

# Approaches to Targeting External Support to Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) Schools in Three States



Andrea Boyle | Ji Hyun Yang | Steven Hurlburt

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## About this research brief

This research brief is part of [a series of briefs](#) within the broader *Study of the Impact of Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) Designation in ESSA Accountability Systems*. In this brief, we explore the approaches that three states and a sample of districts in those states used to provide improvement support to schools identified for CSI, including how such support compares to that provided to non-CSI schools.

## Study overview

Our study aims to understand whether school accountability systems operate as intended under the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. In addition, we assess whether student outcomes improve in schools identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), which represent the lowest performing 5% of Title I schools<sup>1</sup> and all public high schools with graduation rates below 67%. To do so, we partnered with three states (California, Florida, and Ohio) and performed several activities, including analyzing administrative data provided by the states, administering and analyzing a principal survey, and conducting and analyzing interviews with district administrators in each state. More information about the study's design and methods are available in [the first brief](#), and results for each survey item are included in a technical compendium.

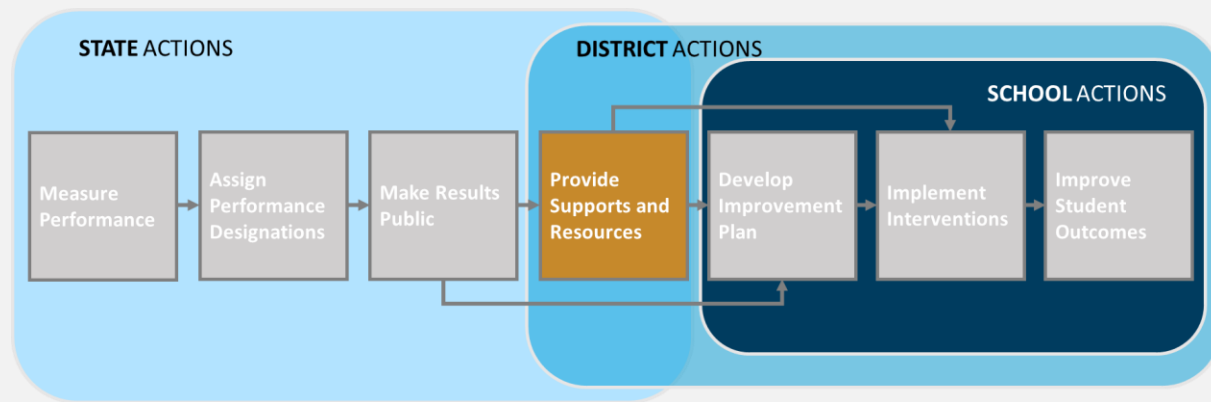
To promote more equitable student outcomes across schools, the federal *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* has for three decades required states to implement accountability systems that regularly assess school performance, identify schools whose performance needs to improve, and publicize school performance results. According to the theory of action behind accountability systems,

### Key Findings

- All three states targeted additional school improvement support to CSI schools and their districts, predominantly through regional service providers.
- Most case study districts reported providing their most intensive school improvement support to more than just CSI schools.
- Principals of CSI schools tended to report receiving support that was similar in breadth, relevance, and helpfulness to what principals of low-performing non-CSI schools reported receiving. However, CSI principals were more likely to report receiving improvement planning support and monitoring.

these actions are meant to spur additional state and district support for the schools that are identified as low-performing to help them develop an improvement plan and implement interventions that will improve student outcomes (see Exhibit 1).

### Exhibit 1. Accountability Theory of Action



The most recent reauthorization of *ESEA, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015*, revamped the accountability requirements featured in its predecessor the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* in ways that hold important significance for the provision of external support to low-performing schools. For one, in response to concerns that accountability systems under *NCLB* were identifying too many schools for states and districts to adequately support, *ESSA* accountability requirements instead sought to focus states’ accountability designations on a smaller, more manageable set of their very lowest-performing schools, which are to be identified for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI). This focus was intended to allow states and districts to concentrate more intensive attention and support on the neediest schools rather than spreading their support too thinly across a large number of schools.

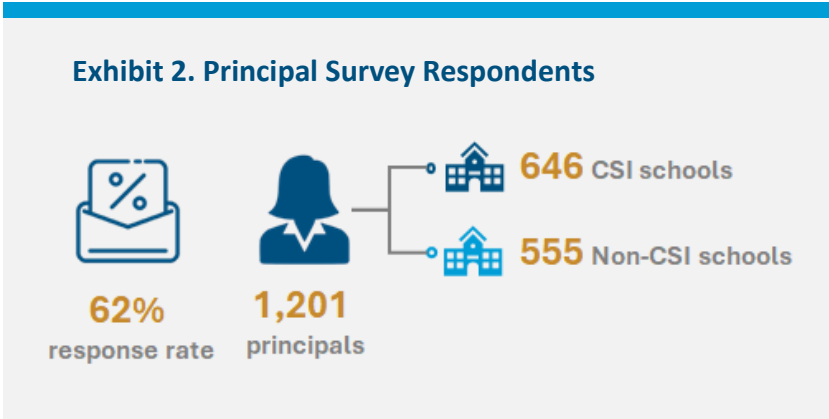
*ESSA* also veered away from *NCLB*’s prescriptive accountability requirements and instead gave states more flexibility in determining the criteria used to identify the lowest-performing schools for support as well as the actions taken to promote improvement. Rather than mandating particular improvement strategies, *ESSA* charges states and districts with supporting the development and implementation of an improvement plan for each school identified for CSI, specifying only that the improvement plan be aligned with school needs, include evidence-based practices, and engage relevant stakeholders. By empowering states, districts, and schools with greater decision-making authority, *ESSA* aims to promote improvement efforts that are tailored to local needs and contexts. However, successfully crafting and carrying out individualized, needs-based improvement plans requires capacity (e.g., expertise, leadership skills), which may be limited in schools exhibiting severe performance challenges. Thus, external support that enhances schools’ capacity to understand and effectively address their needs may increase their chances of improving. Examining how states and districts have targeted such support to CSI schools is critical to understanding how *ESSA* accountability has unfolded in the field.

This brief investigates the extent to which states and districts have provided specialized external support to CSI schools to facilitate their improvement efforts. It begins with an examination of states’ and districts’ general approaches to CSI support, including whether they have directed support to CSI schools that is above and beyond what other schools receive. It then compares CSI principals’ reports of the external support their school received with those of principals in low-performing non-CSI schools. The analyses address the following three research questions:

- 1. How are states approaching the provision of external school improvement support for CSI schools and their districts?
- 2. To what extent do districts report targeting more support to CSI schools than other schools?
- 3. Do principals of CSI schools report receiving external support that is more comprehensive, better aligned with school needs, and/or more helpful than principals of non-CSI schools?

The findings in this brief are based on data collected in 2021-22 from the three states participating in our study (California, Ohio, and Florida), including interviews with state education administrators responsible for state supports for CSI schools,<sup>2</sup> interviews with district administrators in 20 case study districts with CSI schools, and

statewide surveys of principals in CSI schools and other relatively low-performing schools that were not designated as CSI (see Exhibit 2).<sup>3</sup> More information about the study’s methods, including the approach to selecting case study districts, is available in [Brief 1](#).



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Study Findings

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### **All three states targeted additional school improvement support to CSI schools and their districts, predominantly through regional service providers.**

*NCLB* established the first federal requirements for states to provide external support for schools identified as low performing, mandating that states “establish a statewide system of intensive and sustained support”<sup>4</sup> and use those systems to provide technical assistance to districts and schools identified through their accountability systems. Similarly, *ESSA* requires states to provide technical assistance to each district serving a significant number of schools identified through *ESSA* accountability. It also requires states to monitor and periodically review CSI schools’ improvement plans during implementation.

**All three states relied on regional providers to work directly with CSI schools and their districts.** Ohio maintained a network of 16 regionally based State Support Teams (SSTs) that provided coaching, training, and other technical assistance for CSI schools and districts throughout the state. An official from Ohio explained:

Our theory of action is if we build a regional support structure that has the expertise capabilities and capacity to support schools and districts, then we're going to see improved student outcomes. Really, our point of impact, again, is our regional structure, so if we build a solid regional structure, and they have the capacity to support districts and schools then we're going to see a difference.

Although the SSTs’ support work was not limited to supporting CSI schools, a state official noted that supporting CSI schools had become an increasingly important focus of their work.

In Florida, the state was divided into four regions, each with a team of improvement specialists overseen by a regional executive director and a lead executive director at the state education agency. The state required regional executive directors to have experience leading turnaround schools, and it expected the improvement specialists, who were often former instructional coaches, to have background working with schools similar to the ones in need of support as well as a track record of fostering improvement.

California drew on its county offices of education (COEs) to provide regional support for CSI schools and their districts. The state provided \$10 million in funding to COEs to facilitate this support, along with training and oversight. “We focus efforts on building the capacity of our COEs,” a state official noted. “It’s sort of a cascade model that we’ve been trying to develop out.” California also relied on its COEs to review and approve CSI schools’ improvement plans.

**All three states allowed their regional providers discretion to target and tailor their support based on local needs and contexts.** In California, for instance, state officials explained that while the state provides resources, training, and expectations for COEs to support their provision of technical assistance to CSI schools and districts, the COEs determined locally how that assistance would be delivered and to whom. “It’s not a one-size-fits-all,” an official noted. “You can’t expect one county office of education to provide the same kind of support to LEAs in the same way because of how diverse California is...it looks different from COE to COE.” California officials further noted that the state did not have the authority to force CSI schools or districts to work with their local COE but sought to encourage such collaborations by emphasizing the importance of relationship and trust building in their training for COEs. An official explained:

We came out of a compliance[-oriented] world into more of a support[-oriented] world. It takes some LEAs [local education agencies] and even COEs particularly within the context of school improvement—that’s such hard work, and such scary work for people—it takes time to move through that.

In Ohio, the regional SSTs also tailored their support based on local needs and requests. Schools and districts that received heightened levels of support from their regional SST developed a service delivery agreement outlining a customized set of support services that the SST would provide along with goals for what they aimed to achieve through those services. The agreements were meant to help ensure alignment between the SST services offered and CSI schools’ improvement plans.

Florida gave the four regional executive directors who oversaw the state’s teams of regional improvement specialists the authority to design support strategies based on the needs of their particular region and schools. For instance, some regional teams chose to work one-on-one with CSI school principals to help them develop their school improvement plan while others brought together CSI principals from different districts to collaboratively review school improvement plan requirements and share ideas. To ensure oversight and coordination, the state education agency’s lead executive director would meet regularly with the regional executive directors to discuss their support activities.

**Officials from all three states emphasized the importance of targeting support to districts to shore up their capacity to support school improvement.** Districts can play critical roles in fostering school improvement.<sup>5</sup> As such, *ESSA* makes districts responsible for developing CSI schools’ federally required improvement plan, which are to be devised in collaboration with school leaders and community members. Officials from all three states acknowledged districts’ importance in the improvement process and described ways in which their state was channeling support to district administrators to enhance their ability to facilitate school change. State administrators from Ohio mentioned that their SSTs had pivoted in recent years from a school-centric approach to one that prioritizes district engagement. An administrator described this shift as “supporting that district leadership team and looking for throughlines to the building leadership team and teacher-based teams, but mostly from building capacity at the district level in order to create a sustainable support model.” By enhancing

leadership capacity at the district level, the state aimed to empower districts to have a sense of ownership over their schools' improvement efforts and to provide ongoing, localized support.

As another mechanism for boosting districts' capacity to drive school improvement, Ohio and California both established district-level accountability systems, which used state-determined criteria to identify struggling districts and provide them with support. While these systems were not explicitly designed to target districts with CSI schools, they often did so. A California administrator underscored how the state's district-level accountability system was intended to build districts' capacity for systemic and school improvement, explaining:

Research really shows and our experience here in California is that many of the things that are needed for school-level improvement are driven by district-level decisions... our different interventions through our system of support are given at the district level with those conversations of what's going on [at] specific schools within the district [as] part of a larger conversation that is more holistic of what's going on inside the district.

In Florida, state officials noted how they purposefully included district-level involvement in their support framework for CSI schools. For instance, they described how district leaders attended an annual summer academy that the state held for its CSI schools' leadership teams. This academy featured a dedicated program for district leaders, aimed at enhancing their capacity for supporting their CSI schools. It included training on developing a monitoring plan for CSI schools' progress throughout the school year and on gathering evidence that the schools' improvement strategies were impacting student achievement.

## **Most case study districts reported providing their most intensive school improvement support to more than just CSI schools.**

Interview respondents from 16 of the study's 20 case study districts discussed their district's approach to targeting support to CSI schools and other schools in the district,<sup>6</sup> of which most reported distributing support across a broader swath of schools than those identified for CSI. In contrast, about one-third of case study districts indicated that CSI schools received more attention and school improvement support than other schools (see Appendix Exhibit A.1 for a description of how we categorized district approaches to targeting support). It is important to note, however, that the case study districts, due to their limited number, do not necessarily reflect the broader situation across all districts in these states. Instead, the findings in this brief aim to provide a descriptive look into how districts with varying contexts are approaching CSI support. That said, the districts were chosen purposively to ensure they reflected a mix of different characteristics, such as size, urbanicity, demographic composition, and percentage of CSI schools.

**Administrators from six case study districts described providing CSI schools with more specialized attention and support compared with other schools in the district.** For example, an administrator from a small California district explained that CSI schools received extra attention during the

improvement planning process to discuss why they were identified and how to align their school plans with the reasons for their identification. CSI schools also met more often with the district's school improvement coordinator, who described CSI schools as a *"higher priority"* than other schools in the district. This support was in addition to an annual visit that all schools in the district receive to monitor their improvement efforts and progress.

In another case study district, CSI schools were the only schools to receive support from a team of external consultants who collaborated with school leaders on their improvement process and shared insights with other schools. Administrators from a third district also reported prioritizing support to CSI schools, emphasizing that these schools were *"at the top of our list"* for support. CSI schools in this district received more instructional coaching and regular interactions with district administrators. An administrator explained that district staff made more frequent visits to CSI schools than to others to ensure the CSI schools had the necessary resources. Moreover, these staff coordinate with other central office departments and teams, such as the budget office and English learner support team, as well as with assistant superintendents and directors at both the elementary and secondary levels, to ensure delivery of focused and coordinated support.

**Administrators from five case study districts explained that they provided their most intensive school improvement support to CSI schools and other schools that the district had determined to be of highest need.** Respondents from these districts described how certain non-CSI schools in their district had been purposefully designated as needing improvement and thus received heightened attention and support from the district along with CSI schools. In three of these districts, the targeting of additional support was connected to federal accountability designations. Two of the districts provided specialized assistance that was comparable to CSI schools' level of support to schools identified for additional targeted support and improvement (ATSI) under ESSA for low performance among particular student groups. For example, one of the districts had developed a "CSI and ATSI toolkit" that provides talking points, communication information, PowerPoint templates that schools can use in community discussions, as well as an evidence-based interventions resource tool that helps schools identify appropriate interventions for their performance challenges. In the other district, district administrators served as dedicated CSI and ATSI managers who helped coordinate CSI/ATSI schools' improvement efforts and broker these schools' needed resources and expertise from departments throughout the district central office. Administrators from a third district highlighted how the district expanded the heightened level of support that it provided to CSI schools to include schools that were either formerly CSI or were *"on the fence"* toward becoming CSI. These schools received assigned coaching support as well as additional district data meetings and school walkthroughs with assistant superintendents to guide their improvement efforts.

In the final two districts that fell into this category, the district established a tiered system to differentiate support to CSI and other low-performing schools that were selected based on district-chosen criteria. Administrators from one of the districts explained that CSI schools and other schools with low performance would fall within the top two tiers of the district's support system. However, CSI

status did not dictate which schools landed in the most intensive tier; rather, district leaders would determine schools' support tier based on a risk factor analysis that took into account school conditions (e.g., principal turnover and experience, educator capacity, school climate) and five years' worth of school performance data. The other district that employed a tiered system of support also used their own risk assessment process to decide which tier of support their schools would receive. CSI status was one of several factors the district considered in that assessment. An administrator explained that such factors included "who's entering [CSI status], who's been in [CSI status], and who actually also meets certain other kind of risk assessment criteria. Meaning, do they have a newer principal? Do they have a high turnover? Do they have persistently low scoring over the last X amount of years?" Additional factors that could affect schools' level of support in this district included whether the school had just entered CSI status or been in status for multiple years and whether the school's data pointed to a focused performance issue (e.g., low reading scores) or more widespread performance challenges.

**Five of the case study districts reported providing similar levels of support to all of their schools.**

Districts employing this approach typically explained how they believed all schools could benefit from the types of school improvement supports afforded to CSI schools.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, this blanket approach to support was often aimed at promoting consistency across schools. For instance, an administrator from one district noted, *"Quite honestly, the support for [CSI] schools also were supports that our other schools needed."* Thus, the district began treating every school as if it were a priority school, requiring all schools to use the same CSI improvement plan template that was previously only mandatory for those in CSI status. Another district underscored how the district was prioritizing consistency in educational practices across schools. Most schools were implementing the same systems and strategies; therefore, the district provided similar supports to all schools to maintain this alignment. An administrator emphasized, *"It's not that we are neglecting our [CSI] schools, obviously. It's just that our other schools are getting intense involvement also."*

Although districts in this category characterized their overall approach to support as the same for all schools, several acknowledged that some informal or ad hoc targeting of support may occur based on specific issues that arise. For example, an administrator in one district mentioned that they might advocate for additional support if they observed CSI schools with particularly acute needs. Another district highlighted how schools with new leaders or schools that had encountered particular implementation challenges might be targeted with additional support and resources. However, schools that were *"working their [improvement] plan"* and making progress received similar support regardless of their accountability status.

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*"Quite honestly, the support for [CSI] schools also were supports that our other schools needed."*

*– District administrator*

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## Principals of CSI schools tended to report receiving support that was similar in breadth, relevance, and helpfulness to what principals of low-performing non-CSI schools reported receiving. However, CSI principals were more likely to report receiving improvement planning support and monitoring.

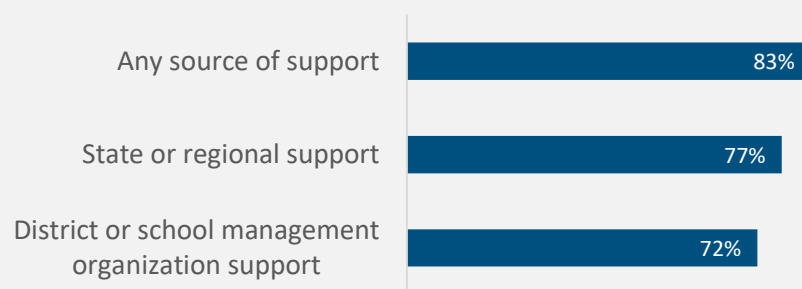
Findings from the principal survey help shed further light on the level and types of support that states and districts are targeting to CSI schools. Across all three states, most CSI principals (83 percent) indicated that their school’s CSI designation led to increased external support, particularly from state or regional providers (see Exhibit 3), which aligns with *ESSA*’s intent for providing specialized assistance to these schools.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, CSI principals were slightly more likely to report an increase in support from the state or regional providers than their district or school management organization (SMO), which might suggest that CSI status is a slightly stronger signal for targeting state-affiliated support than local support.<sup>9</sup>

To investigate the extent to which having a CSI designation was associated with heightened external support, the study team examined CSI principals’ reports of support received from their state, regional providers, district, and/or school management organizations and then compared that information with reports of principals in other low-performing schools that were not designated as CSI. We also explored whether CSI schools were more likely than other low-performing schools to receive monitoring from any of these sources given *ESSA*’s requirement that CSI plans be periodically monitored.

**Principals of CSI and other low-performing non-CSI schools generally reported receiving support in a similar number of areas, but CSI principals were more likely to receive support on developing an improvement plan.** *ESSA*’s term “comprehensive support and improvement” suggests that states and districts should provide CSI schools with multi-faceted support that addresses the full range of areas in which they need assistance. Accordingly, it would be reasonable to expect CSI schools to receive support across more topics than non-CSI schools. However, according to the principal survey, CSI principals tended to receive support in similar numbers of areas as non-CSI principals (see Appendix Exhibit A.3).<sup>10</sup>

**Exhibit 3. Percentage of CSI principals who agreed or strongly agreed that their CSI status increased the level of support their school received, by source of support**



*Note: Ns = 506-507 principals. State or regional support includes support from the state education agency, county offices of education, and/or regional education service centers.*

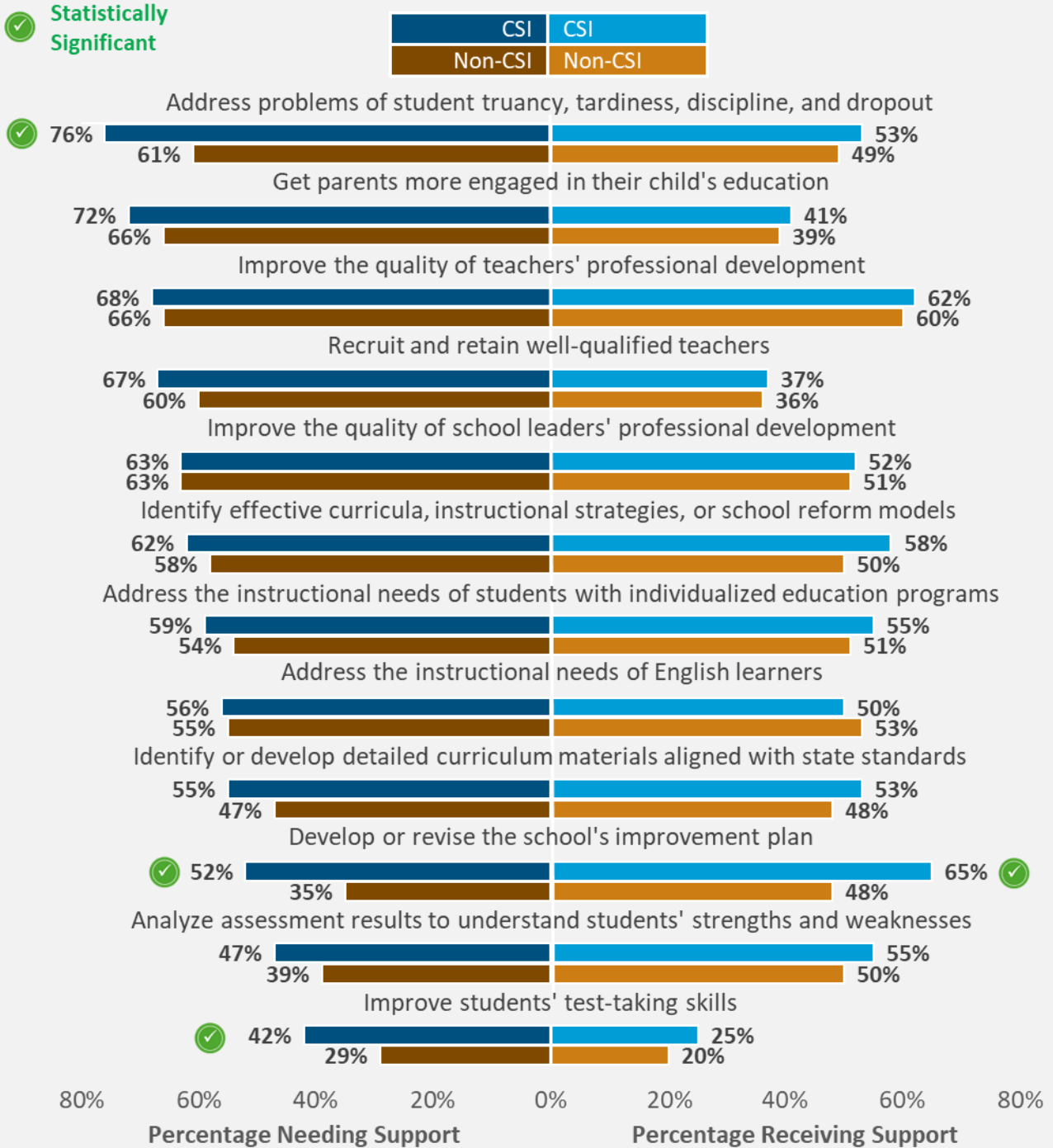
In terms of specific support areas, the only one where CSI principals were statistically significantly more likely to report receiving support than non-CSI principals was in developing or revising the school's improvement plan (see Exhibit 4). Nearly two-thirds of CSI principals (65 percent) reported receiving support in this area, compared with 48 percent of non-CSI principals. Importantly, this area was also one of only three areas where CSI principals were more likely to report *needing* support than their non-CSI counterparts. Furthermore, it reflects one of the few actions that *ESSA* explicitly requires of CSI schools. Nevertheless, only a little over half of CSI principals (52 percent) expressed a need for support in this area, with larger percentages indicating needs in other areas, particularly addressing problems of student truancy, tardiness, discipline, and dropout, which 76 percent of CSI principals identified as a need (see Exhibit 4).

**CSI principals did not report receiving support that was better aligned to their needs than non-CSI principals, but both groups of principals indicated receiving support in most of the areas where it was needed.** *ESSA* requires that the strategies featured in CSI schools' improvement plans be grounded in a thorough needs assessment, with the idea that aligning improvement actions with the specific issues underlying a school's performance challenges can lead to more effective and more efficient improvement. Although *ESSA* doesn't explicitly require such alignment for external support, the same logic arguably applies. Thus, receiving support in a more comprehensive set of areas is not necessarily better if it is wasting time, attention, and resources on areas that are not relevant to the school's improvement needs and efforts.

Overall, both CSI and non-CSI principals reported receiving support in over half of the areas in which they needed it, with CSI principals receiving support in 63 percent of the areas they needed and non-CSI principals receiving support in an average of 64 percent of the areas they needed (see Appendix Exhibit A4). Still, this indicates that there are substantial gaps in support. For instance, as shown in Exhibit 4, some of the areas where CSI principals most needed support, such as addressing student truancy, tardiness, discipline, and dropout and improving school leaders' professional development, were also where they were least likely to receive it.

Conversely, neither group of principals reported receiving support in a lot of areas where they did not need help, with both groups receiving, on average, support in about 20 percent of the areas in which they did not need it (see Appendix Exhibit A.4). Taken together, these findings suggest that the support provided by states and districts is somewhat tailored to, or driven by, schools' specific needs, though not as much as it could be.

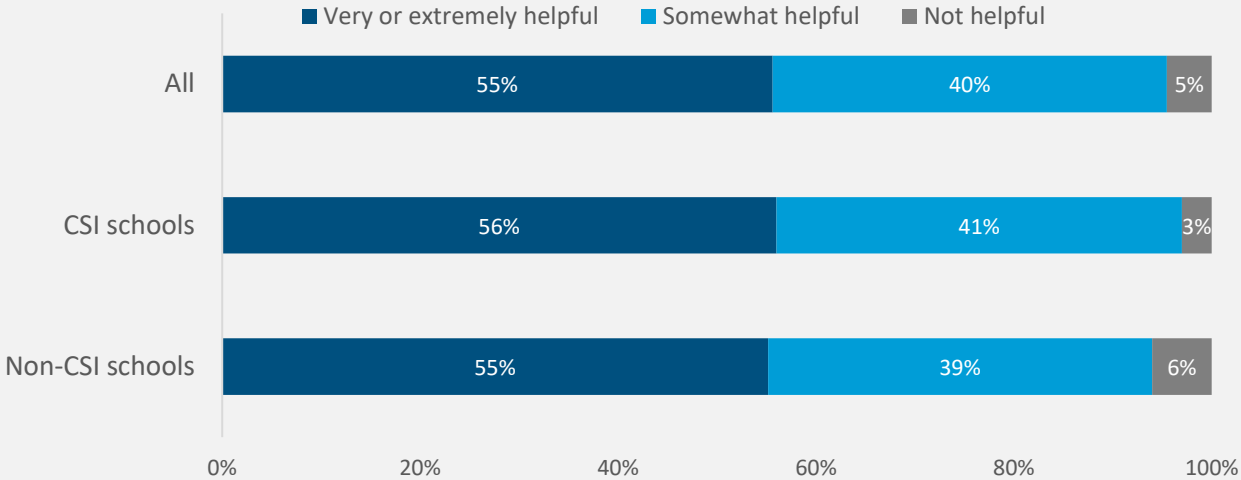
**Exhibit 4. Percentage of Principals Who Reported Needing Support and Receiving Support in Various Areas, by CSI status**



Note: Ns = 600-617 for CSI schools and 515-529 for non-CSI schools.

Overall, CSI and non-CSI principals reported similar perceptions of how helpful their support was, but CSI principals rated the support they received in certain areas, such as developing or revising the school’s improvement plan, as more helpful than non-CSI principals did. In addition to asking about the need for and receipt of support in various areas, the principal survey also asked principals to rate the helpfulness of the support received. Overall, principals were positive about the support they received, with principals finding the support very or extremely helpful in over half (55 percent) of the areas covered and at least somewhat helpful in nearly all (95 percent) of the areas covered (see Exhibit 5 and Appendix Exhibit A.5). While the overall satisfaction with the support was similar between CSI and non-CSI principals, CSI principals rated their support as more helpful than non-CSI principals did in three areas: developing or revising the school’s improvement plan, improving the quality of teachers’ professional development, and recruiting and retaining well-qualified teachers (see Appendix Exhibit A.6).

**Exhibit 5. Average Percentage of Areas in Which Principals Reported Receiving Support That Was Very or Extremely Helpful, Somewhat Helpful, or Not Helpful, by CSI Status**



*Note. Ns = 631 respondents for California, 218 respondents for Florida, and 187 respondents for Ohio. Principals were asked to report whether they received support in a total of 12 areas and then to rate the helpfulness of the support in each area they received. “Not helpful” includes support that was rated as “not at all helpful” or “not so helpful.” See Appendix Exhibit A5 for more details.*

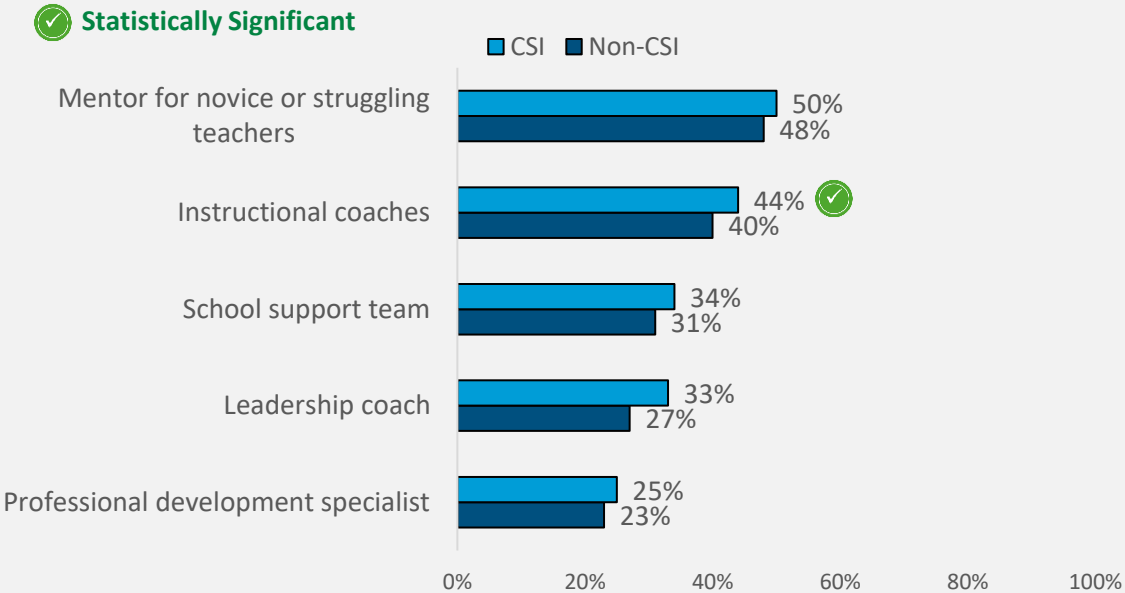
CSI principals reported receiving support from similar types of support providers as non-CSI principals, suggesting that states and districts tend not to reserve particular support roles just for CSI schools. When asked about the types of external providers who supported their school, CSI and non-CSI principals’ reports tended to follow a similar pattern. Both most often reported receiving providers who support teachers in improving instruction, including mentors and instructional coaches (see

Exhibit 6). CSI principals were slightly more likely than non-CSI principals to report receiving support from instructional coaches, but the difference was small (44 percent of CSI principals vs 40 percent of non-CSI principals). In addition, CSI and non-CSI principals reported receiving leadership-focused supports, such as school support teams or leadership coaches, at similar rates.

**However, CSI schools reported having slightly higher access to support providers in general.**

CSI principals were a little bit more likely than non-CSI principals to report receiving support from *any* of these five types of providers (74 percent of CSI principals vs 69 percent of non-CSI principals). Moreover, they were somewhat more likely to report receiving support from multiple types of providers, particularly in California. Overall, 56 percent of CSI principals reported receiving support from at least two different types of support providers, compared to 49 percent of non-CSI principals (see Appendix Exhibit A.7).

**Exhibit 6. Percentage of Principals Reporting That Their School Received Support from Various Types of Support Providers, by CSI Status**



*Note.* Ns = 621-627 respondents for CSI schools and 527-534 respondents for non-CSI schools.

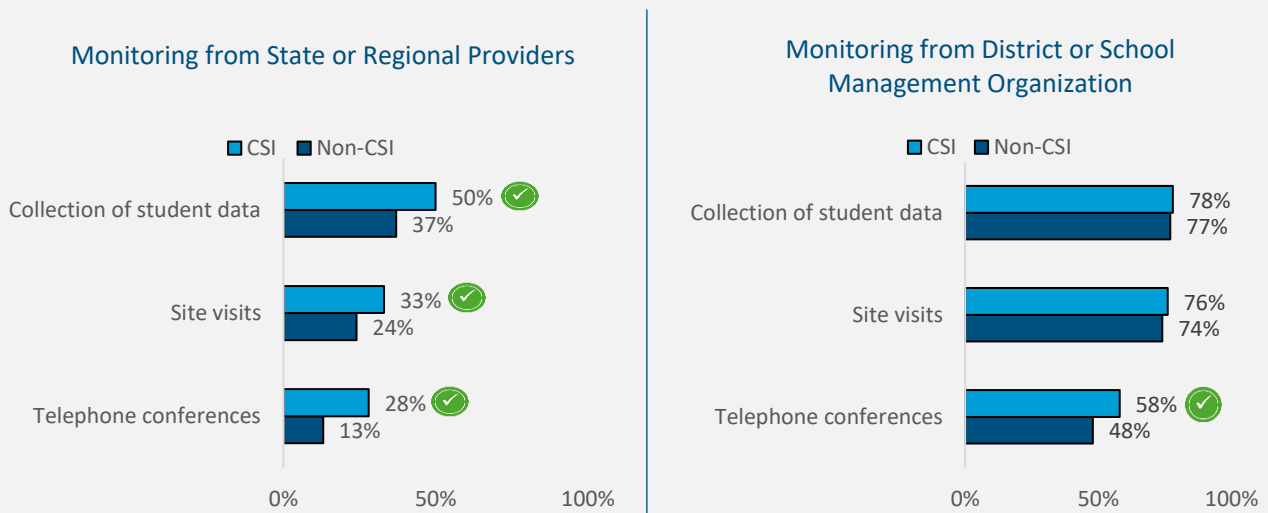
**Consistent with ESSA requirements that the implementation of CSI plans be monitored, CSI schools were significantly more likely than non-CSI schools to report receiving monitoring from state or regional providers.** As shown in Exhibit 7, greater percentages of CSI schools reported receiving state or regional monitoring in each type of format examined. Although monitoring through the collection of data was the most prevalent form of state/regional monitoring (50 percent of CSI schools), one-third of CSI schools reported receiving more intensive, individualized monitoring through site visits, and nearly

a third received it through telephone conferences. State and regional monitoring was particularly prevalent in Ohio where each form of monitoring was reported by a majority of CSI principals (See Appendix Exhibit A.8).

CSI and non-CSI principals differed less in their reports of monitoring from their local school district or school management organization (see Exhibit 7). Both groups reported receiving local monitoring through the collection of data and site visits, the two most commonly reported monitoring formats, at similar rates. However, CSI principals were more likely than non-CSI principals to indicate that their district or school management organization monitored their progress through telephone conferences (58 percent of CSI principals vs 48 percent of non-CSI principals). These findings again may suggest that states—and the regional providers that states use to support schools and districts—may be using CSI status as a means of targeting their external support and attention more than districts are, while districts may be playing a larger role in supporting low-performing schools that are not designated as CSI.

### Exhibit 7. Percentage of Schools Receiving State or Local Monitoring in Various Formats, by CSI Status

✔ Statistically Significant



Note. Ns = 646 respondents for CSI schools and 555 respondents for non-CSI schools.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- **Although ESSA's CSI provisions were designed to allow states and districts to focus their most intensive levels of support on the very lowest-performing schools, in practice, they may be targeting such support to a broader swath of schools.** The similarities between CSI and non-CSI principals' reported school improvement support suggest that states and districts might not be significantly differentiating supports provided to CSI versus other low-performing schools. Indeed, our case study districts often indicated that this was the case. This could mean that local administrators are identifying similar levels of need in at least some non-CSI schools, raising potential questions about whether states' CSI criteria are appropriately identifying all of the schools most in need. It could also suggest that districts may be diffusing their support across schools with varying levels of need rather than concentrating it on the very neediest schools, potentially diluting the intensity of support provided to CSI schools.
- **The use of locally chosen criteria that some case study districts reported using to target support to schools—either formally or informally—may allow them to differentiate support based on a more nuanced and context-driven assessment of school needs than the CSI designation alone.** It may also help districts promote coherence between school improvement support and other types of local support and initiatives. However, if not done thoughtfully and transparently, this type of local prioritization could potentially raise equity concerns, particularly if it is unclear why some schools are receiving greater support or attention than others.
- **Principals' reports of the supports they received suggest that states and districts may tend to target support to CSI schools based on the CSI requirements outlined in ESSA, potentially overlooking other areas of need.** For example, the areas in which CSI principals were more likely to receive support than non-CSI principals largely reflect ESSA's requirements that CSI schools develop and implement an improvement plan that is then periodically monitored. However, in addition to needing support around the CSI improvement process itself, large percentages of CSI principals reported needing support on particular challenges their school faced (e.g., addressing problems of student truancy, tardiness, discipline, and dropout) and not always receiving it. Thus, CSI principals may require greater access to substantive expertise on the specific needs and strategies included in their CSI plans.

# Appendix: Additional Exhibits

**Exhibit A1. Summary of District Approaches to Targeting School Improvement Support**

District prioritizes CSI schools	District supports CSI and other high-needs schools	District provides same level of support to all schools
District indicates that (1) CSI schools receive supports that other schools do not, (2) CSI schools receive a greater amount of attention or support than other schools (e.g., district spends more time working with CSI schools), and/or (3) CSI schools are given priority for district initiatives or support.	District indicates that it provides comparable levels of support to CSI and other high-needs schools (e.g., other low-performing schools, TSI/ATSI schools, schools at risk of becoming CSI) because all of those schools are in need of support	District indicates that it provides comparable levels of support to all schools, regardless of performance

**Exhibit A2. Percentage of CSI Principals Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed That Their CSI Status Has Increased the Level of Support Received, By Source of Support and State**

State	Support from state or regional providers	Support from district or school management organization
All	77%	72%
California	80%	72%
Florida	69%	75%
Ohio	68%	61%

*Note.* *Ns* = 400-401 respondents for California, 58 respondents for Florida, and 48 respondents for Ohio. State or regional support includes support from the state education agency, county offices of education, and/or regional education service center.



**Exhibit A3. Percentage of Principals Who Reported Receiving Support in Various Numbers of Areas, by State and CSI Status**

State	CSI status	0 Areas	1-4 Areas	5-8 Areas	9-12 Areas
All	All	15%	32%	26%	27%
	CSI schools	14%	31%	25%	30%
	Non-CSI schools	16%	32%	27%	25%
California	All	17%	34%	23%	26%
	CSI schools	17%	33%	21%	29%
	Non-CSI schools	17%	35%	25%	23%
Ohio	All	6%	33%	34%	27%
	CSI schools	4%	29%	43%	24%
	Non-CSI schools	6%	36%	28%	30%
Florida	All	16%	24%	30%	31%
	CSI schools	9%*	25%	27%	39%*
	Non-CSI schools	21%	24%	32%	24%

*Note.* \* Represents differences between CSI and non-CSI schools that are statistically significant. Ns = 701 respondents for California, 243 respondents for Florida, and 199 respondents for Ohio. Principals were asked to report whether their school received support in a total of 12 areas (see Exhibit A.6 below for a list of the 12 areas).

**Exhibit A4. Average Percentage of Needed and Unneeded Areas of Support That Schools Received, by State and CSI Status**

State	CSI status	Average percentage of needed areas of support that the school received	Average percentage of unneeded areas of support that the school received
All	All	63.4%	19.9%
	CSI schools	62.6%	20.2%
	Non-CSI schools	64.2%	19.5%
California	All	61.7%	18.2%
	CSI schools	59.9%	18.2%
	Non-CSI schools	63.6%	18.2%
Ohio	All	64.0%	19.0%
	CSI schools	64.8%	20.6%
	Non-CSI schools	63.5%	18.1%
Florida	All	68.7%	25.6%

	CSI schools	70.4%	26.8%
	Non-CSI schools	66.9%	24.4%

*Note.* \* Represents differences between CSI and non-CSI schools that are statistically significant. Ns = 648 respondents for California, 200 respondents for Florida, and 181 respondents for Ohio. Principals were asked to report whether their school needed and received support in a total of 12 areas (see Exhibit A.6 below for a list of the 12 areas).

**Exhibit A5. Average Percentage of Areas in Which Principals Reported Receiving Support of Various Levels of Helpfulness, by State and CSI status**

State	CSI Status	Average Percentage of Areas in Which the Support Received Was:				
		Not at all helpful	Not so helpful	Somewhat helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful
All	All	0.6%	3.9%	39.7%	43.3%	12.1%
	CSI schools	0.4%	2.6%*	41.0%	41.1%	14.9%
	Non-CSI schools	0.8%	5.2%	38.6%	45.4%	9.5%
California	All	0.6%	4.4%	39.4%	44.8%	10.5%
	CSI schools	0.5%	3.3%	42.0%	41.0%	13.2%
	Non-CSI schools	0.7%	5.6%	36.6%	48.9%	7.7%
Ohio	All	1.3%	3.3%	44.3%	40.3%	10.9%
	CSI schools	0.3%	1.5%	43.4%	39.0%	15.7%
	Non-CSI schools	1.8%	4.3%	44.8%	41.0%	8.1%
Florida	All	0.2%	3.1%	36.9%	41.4%	17.9%
	CSI schools	0.1%	1.2%*	35.9%	42.8%	19.9%
	Non-CSI schools	0.3%	4.7%	37.7%	40.1%	16.0%

*Note.* \* Represents differences between CSI and non-CSI schools that are statistically significant. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding. Ns = 631 respondents for California, 218 respondents for Florida, and 187 respondents for Ohio. Principals were asked to report whether they received support in a total of 12 areas and then to rate the helpfulness of the support in each area they received. See Exhibit A.6 below for a list of the 12 areas.

**Exhibit A6. Percentage of Principals Reporting That the Support Their School Received Was Very or Extremely Helpful, by CSI Status**

Area of Support	All schools	CSI schools	Non-CSI Schools
Develop or revise the school’s improvement plan	65%	69%*	60%
Analyze assessment results to understand students’ strengths and weaknesses	62%	64%	62%
Improve students’ test-taking skills	61%	59%	64%
Identify or develop detailed curriculum guides, frameworks, pacing sequences, and/or model lessons aligned with state standards	69%	65%	71%
Identify curricula, instructional strategies, or school reform models that have been shown to be effective in increasing students’ achievement	66%	64%	68%
Address the instructional needs of students with individualized education programs	65%	67%	63%
Address the instructional needs of English learners	63%	62%	63%
Get parents more engaged in their child’s education	50%	56%	45%
Address problems of student truancy, tardiness, discipline, and dropout	55%	57%	52%
Improve the quality of teachers’ professional development	62%	65%*	59%
Improve the quality of school leaders’ professional development	62%	65%	57%
Recruit and retain well-qualified teachers	59%	64%*	53%

*Note.* \* Represents differences between CSI and non-CSI schools that are statistically significant. Ns = 143-392 respondents for CSI schools and 110-143 respondents for non-CSI schools.

**Exhibit A7. Percentage of Principals Who Reported Receiving Support From No, One, and At Least Two Types of Support Providers, by State and CSI Status**

State	CSI status	No Types of Providers	One Type of Provider	At Least Two Types of Providers
All	All	29%	19%	52%
	CSI schools	26%*	18%	56%*
	Non-CSI schools	31%	20%	49%
California	All	29%	20%	52%
	CSI schools	25%	18%	57%*
	Non-CSI schools	33%	21%	46%
Ohio	All	13%	21%	66%
	CSI schools	8%	20%	72%
	Non-CSI schools	16%	22%	62%
Florida	All	39%	16%	45%
	CSI schools	41%	16%	43%
	Non-CSI schools	37%	17%	46%

*Note.* \* Represents differences between CSI and non-CSI schools that are statistically significant. *Ns* = 701 respondents for California, 243 respondents for Florida, and 199 respondents for Ohio. The survey asked about a total of five provider types: leadership coach, school support team, instructional coaches, mentor for teachers who are novices or teachers who are struggling, and professional development specialist.

**Exhibit A8. Percentage of School Principals Who Reported Receiving State or Local Monitoring in Various Formats, by State and CSI Status**

	California			Florida			Ohio		
	Total	CSI	Non-CSI	Total	CSI	Non-CSI	Total	CSI	Non-CSI
<b>Monitoring from state or regional providers</b>									
Site visits	17%	21%*	12%	45%	51%	40%	49%	67%*	39%
Telephone conferences	16%	23%*	9%	26%	29%	24%	28%	54%*	13%
Collection of data	35%	40%	29%	55%	66%	47%	61%	75%*	52%
<b>Monitoring from district and/or school management organization</b>									
Site visits	72%	74%	69%	85%	83%	87%	73%	72%	73%
Telephone conferences	51%	57%*	45%	56%	59%	54%	56%	60%	54%
Collection of data	74%	76%	72%	86%	83%	89%	78%	78%*	77%

*Note.* \* Represents differences between CSI and non-CSI schools that are statistically significant. *Ns* = 745 respondents for California, 252 respondents for Florida, and 204 respondents for Ohio.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> States have the option to include non-Title I schools in identifying CSI schools based on low performance.

<sup>2</sup> As part of the state interview process, the study team also collected and analyzed state policy documents that described the state's approach to identifying and supporting CSI schools (e.g., accountability handbooks, service provider agreements).

<sup>3</sup> The state interviews were conducted in fall 2021, the district interviews were conducted in spring through summer 2022, and the principal survey was administered in spring 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Section 1117(a)(1) of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act*

<sup>5</sup> Sykes, G., O'Day, J., & Ford, T. (2009). "The District Role in Instructional Improvement" in Sykes, G., Schneider, B., Plank, D., & Ford, T. G. (Eds.) *Handbook of Education Policy Research* (pp. 767–784). Dunn, L., Scott, C., Chapman, K., & Vince, S. (2016). *The missing link: How states work with districts to support school turnaround*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

<sup>6</sup> In interviews, case study district respondents were asked a series of questions about the types of support their district provided to CSI schools and the role the district played in guiding CSI schools' needs assessments and school improvement planning. In response to these questions, respondents in 16 of the 20 districts described how their district's support for CSI schools compared with their support for other schools in the district, which allowed the study team to categorize the district's approach to targeting support. Interview responses for the other four case study districts did not include sufficient information on this topic for the study team to categorize the district's approach to targeting support.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, across these five districts, 90 percent of schools were performing below the state average in students' English/language arts proficiency, and 93 percent of schools were performing below the state average in student's mathematics proficiency, which suggests that the vast majority of schools were facing notable challenges in raising their performance.

<sup>8</sup> For the 17 percent of CSI principals who did not report an increase in support with their CSI designation, they may have already been receiving similar levels of support before their school was identified as CSI.

<sup>9</sup> This result was driven largely by principals in California and Ohio. In Florida, the reverse was true: 69 percent of CSI principals reported an increase in state or regional support whereas 75 percent reported an increase in district or SMO support (see Appendix Exhibit A.2).

<sup>10</sup> Although CSI principals tended to report receiving support in a slightly higher number of areas than non-CSI principals, these differences were only statistically significant for principals in Florida (see Appendix Exhibit A.3).