

Resource Allocation Reviews: A Critical Step to School Improvement

Use this guide to advocate for meaningful resource allocation reviews and for ensuring equitable allocation of resources to Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools and to underserved students within schools.

What do we know?

- **Resources matter.** Educational resources — people, time, and money — matter. Whether it's [funding](#), [quality teaching](#), instructional time, or [academic rigor](#), parents and teachers know — and research shows — that more is better.
- **“How much?” is only part of the story.** How well resources are used matters tremendously. See the evidence-based guide for additional support on how to identify and advocate for smart use of people, time, and money in schools.
- **Equal is not the same as equitable.** Our country was built on unfair [systems](#). Students of color and students from low-income families continue to face substantial systemic barriers today, and need additional supports and resources to overcome those barriers.
- **We shortchange our students from low-income families and students of color.** Across the country and in too many states and districts, the very students who need additional resources [actually receive fewer](#).
- **These patterns are not inevitable.** There are students of color and students from low-income families who are thriving all over the country in [schools that serve them well](#). Those [school systems](#) work to provide schools and students dealing with daily challenges of poverty and racism with the [additional](#) supports they need to succeed.
- **State, district, and school leaders each have a role to play.** State leaders can work to address resource inequities [between districts](#); district leaders can tackle resource inequities [between schools](#); and school leaders can impact resource inequities [between students in their own school](#).

What does the Every Student Succeeds Act require?

ESSA requires resource allocation reviews at every level that, if done well, can get to the bottom of the resource inequities that matter most for underserved students:

- **State Resource Allocation Reviews:** State education agencies must review resource allocations to support school improvement in districts with a significant number of schools identified for improvement (§1111(d)(3)(A)(ii)).
- **District Resource Allocation Reviews:** Districts with schools identified for comprehensive improvement must identify and address resource inequities within their district (§1111(d)(1)(B)(iv)).
- **School Resource Allocation Reviews:** Schools identified for improvement based on low performance for individual groups of students must identify and address resource inequities within their school (§1111(d)(2)(C)).

Reference guide roadmap

Will ESSA's required resource allocation reviews be meaningful and lead to real changes that ameliorate inequities in access to critical educational resources? Or will they be “check the box” compliance exercises? This guide can help advocates work toward the former.

► QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT *resource allocation reviews*

Advocates should ask these questions of all leaders who are required to conduct a resource allocation review under ESSA —state, district, and school leaders.

1. What educational resources will your resource allocation review include?

Look for:

A plan to review data on resources including **school funding** and other resources that matter for student learning, such as:

- Teaching quality
- School leadership quality
- Academic rigor
- Instructional time and attention
- Early learning and early interventions
- Whole child approaches
- Diverse and inclusive schools
- Family academic engagement

Watch out for:

- Plans to only review inequities in school funding
- Lack of data about access to critical resources — and no plan to get that data

2. What is your goal when allocating resources?

Look for:

An understanding that “equitable” is not the same as “equal”

- A goal that sufficient resources are allocated to meet the needs of each student and school
- A goal that schools and students with additional needs (e.g. CSI schools and underserved students in TSI schools) have additional resources relative to their peers

Watch out for:

- Goals to ensure “equal” resources for all
- Goals based on how much money is available from a particular source (e.g., Title I) instead of student need

3. What funding sources will be included in your resource allocation review?

Look for:

- A plan to include a review of the use of resources supported by all funding sources — federal, state, and local — including both general funds and funds dedicated to school improvement activities

Watch out for:

- Plans that only focus on school improvement funds, or federal funds

4. How will you ensure that your resource allocation review process is meaningful?

Look for:

A commitment to:

- Compare resources in identified schools or districts with a significant number of identified schools to resources in other schools or districts
- Dedicate sufficient resources to the process – including, where necessary, paying to collect new data or bring on additional analytic expertise
- Publish consistent data that tracks resource allocations over time so that stakeholders can monitor progress
- Ongoing opportunities for stakeholders to engage with the data and potential strategies to address inequities

Watch out for:

Plans that:

- Review resources only in schools identified for improvement or their districts (no comparison to other schools or districts)
- No commitment to discuss results publicly and update over time

5. How will you address inequities identified in your resource allocation review?

Look for:

Strategies that:

- Explicitly identify realistic new revenue or cost-saving strategies to free up money to invest in school improvement work.
- Address either the largest or most important inequities identified in the review — not just funding
- Include a specific implementation timeline

Watch out for:

Strategies that:

- Rely on wishful thinking or unlikely new revenue
- Refuse to commit to change without new funds
- Have no timeline

► QUESTIONS FOR STATE AND DISTRICT LEADERS ABOUT *resource allocation*

1. STATE LEADERS: How will you ensure that *district* and *school* resource allocation reviews are meaningful?

Under ESSA, states are required to approve and then monitor implementation of all school improvement plans, which must identify and address resource inequities. States must also provide technical assistance to districts serving a significant number of schools identified for support.

Look for:

State leaders to:

- Issue clear **guidance** to districts explaining how to conduct a high-quality resource allocation review and what those reviews must entail to be approvable (which should reflect the previous answers)
- Commit to meaningful **monitoring** by dedicating adequate time and money to the process and by publishing clear **protocols** that ask districts to produce annual data updating their resource allocation reviews and show significant progress on implementing strategies to eliminate inequities
- Provide **technical assistance** to districts including support in:
 - Data analysis. (Many school districts do not have the staff time or expertise to conduct rigorous analyses of which schools and students have access to which resources)
 - Identification and implementation of strategies for allocating resources to allow for increased investments in under-resourced schools
 - Communicating with all relevant stakeholders
- **Collect, publish, and then discuss** state- and district-wide resource allocation reviews at a state board of education meeting and with **state legislators**

Watch out for:

- Approval guidance or monitoring protocols requiring only that the district have a plan, not that the plan meet quality bars
- Ignoring resource allocation review requirements altogether in approval, monitoring, and technical assistance efforts related to school improvement
- No plan to share results of resource allocation reviews with legislators who control resource allocation at the district level

- 2. DISTRICT LEADERS: How will you ensure that *school* resource allocation reviews are meaningful?** Under ESSA, districts are required to approve and then monitor implementation of all school-level improvement plans. The plans for schools identified for improvement based on low performance for individual groups of students must identify and address resource inequities within their school.

Look for:

Much like state leaders, district leaders should:

- Issue clear **guidance** to school leaders in schools identified for improvement based on low performance for individual groups of students about how to conduct a high-quality review and what the reviews must entail (including school-specific strategies to address inequities)
- Commit to meaningful **monitoring** by dedicating adequate time and money to the monitoring process and by publishing clear **protocols** that ask schools to show significant progress on implementing school specific strategies to eliminate identified inequities
- Provide **technical assistance** for leaders of these schools including support in:
 - Data analysis. (Principals often do not have the time, data, or expertise to conduct rigorous analyses of which students have access to which resources within their schools)
 - Selection and implementation of strategies to address identified inequities, e.g., ensuring that underserved students are not being taught by novice teachers or implementing team teaching model pairing bilingual teachers with content teachers to better address needs of English learners
 - Communicating about strategic resource (re)allocation decisions with teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders.
- **Collect, publish, and then discuss** school resource allocation reviews at school board meetings.

Watch out for:

- No plans to support principals in data analysis or strategic change
- Guidance that encourages or allows schools to adopt generic, one-size-fits-all solutions. Improvement strategies must be tailored to the specific needs of the school and aligned with the school culture and priorities

States and districts that are rising to the challenge on resource equity

In [New Jersey](#), the highest poverty districts spend 18 percent more per student than the lowest poverty districts. The state counteracts wide disparities in local funding across the state by sending five times as much funding to its highest-poverty districts as its lowest-poverty districts. Similarly, the districts with the most students of color in New Jersey spend 16 percent more per student than districts with the fewest.

In [Boston](#), district leaders have intentionally provided more funding to highest-need schools. They analyze student need at each school, accounting for factors such as poverty, English learner status, and special education services, and allocate funding accordingly.

And in [Steubenville](#), a high-poverty district in Ohio, third through eighth grade students are performing more than a full grade level above the national average. District and school leaders say that their focus on increasing academic rigor for all students — especially their highest need students — by using an evidence-based improvement program called [Success For All](#) has made a huge difference.

A GOOD RESOURCE ALLOCATION REVIEW ASKS & ANSWERS:

Are high need districts, schools, and students getting more or less of critical educational resources when compared to their peers?

Look for data comparing access to:

- School funding
- Teaching Quality
- School Leadership quality
- Academic Rigor
- Instructional Time & Attention
- Early Learning & Early Interventions
- Whole Child Approaches
- Diverse & Inclusive Schools
- Family Academic Engagement

Additional resources

[What Is Resource Equity?](#) (Education Resource Strategies): This resource provides more detail on each of the nine critical resources referenced in the first question in this guide. It explains how each resource links to student outcomes; identifies typical sources of inequities within systems; shares ways that schools and systems have organized resources to create greater equity; and provides sample diagnostic questions to help systems self-assess.

[Funding Gaps 2018](#) (The Education Trust): This report identifies inequities in state and local funding for districts serving high concentrations of students from low-income families and students of color, both nationally and within states.

[Breaking the Link](#) (Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools): This shows an example of how this district in North Carolina is analyzing resource allocation and student outcome data to drive more equitable policy and practice.

[Budget Hold Em](#) (Education Resource Strategies): This is an online game in which you can learn more about the tradeoffs district leaders make in trying to improve student outcomes while also balancing their budgets. This resource helps us all to remember that resource allocation is all about tradeoffs.