Center on
GREAT TEACHERS & **LEADERS**
at American Institutes for Research ■

The Equitable Access Implementation Playbook
CREATING COHERENCE AND ALIGNMENT TOOL

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Contents

The Opportunity

Federal initiatives such as Race to the Top, School Improvement Grants, and Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility waivers have encouraged the implementation of a wide range of state-level legislative and policy actions: from systems designed to define and measure educator effectiveness to rewritten content standards and academic assessments. State boards of education often adopt new policies in response to federal requirements or incentives, state legislative action, or the latest private sector reform agendas. Too often, however, the implementation efforts of these initiatives become housed in a specific program or other state education agency (SEA) office. The result is a patchwork of policies that often treat each initiative individually, with only nominal attention to relationships and interdependencies across policies. Further, SEA offices implementing each individual policy or program may not be aware of the reform efforts happening across the organization.

With the implementation of the most recent federal reform initiative, the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Excellent Educators for All initiative, states and districts have an opportunity to increase the coherence and alignment of existing education reform efforts.

Purpose of This Resource

The Center on Great Teachers and Leaders (GTL Center) designed this resource to support the work described in the Equitable Access Implementation Playbook: *Implementation Planning Tool* document. The goal of this resource is twofold: (1) to provide SEAs with a working definition of what it means to create coherence and alignment across education reforms and (2) to provide states with a stepwise process toward creating coherence and alignment across their educator effectiveness initiatives. Although this resource focuses on applying coherence and aligning strategies found in state Equitable Access Plans as the basis for the activity, this approach is applicable to any education initiative.

> **Playbook Tool Connection**
>
> The *Equitable Access Implementation Playbook: Implementation Planning Tool* suggests using the *Creating Coherence Tool* as part of *Step 5. Create a project management plan.*

This resource is primarily intended for electronic use. If you desire to work with a printed version, the five tables that constitute this tool are available in a 14 × 8.5 format.

Defining Coherence and Alignment

Creating coherence and alignment is an approach to policymaking and implementation that can help state education leaders capitalize on opportunities that come through policy changes. The purpose of creating coherence and alignment is to identify common goals and connections across seemingly disparate initiatives (e.g., Early Race to the Top and college and career readiness) and take advantage of opportunities to maximize efforts. Whatever programs your state is currently implementing, it is quite likely that many relate to equitable access work, so identifying these connections is a crucial part of creating coherence.

Coherence across policies refers to the process by which SEAs and local education agencies (LEAs) ensure a common message across the board (e.g., What are the goals and expectations of each individual reform? Do these goals speak to a larger common understanding?). The concept of coherence is the degree to which state

policies and programs relate to one another and the degree to which interdependence exists between state policies in response to federal requirements or incentives, state legislative action, or the latest private sector reform agendas. It focuses on systematic and mutually reinforcing policy actions across educator quality initiatives, with an aim toward achieving a shared goal.

Alignment refers to the process by which SEAs and LEAs implement policies and programs collaboratively across the board. The goal of creating alignment is for SEA staff to become aware of other initiatives being implemented that support the common goals and message. Through our long-running work with regional comprehensive centers and SEAs, the GTL Center has identified several components that, when combined, address alignment across policy initiatives.

Fiscal Alignment

Fiscal alignment is the strategic bundling or comingling of a state's various funding streams in service of its strategic goals. With the existence of multiple and varied funding streams (e.g., federal formulas and competitive grants, state and local funds), as well as the earmarking of these funds for specific purposes (e.g., English language learners, migrant populations, students from low-income or minority backgrounds), it is challenging to ensure that every dollar available is allocated efficiently and effectively. Moreover, with budget constraints only growing in public education, it is more important than ever to consider the allocation of funds. In particular, no new funding currently exists to support the implementation of equitable access plan strategies. By assessing all available sources of funding, the programs currently supported, and allowable uses for these funding streams, states may be able to improve how existing funds are used to support strategic goals.

Role and Responsibility Alignment

The success of all policy programs and initiatives, including equitable access plans, depends on the staff charged with implementing them. With limited staff resources, it is common for the same individuals to be responsible for implementing multiple initiatives and, in the process, take on multiple roles. Strengthening alignment in how these individuals are assigned roles and responsibilities also is crucial to ensure the optimal impact of their efforts.

Data Alignment

During the last decade, the importance of using data to inform education policy often outpaced current state data collection processes, along with accessibility to and the quality of the data that were available. Most states are engaged in testing and rolling out new student assessment systems; collecting data from new surveys; and developing longitudinal data systems for capturing, organizing, and sharing multiple data streams. With so many data sources collected at both the state and local levels, it may be challenging to establish an aligned system for using these data. States without the ability to align data across SEA sources may be limited in how data can be used. Moreover, without consistent policies for collecting and reporting data, it becomes even harder to analyze available data. Creating alignment across state systems for collecting and housing data can support using data to assess the effectiveness of equitable access plan implementation strategies and contribute to the continuous improvement of these strategies.

Communication Alignment

Finally, it is crucial that you communicate effectively internally and with external stakeholders before and during implementation. Communication with stakeholders is a two-way street and includes both the sharing of information and the collection of feedback. Internally, such communication will facilitate the collaboration and connection required to create alignment. Externally, such communication will support the partnerships often required to achieve the successful implementation of equitable access plan strategies. Moreover, taking a strategic approach to identifying what information will be most important to communicate and how to communicate it to particular groups will support achieving stakeholder buy-in.

Planning for Coherence and Alignment

Creating coherence and alignment is a process that can help states better achieve their educator quality goals and requires identifying areas of alignment and connection across policies, staff, stakeholders, data, and fiscal resources. This process should occur across SEA offices and initiatives before any Equitable Access Plan is implemented. Creating coherence and alignment makes efficient use of resources and avoids a duplication of effort. Such efforts require breaking down the departmental silos that often are artifacts of a long history of policymaking and implementation based on federal and state programs—a change that can improve coordination across policy and planning efforts beyond educator talent development. The process of creating coherence and alignment requires both time and effort to implement. However, establishing these connections across initiatives prior to implementation offers the opportunity to communicate clearly to educators and other stakeholders that each state's Equitable Access Plan is part of a larger, common effort rather than "just one more thing."

Figure 1 offers a stepwise process that states can use to identify areas for coherence and alignment building between State Plans to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators and other strategic state initiatives. The activity that follows offers guidance to walk states through these steps, with the final goal of developing a coherence and alignment crosswalk that provides action steps and timelines for future work.

Figure 1. Planning for Coherence and Alignment

STEP 1.	STEP 2.	STEP 3.	STEP 4.	STEP 5.
Identify Current Educator Quality Initiatives	Create a Crosswalk of Equitable Access Plan Strategies	Create a Crosswalk of Stakeholder Engagement Commitments	Create a Crosswalk of the Data Analysis and Ongoing Monitoring Requirements	Create a Crosswalk of Funding Streams

After completing these steps, consider the following questions for each component of alignment:

Fiscal Alignment

- What alignment currently exists across funding streams?
- What steps can your state take to address gaps in funding alignment?

Role and Responsibility Alignment

- What alignment currently exists across staff roles and responsibilities?
- What steps can your state take to strategically assign roles and responsibilities?

Data Alignment

- What alignment currently exists across data collection processes and data systems?
- What steps can your state take to develop consistent policies for data collection and reporting?
- What steps can your state take to establish a coherent system for storing and using the data?

External Communication Alignment

- To what degree does alignment exist across communications with external stakeholders?
- What steps can your state take to facilitate communication and collaboration with external partnerships and achieve stakeholder buy-in?

Internal Communication Alignment

- To what degree does alignment exist across communications with internal stakeholders?
- What steps can your state take to facilitate more collaboration and connection internally and enhance stakeholder buy-in?

Activity: Creating a Strategic Initiative Crosswalk

To begin the process of creating coherence, state education leaders can use a strategic initiative crosswalk to help identify areas for policy and planning alignment. The finished crosswalk becomes a useful resource for visually representing a range of policy and planning alignments and connections between an Equitable Access Plan and other state strategic initiatives. The GTL Center recently collaborated with staff from regional comprehensive centers and SEAs to create a crosswalk of strategies and initiatives. This section provides guidance for constructing a similar crosswalk in your state, enhances the crosswalk with activities designed to help states think about planning coherence, and illustrates the process with examples of content.

STEP 1. Identify Current Educator Quality Initiatives

The first step in creating a crosswalk is to identify the current educator quality initiatives in your state plus the key stakeholders responsible for implementing each initiative. During this step in the process, two important factors should be considered:

- **Who has overall responsibility and oversight for the alignment process?** Has your state convened a stakeholder group to discuss coherence? Will one member of the stakeholder group take ownership of the coherence work? If clear ownership and responsibility for the coherence work are lacking, potential progress can be stymied. Further, it is important to ensure that the right person or people are assigned to this task and have access to other key stakeholders to collaborate on the coherence efforts.

- **What is the state's institutional context?** What aspects of the educator quality initiatives do SEAs control? What aspects of the educator quality initiatives does the state board of education control? What is the relationship between your SEA and the board of education? How does communication flow between each agency? Although the terms often are used interchangeably, states typically have a state board of education with either elected or appointed personnel. The board makes policy decisions. SEA staff members implement the policies from the state board as well as other state and federal legislation. State boards typically establish strategic initiative goals, and SEAs are responsible for creating action plans. However, it is important to acknowledge the institutional relationships that exist between state boards and SEAs.

Consider the educator quality initiatives that currently exist in your state. Which should be included in the crosswalk? Then consider the people or agencies among your state's stakeholder groups who are currently responsible for implementing each educator quality initiative. How can your state consolidate responsibility and strengthen ownership for the alignment work? Complete Table 1 by identifying the strategic plans; any initiatives, policies, or programs; and the key stakeholders.

Table 1. Current Educator Quality Initiatives

Strategic Plan	Educator Effectiveness Initiatives, Policies, or Programs	Key Stakeholders and Program Staff
Possible sources: ■ *State board of education policy* ■ *State ESEA flexibility waiver* ■ *State School Improvement Grant* ■ *Other federal, state, or local initiatives*	*Possible initiatives, policies, and programs:* ■ *Strengthen preparation, support, and ongoing development of principals.* ■ *Encourage district and school innovation related to teacher and leader recruitment, selection, and the development of career pathways.*	*Possible stakeholders:* ■ *State talent development office staff* ■ *Educator preparation accountability staff* ■ *State directors of educator effectiveness*

STEP 2. Create a Crosswalk of Equitable Access Plan Strategies, Substrategies, and Alignment With Other Educator Effectiveness Initiatives

In Step 2, states consider the strategies, substrategies, and aligned or related goals identified in their state Equitable Access Plan. The goal of this step is to make connections between the strategies and substrategies found within the Equitable Access Plan to other educator quality initiatives in the state (i.e., those identified in Step 1). State staff should fill in each column of Table 2 to identify the following information:

- **Strategy.** What strategies are mentioned in your state's Equitable Access Plan? This task can be a simple copy and paste of the overarching strategy mentioned.

- **Substrategies.** Are substrategies or initiatives described in your state's Equitable Access Plan to detail the action steps needed to meet each strategy?

- **Alignment Across Initiatives.** Where do strategies and substrategies connect with other educator effectiveness initiatives in your state (as described in Step 1)?

- **Timeline.** When will the strategies and substrategies be implemented? Include timelines for each step in the process, if known.

- **Measurable Objectives.** What strategic goals do the strategies and substrategies meet? How will your state know if the strategy and substrategy goals are met?

Table 2. Alignment Across Equitable Access Strategies and Measurable Objectives

Strategy	Substrategies	Alignment Across Initiatives	Timeline	Measurable Objectives
Example Strategy: *Encourage district and school innovation related to teacher and leader recruitment, selection, and the development of career pathways by focusing on the highest need content areas, schools, and districts to ensure that all educators are school and learner ready on Day 1.*	*Example substrategies:* ■ *Reform the state's educator preparation program approval process and revise the educator preparation regulations to align with the new vision.* ■ *Design and implement a Web-based data and accountability system for all state-approved educator preparation programs, including candidate graduate responses and employer satisfaction with candidates.* ■ *Review teacher performance-based assessments and implement a voluntary pilot of one assessment that aligns with the Common Core State Standards.* ■ *Partner identified state institutions of higher education to integrate the research-based strategies provided by experts in the field into their curriculum to ensure that all teachers are prepared to address the individualized learning needs of all students.* ■ *Revise and update the certification regulations to ensure that the planned program requirements are developing new educators with the appropriate skills so that they are learner ready when hired.*	*Consider other policies and programs with similar goals, strategies, and substrategies to be implemented.*	*Sample timeline:* *summer 2015– winter 2016*	*Example measurable objectives:* ■ *The percentage of teacher and school leader preservice candidates who are learner ready and school ready as a result of the implementation of high-quality educator preparation programs* ■ *Completed system that measures educator readiness by preparation program* ■ *Reduced variation in preparation program quality* ■ *Equity metric: Increase the percentage of racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse candidates who complete educator preparation programs and enter the teaching profession school and learner ready.*

Strategy	Substrategies	Alignment Across Initiatives	Timeline	Measurable Objectives

STEP 3. Create a Crosswalk of Stakeholder Engagement Commitments for Each Strategic Initiative

Meaningful stakeholder engagement is the result of time and careful planning. Step 3 allows states to consider where opportunities exist to align stakeholder engagement events across strategies and initiatives. For this step, your state should consider each discrete stakeholder engagement activity that was planned to implement each strategic initiative identified in Steps 1 and 2. Complete Table 3 by providing the following information:

- **Key Stakeholder Engagement Activities.** These activities can include a task force or work group convening, a stakeholder group meeting, methods of stakeholder communication, or similar activities.

- **Stakeholder Groups Included.** Who is invited to the table? If it is an in-person meeting, who is attending the meeting?

- **Timeline.** When will these activities occur? Are they ongoing or one-time events?

- **Other Notes.** Include any additional information relevant to engaging with stakeholder groups here.

Table 3. Stakeholder Engagement Across Equitable Access Strategies

Strategy or Substategy	Key Stakeholder Engagement Activities	Stakeholder Groups Included	Timeline	Other Notes
Example Strategy: *All strategies identified in the state Equitable Access Plan*	*Example activities:* ■ *Establish a shortage area task force.* ■ *Establish a connected educator network.* ■ *Use existing stakeholder groups through regional collaborative meetings.*	*Example stakeholder groups:* ■ *K–12 and institutions of higher education regional collaborative meetings* ■ *Shortage area task force* ■ *Other state educator networks, such as a network of teacher leaders designed to support the implementation of state initiatives*	*Sample timeline:* *Ongoing*	*Other questions to consider:* ■ *Are any individuals not currently invited but should be?* ■ *What opportunity exists to align messages across engagement activities?*

Strategy or Substategy	Key Stakeholder Engagement Activities	Stakeholder Groups Included	Timeline	Other Notes

STEP 4. Create a Crosswalk of the Data Analysis and Ongoing Monitoring Requirements for Each Strategic Initiative

Data metrics describe the type of measures that a state will use. In Step 4, states should identify the key data metrics that will be used to measure progress on the educator effectiveness initiatives included in the crosswalk, linking back to the measurable outcomes identified in Step 2.

The state should link the metrics to the available data sources that will be used to collect the data, as well as the timeline for collecting and reporting/using the data and the key department staff who will oversee the data collection and analysis process. Along with the key metrics (Table 4), this crosswalk also will include the following:

- **Items to Be Monitored.** The specific items subject to ongoing monitoring, the legal requirements for monitoring, as well as any monitoring that goes beyond the requirements, as written into each educator quality initiative identified in the crosswalk.

- **Key Department Staff.** Which departments oversee the monitoring process? Which staff members within each department contribute to the work?

Table 4. Data Metrics and Ongoing Monitoring Across Equitable Access Strategies

Strategy/ Substategy	Measurable Outcomes	Key Data Metrics and Data Sources	Items to Be Monitored	Data Collection and Monitoring Timeline	Key Department Staff
Example Strategy: *Strengthen preparation, support, and ongoing development of teachers.*	*Example measurable outcomes:* ■ *The percentage of teacher and school leader preservice candidates who are learner ready and school ready as a result of the implementation of high-quality educator preparation programs* ■ *Completed system that measures educator readiness by preparation program* ■ *Reduced variation in preparation program quality* ■ *Equity metric: Increase the percentage of racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse candidates who complete educator preparation programs and enter the teaching profession school and learner ready.*	*Example metrics:* ■ *The number of teacher preparation programs that require at least one field placement in a high-poverty or high-minority school* ■ *The number of beginning teachers working in high-poverty or high-minority schools who report that their field placement prepared them well* ■ *The number of high-poverty or high-minority schools that participate in a field test of new cultural competence module(s)* ■ *The number of teachers from high-poverty and high-minority schools who participate in a connected educator network* ■ *The number of teachers from high-poverty, high-minority schools who serve as state educators-in-residence* ■ *The number of schools reporting effective teacher-leadership structures designed to improve student outcomes* *Example data sources:* ■ *State research and development office* ■ *District teacher leadership survey results* ■ *District teacher leader focus group feedback* ■ *New teacher survey results*	*Example items to be monitored: Several district-level data points, including the following:* ■ *Discipline incidents* ■ *Truancy rates* ■ *Dropout rate* ■ *Student attendance*	*Example timeline: Data collection from July 2015 to January 2016, with quarterly monitoring as follows:* ■ *September 2015* ■ *December 2015* ■ *March 2016* ■ *June 2016*	*Identify individuals and state department affiliation responsible for data collection and progress monitoring.*

Strategy/ Substrategy	Measurable Outcomes	Key Data Metrics and Data Sources	Items to Be Monitored	Data Collection and Monitoring Timeline	Key Department Staff

STEP 5. Create a Crosswalk of the Funding Streams for Each Strategic Initiative

Funding streams describe the source of funding for each strategy. In Step 5 (Table 5), states should identify the funding streams that will be used for each educator effectiveness initiative included in the crosswalk. This should include the source of the funding, the funding type, and any funding restrictions or funding gaps identified.

Table 5. Funding Streams Across Equitable Access Strategies

Strategy/Substategy	Funding Stream	Fund Type	Funding Restrictions	Funding Gaps
Example Strategy: *Improve Educator Evaluation System*	*Example funding stream:* *Race to the Top grant funding*	*Sample fund types (e.g., federal formulas, competitive grants, state funds, local funds):* *Grant*	*Sample funding restrictions (e.g., students from low-income families, migrant populations, English learners):* *Limited to use in our 16 Race to the Top districts.*	*Sample funding gap:* *Our Race to the Top funds will sunset at the end of 2014–15, so we will need to identify a new funding source to continue this program.*

Bringing It All Together

After completing Steps 1–5, your state should have a detailed crosswalk that identifies the key educator effectiveness strategies and initiatives, as well as opportunities for alignment across strategies and initiatives, policies, and programs. As this resource highlights, a need exists for not only coherence across policies, programs, strategies, and initiatives at the state level but also alignment across five main components: fiscal, roles and responsibilities, data, and communication (internal and external).

Taking the strategies and substrategies identified in this activity, answer the following questions for each component of alignment.

Fiscal Alignment

Reflect on the crosswalk of funding streams (Step 5) to think through fiscal alignment across strategies and initiatives.

What alignment currently exists across funding streams?

What steps can your state take to address gaps in funding alignment?

Role and Responsibility Alignment

Reflect on the "staffing" columns of the Step 1 and Step 4 tables to think through role and responsibility alignment across strategies and initiatives.

What alignment currently exists across staff roles and responsibilities?

What steps can your state take to strategically assign roles and responsibilities?

Data Alignment

Reflect on the thinking done in Step 4 (data metrics and monitoring) table to think through data alignment across strategies and initiatives.

What alignment currently exists across data collection processes and data systems?

What steps can your state take to develop consistent policies for data collection and reporting?

What steps can your state take to establish a coherent system for storing and using data?

Internal Communication Alignment

Reflect on the stakeholder engagement crosswalk (Step 3) to think through internal communication alignment across strategies and initiatives.

To what degree does alignment exist across communications with internal stakeholders?

What steps can your state take to facilitate more collaboration and connection internally and enhance stakeholder buy-in?

External Communication Alignment

Reflect on the stakeholder engagement crosswalk (Step 3) to think through internal communication alignment across strategies and initiatives.

To what degree does alignment exist across communications with external stakeholders?

What steps can your state take to facilitate communication and collaboration with external partnerships and achieve stakeholder buy-in?

Conclusion

By viewing equitable access plan implementation as the key to linking multiple educator quality initiatives and creating coherence across these efforts, state leaders can better position themselves to combat "reform fatigue" among staff and improve the implementation process. By creating coherence in policy and alignment across sources of funding, staff roles and responsibilities, data, and communication, states can improve the efficiency of the implementation of Equitable Access Plans and other state initiatives.

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