. Successful grantees can demonstrate the need, show alignment to a single improvement strategy, and have a clear plan for implementation. DDL-Implementation Support is a good fit for districts with a clear implementation plan who have recently completed Exploration Supports (i.e. School Holistic Review, Language Learner Partnership, AEC and Online Review, or District Strategic Planning) who are looking for additional funding to continue implementation efforts. DDL-Implementation Support is not a good fit to simultaneously occur with other EASI supports such as Connect for Success, Foundations for Accelerated Improvement, Transformation Network, School Transitions, or DDL-MIS.

Sequence of Program Support

The sequence of the work is determined and outlined by the implementation plan developed by the district. Proposals must detail the sequence of the work as it aligns to the demonstrated need (i.e. outcome of recent diagnostic review).

Available Funds & Duration

Available Funds. Applicants may request up to the maximum award amount for each school included in the selected Major Improvement Strategy. Award may be:

- Up to $20,000 per school in Year 1 (2026-27)
    - May only be requested if funds do not overlap with a prior EASI support used to demonstrate the need for DDL-Implementation Support.

- Up to $50,000 per school in Year 2 (2027-28)
- Up to $50,000 per school in Year 3 (2028-29)

Note: All District Designed & Led (Implementation Support and Major Improvement Strategy combined) awards may not exceed the district DDL funding cap.

Duration. Program support is designed to support a district-led initiative for a period of 2.5 years (2026-27 to 2028-29).

Allowable Use of Funds

Funds for DDL-Implementation Support must tightly align to the detailed implementation plan provided by the grantee and focus on a single improvement strategy. Allowable use of funds includes costs associated with:

- Hiring an external provider to support implementation
    - Preferably (although not required) an approved provider on the CDE Advisory List of Providers
- Stipends for teachers and support staff to design, develop, or implement activities in support of the selected improvement strategy
- Substitute pay to create staff time for implementation activities or professional development related to the selected improvement strategy
- Materials and supplies needed for implementation of the selected improvement strategy
- Stakeholder engagement (stipends, translation, childcare, etc.)

Funding requests for full-time equivalent (FTE) positions are generally not approved. Narrow exceptions are allowed if the school or district can clearly demonstrate that the position is intended to build capacity through the development of systems, practices, and structures for the respective improvement strategy. Additionally, FTE requests must be tightly aligned to the selected improvement strategy, be supported by a clear plan for sustainability for the position after the grant concludes.

Budget Recommendations. For the application submission, a draft budget should clearly demonstrate a clear plan for implementing the improvement strategy. Each budget line should specify activities and the connection to narrative provided to demonstrate a clear plan based on an identified need. It is acceptable, however, to use a general placeholder in the budget if the activities are sequential and dependent on the outcome of initial activities. District-level implementation of DDL-Implementation Support is acceptable, but any school-specific expenses (i.e. staff stipends, substitute pay, supplies, etc.) may only be for schools eligible for EASI support.

Any expenses related to an external provider must be supported by a scope of work (draft version acceptable) that clearly outlines timelines, deliverables, and costs for eligible school(s) and/or the district. Scope of work must also clearly align to the implementation plan outlined in the narrative of the application.

Note: If entering indirect costs, the total request amount may not exceed the maximum allowable amount. Additionally, if the demonstrated need is through a recent EASI support with a diagnostic review component grant funds may not overlap. If the recent EASI support is concluding in 2026-27, then the district or school may only request funds for Year 2 and Year 3 in the budget.

Indirect Costs. Applicants may elect to include indirect costs in the application budget. Indirect cost rates based on the district's restricted indirect cost rate. The total request amount (indirect costs plus other budget lines) may not exceed the maximum allowable amount. There are some exclusions for distorting items that apply, such as the limitation of indirects on the first $50,000 on provider contracted services. Grantees should note that indirect costs are only allowed on federal awards. If the grantee receives a state award, indirect

costs must be removed during the post-award revision process. More information regarding indirect cost rates is available on CDE's School Finance webpage at https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/icrc.

Fund Considerations.

- Funds from this opportunity must be used to **supplement and not supplant** any federal, state, and local funds currently being used to provide activities.
- Post-award revisions must be submitted and approved in the online system prior to incurring expenses. Any expenses incurred prior to approval are the responsibility of the LEA. All post-award revisions must be approved by 06/30.
- For federal awards, funds must be obligated by 09/30 and requested by 11/1 of each respective fiscal year.
- For state awards, funds must be obligated by 06/30 of the final year of the grant cycle.
- A school or district may carry funds forward in alignment with funding source restrictions and with CDE approval. At the end of the grant performance period, any non-requested federal funds are reverted and any unspent state funds must be returned to the state.
- CDE may terminate a grant award upon thirty days' notice if it is deemed by CDE that the applicant is not fulfilling the requirements of the funded program as specified in the approved project application, or if the program is generating less than satisfactory results.
- Multi-year or future award year amounts are contingent on allocations of state and federal funds to CDE in each respective fiscal year.

Important Program Dates

Program Dates	Activity
September- December	Meet with the appropriate school and district teams to discuss interest in applying for EASI support and develop an application. If needed, meet with supporting CDE staff.
December	Application due
January	Award notifications
April-May	Meet with CDE DDL Program Lead and set performance targets and implementation benchmarks for grant
Fall & Spring Year 2 & 3	Participate in two check-ins per year with CDE DDL Program Lead

Evaluation and Reporting

Each grantee of the program must, at a minimum, agree to the following evaluation, reporting, and/or progress monitoring components:

- Development of an implementation plan including implementation benchmarks and performance targets
- Progress monitoring check-ins twice per year
- Any school or district contact working with an approved external provider funded through the EASI grant may be asked to serve as a reference for provider approvals as part of the CDE School & District Support RFI process in the following year.
- Final Expenditure Report (FER) in GAINS each fiscal year by 09/30.
- *Note: All data collected will protect personally identifiable information (PII) protected and is only reported on an aggregate level for purposes of evaluating the EASI support and/or supporting future program improvements.*

Program Assurances

LEA Commitments:

- Designate a program contact person or small working team who will be responsible for the implementation of the supported improvement effort
- All grant requirements are met in a timely manner
- Participate in the development, tracking, monitoring, and sharing of implementation benchmarks and performance targets with CDE staff through the duration of the grant
- Participate in two implementation check-ins each year of the grant with designated CDE staff
- Ensure the LEA and staff will not discriminate against anyone regarding race, gender, national origin, color, disability, or age.
- LEA will be required to submit Final Expenditure Reports (FER) the end of each fiscal year.
- LEA understands that unobligated funds state funds will be returned to CDE and unobligated federal funds will be rescinded at the conclusion of the grant cycle.
- Funds will be used to supplement and not supplant any federal, state, and local moneys currently being used to provide services and grant dollars will be administered by the appropriate fiscal agent.
- Funded projects will maintain appropriate fiscal and program records and fiscal audits of this program will be conducted by the grantees as a part of their regular audits.
- If any findings of misuse of these funds are discovered, project funds will be returned to CDE.

Related Resources & Information

Colorado Department of Education's EASI Website

www.cde.state.co.us/fedprograms/easiapplication