

School Quality Improvement System

Executive Summary

May 2013

The School Quality Improvement System is a holistic approach to school improvement proposed by the California Office to Reform Education (CORE), a consortium of California school districts, to replace No Child Left Behind accountability rules through the federal waiver process. The CORE districts represent more than a million students. When federal approval is final, any California local educational agency (LEA) will be eligible to participate in the School Quality Improvement System.

The district leaders that designed the School Quality Improvement System did not set out to replace existing unproductive federal accountability rules with simply a different set of more flexible regulations. Instead they seized this opportunity to radically reorient their systems so that student success in multiple dimensions is at the center of every decision and motivates every action.

The School Quality Improvement System is rooted in a commitment to prepare all students for college and career, achieved through shared learning and collective responsibility for continual improvement. It is designed to instill a new collective and individual moral imperative to prepare all students for successful futures and be responsive to the specific needs of California students, with an all-encompassing focus on eliminating disparities between subgroups.

The School Quality Improvement System is grounded in the concept of moral imperative highlighted in [Michal Fullan's](#) research and described in "[Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform](#)." The School Quality Improvement System also incorporates recommendations from the state's [Greatness by Design](#) report, acknowledging that achieving success for all students hinges on teacher effectiveness, but responsibility rests on the collective shoulders of the entire school community.

The School Quality Improvement System is not an escape FROM accountability. Instead, LEAs participating in the School Quality Improvement System invite a higher level of accountability for multifaceted student success; and accept shared responsibility to prepare all students for college and careers.

The School Quality Improvement System is designed with recognition that the federal expectations for meeting students' needs have been too narrow for too long; LEA's have too often been chasing success in a system that does not define success in a comprehensive or rigorous way. Districts participating in the School Quality Improvement System are rejecting this narrow focus and accept the idea that true success for all students can only be achieved through a holistic approach. The participating districts want to be held to a higher standard on a much more comprehensive range of measures that collectively indicate students' college and career readiness, and are more effective drivers of change.

The School Quality Improvement System is built upon four foundational goals that align to, and extend beyond the three principles of the federal waiver guidelines:

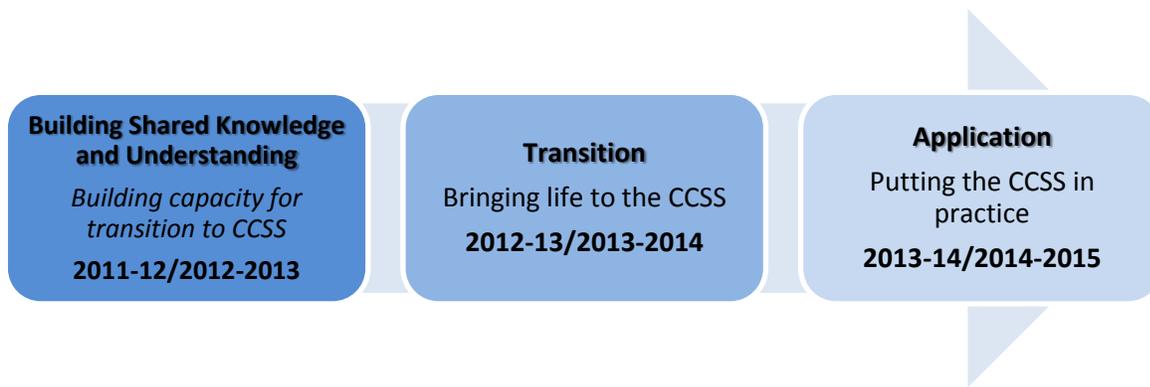
- College and career ready expectations for all students.
- A focus on collective responsibility, accountability, and action that emphasizes capacity-building over accountability.

- The development of intrinsic motivation for change through differentiated recognition, accountability, and support for schools.
- Focused capacity-building for effective instruction and leadership.

Creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration are needed to prepare students for college and careers.

The School Quality Improvement System commitment to success for all students starts with a commitment to fully transition to the Common Core State Standards and aligned assessments by 2014-15. The Common Core State Standards will revolutionize how students learn in ways that prepare them for meaningful careers and participatory citizenship in the 21st Century. It will also revolutionize the way teachers teach. Putting the Common Core into practice will demand creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration by both teachers and their students. This transition will encourage innovation, project based learning, and a focus on deeper learning by all educators.

Common Core State Standards Transition Timeline



LEAs participating in the School Quality Improvement System are committed to hold themselves and each other accountable for student success on the Common Core State Standards, as measured by both absolute performance and growth over time. However significant research has found that by only focusing on academic success, the true picture of a student’s college and career readiness is obscured. The School Quality Improvement System reorients schools' focus toward this holistic system of support and measures improvement in many more informative facets of college and career readiness.

It is equally important that high expectations for all students are coupled with system support to get them there. These supports include a positive school culture and climate, and assistance to help students develop additional skills beyond academic preparedness that are necessary to succeed in life. The School Quality Improvement System counts on the collective effort of the school, district, and community to value and measure multiple aspects of student success across academic, social-emotional, and culture and climate domains. It also counts on a collective ownership of success across these domains and a collective commitment to hold themselves and each other accountable for ensuring all students stay on track toward college and career readiness.

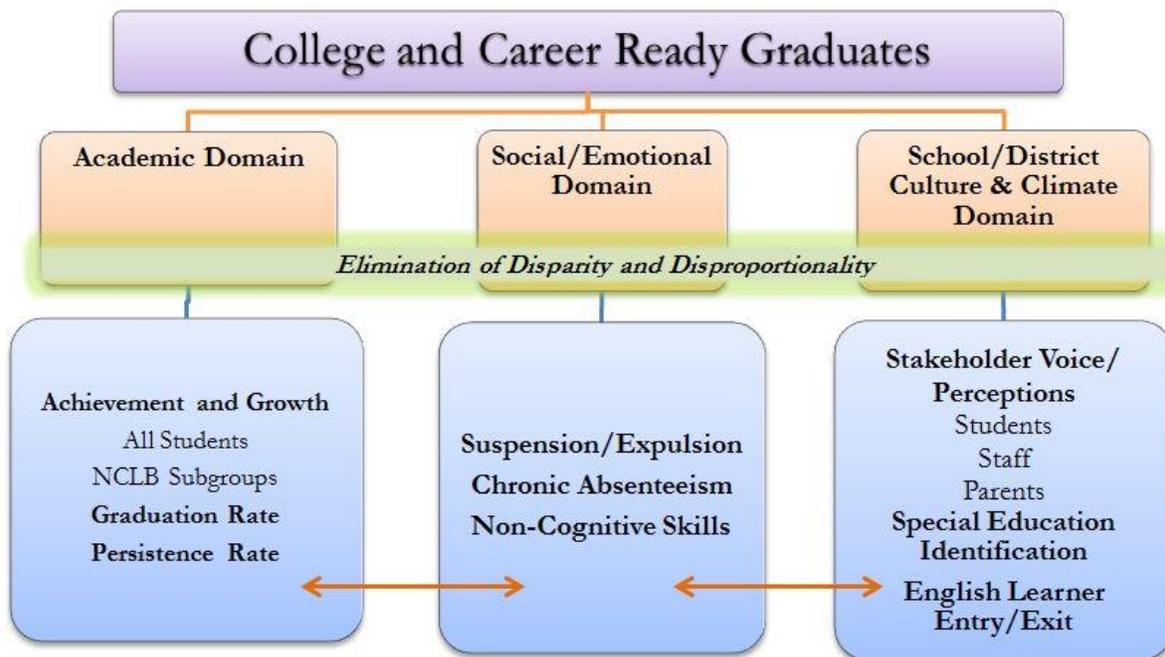
True success for all students is achieved by serving the needs of the whole child and eliminating disparity and disproportionality on multiple critical measures.

While academic progress is critical, The School Quality Improvement System recognizes the importance of factors beyond academic preparedness, and values multiple measures of student success in social/emotional development, as well as the critical importance of a school’s culture and climate.

The School Quality Improvement System includes annual expectations for progress as well as absolute levels of performance and growth. The accountability calculation that is at the heart of the School Quality Improvement System is the School Quality Improvement Index, which will provide a quantitative and holistic measure of school-level performance.

A central tenant of the School Quality Improvement System is that college and career readiness for all students can only be achieved if disparity and disproportionality are eliminated. This is why the minimum (“n-size”) number of students necessary for inclusion of their subgroup performance in the School Quality Improvement Index is 20 students, as compared to 100 students under California’s current federal accountability system. This change was not requested or required by the US Department of Education, but is done voluntarily by the CORE districts to ensure that a bright light is shown on achievement and support for traditionally underserved students at every school. With the change in subgroup “n” size to 20, across the current nine participating LEAs, schools will be held accountable for reporting progress of nearly 200,000 additional students, of whom a large percentage are African American, Latino, English Learner, or are students with disabilities.

School Quality Improvement Index



When fully implemented during the 2015-16 school year, the School Quality Improvement Index will include points awarded across the following domains:

- **Academic Domain (60%):** Key indicators in this domain include: performance in Math, English Language Arts, and all other state-administered assessments such as science, history

and writing at certain grade levels; student growth as defined by the School Quality Improvement System; high school graduation rate, with points awarded for both the federally-defined 4-year cohort graduation rate, and 5- and 6-year rates; and middle school persistence rates defined as the percentage of graduated 8th graders that go on to enroll in 10th grade.

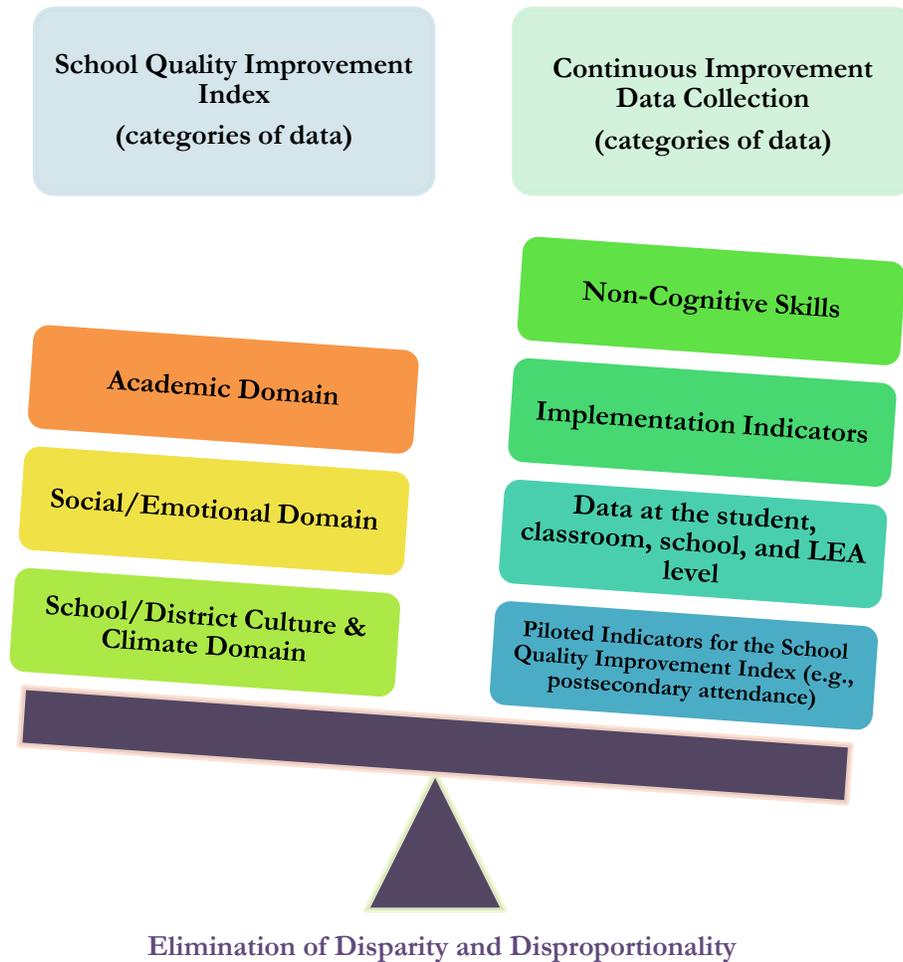
- **Social-Emotional Domain (20%):** Factors include: chronic absentee rate; suspension/expulsion rate for the purposes of reducing disproportionality, and non-cognitive factors (such as grit or resilience) for the “all students” group and all subgroups. Indicators will be determined and piloted during the 2013-14 school year.
- **Culture-Climate Domain (20%):** Factors include: school performance on student/staff/parent surveys; English Language Learner re-designation; and Special Education identification for the purposes of reducing disproportionality. Indicators will be determined and piloted during the 2013-14 school year.

Meeting School Quality Improvement Goals will be an individual and collective responsibility for every person in every school and district.

To achieve college and career readiness for all students and to eliminate disparity and disproportionality, all participating LEA's will also collect and share data far beyond what's necessary for federal accountability. These additional elements will include factors that are identified through research to be critical indicators of the ultimate success of students. Examples could be Pre-k information, middle school transitions, A-G completion rates, etc. This data will then be transparently shared, not with threats of sanction or reprisal, but out of a moral imperative to jointly ensure that schools are preparing each and every student to be college and career ready. If student or school performance is lagging on any of these indicators of success, it will be highlighted so that schools can make changes to keep student preparedness on course.

By sharing this data across all participating LEAs school and district personnel will begin to break out of traditional silos in order to work collectively for the betterment of all students. And by identifying and highlighting best practices and success within in our system, schools can better learn from the true experts – teachers in the classroom – about how to improve as a whole.

Dual Data Collection and Information System



All data to support continuous improvement in these domains will be shared so that participating LEAs can hold themselves and each other accountable for preparing every student for college and career, and develop cross-LEA collaborative relationships with a culture of excellence, continuous improvement, and collaboration.

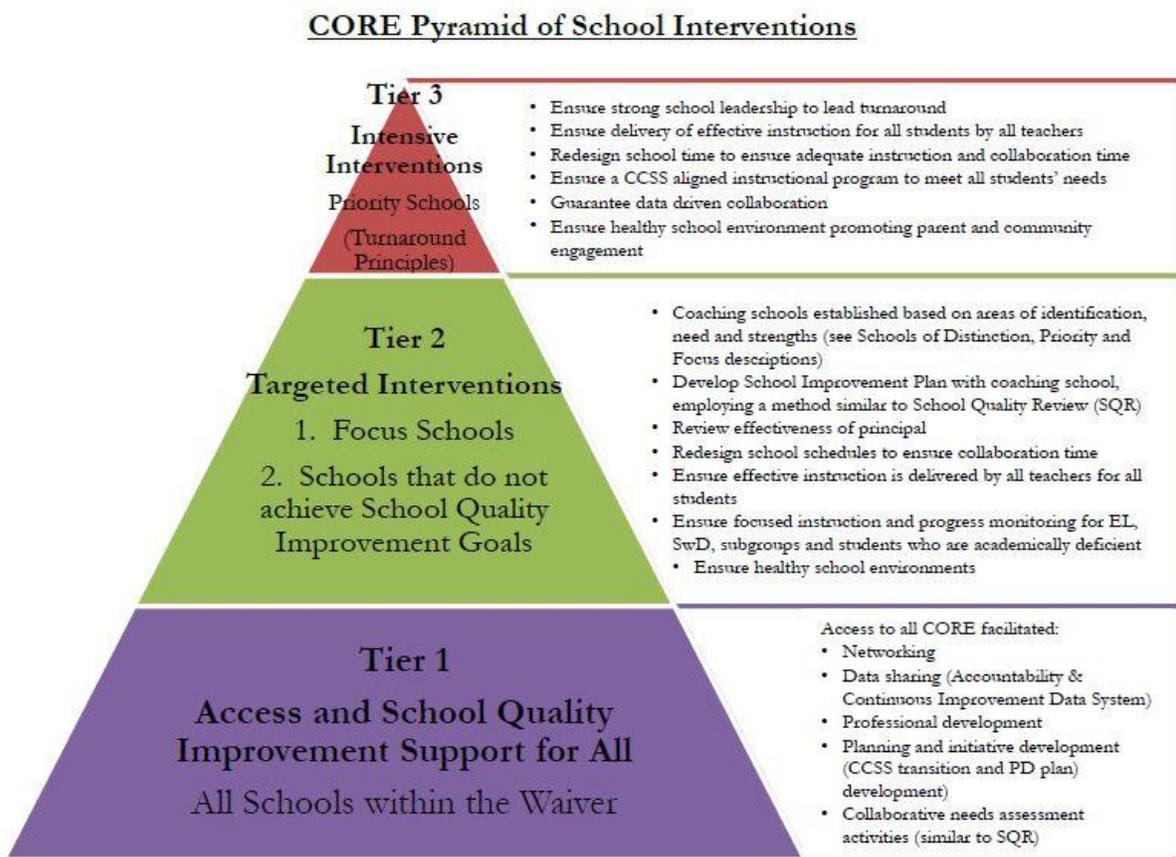
LEAs participating in the School Quality Improvement System expect success, but will be open and honest about failure in order to improve.

In the School Quality Improvement System, federally required “Annual Measurable Objectives” will be known as School Quality Improvement Goals. All schools will be held accountable for increasing graduation rates and for overall improvement in student achievement as well as improvement in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups through their total score on the School Quality Improvement Index. The consequence for a school or district falling short on their School Quality Improvement Goal is not a sanction but support and technical assistance offered by current partner school teachers and leaders that are seeing success with similar students measured by the School Quality Improvement System’s accountability metrics. This is a paradigm shift away from a

compliance-based accountability system to one driven by the collective and individual responsibility to adhere to this new set of principles, with shared responsibility and support building from educator to educator, from school to school, and from district to district.

The School Quality Improvement System will identify schools having great success with increasing student achievement while closing achievement gaps. Those schools will be paired with schools with schools that are not making their School Quality Improvement Goals. In addition, the five percent of schools that significantly struggle over multiple years will engage in much more intensive intervention strategies to speed turnaround process and ensure that students at that site do not languish.

School Quality Improvement System Pyramid of School Interventions



Educator effectiveness is the lynchpin of student success.

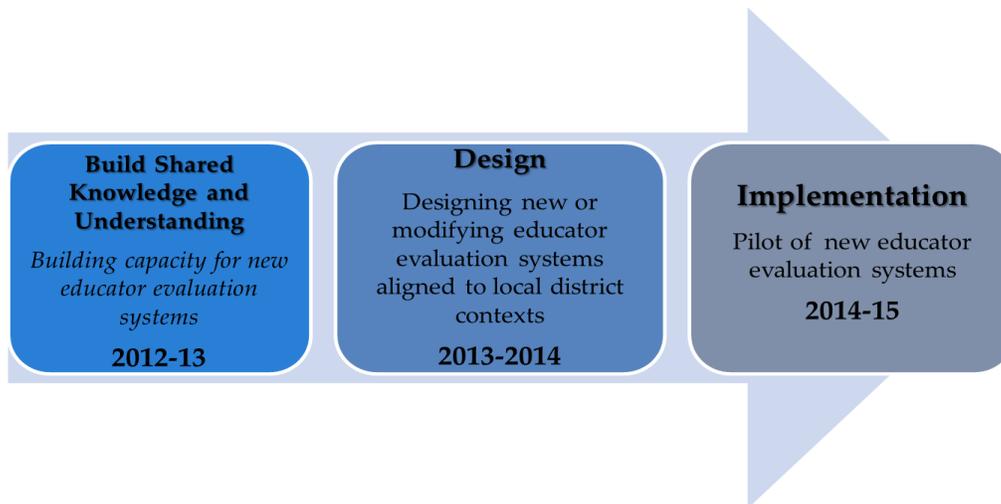
The School Quality Improvement System includes an expectation that every student deserves an effective teacher, and it is the collective responsibility of the school and district community to ensure that every teacher and principal is effective. Providing appropriate support and assistance for teachers is the overriding purpose of teacher effectiveness evaluations in the School Quality Improvement System, as recommended in the California Department of Education publication [*Greatness by Design*](#).

As State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson noted in his introduction to *Greatness by Design*, “The goal of teaching is learning, so there can be no honest assessment of a teacher’s performance without considering what students have learned. Teachers want honest feedback to understand their strengths and focus attention on areas they need to improve.”

And, he continued, “Teachers are expected to work hard every day to help students learn many more things than are evaluated on one test. Fairness demands they be evaluated on the sum of their efforts.”

Both of these sentiments are evidenced in the School Quality Improvement System as student achievement growth is included as one of multiple measures of evaluating educator effectiveness, but it does not require a one-size-fits-all mandate. The specific way that teacher and principal effectiveness is measured will be different in each LEA participating in the School Quality Improvement System; yet each system will be nested in high-leverage common indicators that exemplify effectiveness, such as instructional collaboration around student achievement. Teacher and principal effectiveness will be supported through the collective network of support fostered by the School Quality Improvement System. LEA’s participating in the School Quality Improvement System will collaboratively engage in a three-year teacher and principal effectiveness pilot and implementation timeline.

Educator Effectiveness Evaluation Implementation Timeline



When developing guidelines that incorporate student growth as a significant factor in teacher and principal evaluation systems participating LEAs may choose from two options:

Option 1 - Student growth integrated through a “trigger” system: Misalignment between teacher/administrator professional practice and student performance will initiate dialogue to identify why a discrepancy between scores exists, followed by district action in the interest of professional development of the teacher, which could include, among other options, an addendum to the review of professional practice or a one-year improvement plan.

Option 2 - Student growth as a defined percentage: Student growth will represent a minimum of 20% of teacher and principal evaluation calculations. Student growth will be calculated using a

growth model which will be developed by the CORE Board of Directors in the 2014-2015 school year. However, if an LEA currently uses or seeks to use another high quality student growth model, the LEA will have the opportunity to apply to the CORE Board for the option to use an alternative method, provided the LEA provides a strong research-based rationale.

A commitment to prepare all students for college and careers and eliminate disparity and disproportionality are the right drivers to create a system that truly supports the entire student community.

The districts participating in the School Quality Improvement System share a central belief – that a moral imperative to prepare all students for college and career, as opposed to responding to a narrow accountability model, will increase the quality of instruction for students and increase success in all three domains: academic, social/emotional, and school culture and climate. Once the School Quality Improvement System receives final federal approval, any California district or charter school will be welcome to participate in the School Quality Improvement System as long as they are willing to share their data and expertise, and are willing to take on the hard work of reorienting their systems around the right drivers.

