



State Policy and Practice Portrait

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Aligning Efforts: Reaching Coherence Through Strategic Collaboration

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The Priority

School reform initiatives are commonplace in today's schools. Ask any teacher or leader. A surplus of reform initiatives—all purporting to enhance teacher and leader capacity for improved student performance—has left the field overwhelmed with seemingly competing priorities. For teachers and school leaders, the wide range of reform initiatives can create confusion regarding what to prioritize and can lead to a lack of clarity concerning expectations of practice. In addition, school reforms such as these often result in competing demands and the expenditure of considerable effort by the states that oversee their implementation and the districts that are charged with their ongoing management, leaving the initiatives disconnected and lost in the black hole of the tried and forgotten. The significant challenge facing PK–12 education, then, is to create better alignment among initiatives so that they are mutually supportive and result in stronger outcomes for all students.

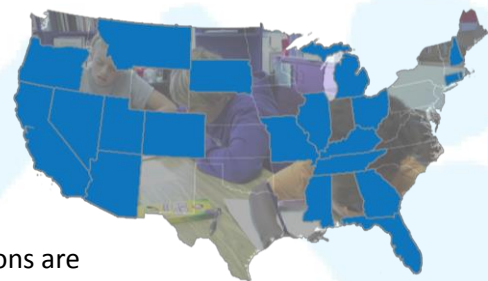
What is Alignment?

Simply put, *alignment* equates to *agreement* or linkage. We often discuss alignment in terms of broad umbrellas that incorporate multiple initiatives with common goals and outcomes. In this context, alignment may fall short of the desired level of shared engagement and accountability across partners and rarely leads to the strategic, deliberate deployment of effort and resources necessary to prevent duplication and conflicting priorities.

When alignment is intentional and strategic, however, it enables new and existing initiatives to become mutually supportive. This degree of alignment is difficult to achieve and sustain because it requires continual contact within and across teams; consistent communication regarding expectations; and, most important, association and connection, so that all parties have a shared understanding of expectations and are equally invested in and committed to success. Strategic alignment is possible when expectations are clearly articulated and manifested through:

- Shared data
- Shared vision
- Shared ownership

CEEDAR Intensive States



Advancing Alignment Through CEEDAR

The Center for Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (the CEEDAR Center) partners intensively with 20 states to provide support and alignment opportunities for stakeholders at various levels. Through ongoing technical assistance and collaboration, state teams comprised of departments of education, educator preparation programs (EPPs), and local district stakeholders have participated in alignment-focused activities designed to serve as foundational exercises to ensure that CEEDAR state goals, objectives, and activities align and support existing state initiatives. In this context, CEEDAR technical assistance offers states an established process for building increased coherence, invested partnerships, and shared accountability, with educator preparation and support serving as the primary anchors of alignment. This collaborative process fully engages partners and identifies roles, responsibilities, and activities that mutually support the shared vision. In many cases, the CEEDAR process has greatly increased trust, teamwork, and coordination among partners (see comments by Joe Lubig, Northern Michigan University). These activities have facilitated stronger alignment among initiatives and have enhanced the potential for scalability and sustainability beyond CEEDAR support and funding.



[Joe Lubig, Northern Michigan University](#)

CEEDAR’s alignment facilitation activities have been successful precursors to the development by state teams of shared goals and objectives that both align and support other state strategic plans, specifically State Equity Plans and State Systemic Improvement Plans (SSIPs). Table 1 (below) provides an overview in where CEEDAR efforts have and can support other state initiatives.

Table 1. CEEDAR’s Connection to State Plans

State Plans	Plan Strategies	Connection to CEEDAR State Plans
State Equity Plans States must include “steps that [they] will take to ensure that poor and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers.”	Improve preparation programs and certification and licensure standards as a mechanism to both recruit and retain effective teachers.	A number of states have identified teacher shortages as primary barriers to ensuring that all students have equitable access to effective teachers. Not surprisingly, shortages of special education teachers emerge as common issues. CEEDAR’s mission—to establish collaborative partnerships with EPPs to improve policies and practices regarding teacher and leader preparation and support—directly aligns with state equity plan goals and strategies to improve teacher preparation. States such as Montana, New Hampshire, and South Dakota have integrated CEEDAR efforts within state equity plans. In addition, CEEDAR state partnerships with EPPs create effective venues to address immediate school needs. For example, San Francisco State University, a CEEDAR partner, has collaborated with San Francisco Unified School District to develop an integrated Clear Credential Program (process for completing renewal requirements associated with preliminary credentialing) for general and special educators. Moreover, several state teams have engaged in certification and licensure standard revisions in order to improve the preparation of all educators in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.
State Systemic Improvement Plans SSIPs are coordinated plans that states develop as part of a federal requirement for	Strengthen educator capacity to implement evidence-based instructional practices.	A key element of SSIPs is the establishment of a State Identified Measureable Result (SIMR), including baselines, benchmarks, and targeted areas of need (e.g., literacy, mathematics, graduation rates). States are expected to support the implementation of evidence-based practices within local districts as mechanisms to advance progress toward the achievement of their SIMRs. Similarly, CEEDAR establishes a strong evidence-base in the tools and resources it offers to support and strengthen educator preparation programs. States such as Arizona, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Montana, and Ohio have

State Plans	Plan Strategies	Connection to CEEDAR State Plans
states to address specific needs of students with disabilities.		integrated CEEDAR efforts within SSIPs. CEEDAR has developed Innovation Configurations (ICs) that synthesize research and identify essential components of evidence-based practices (EBPs). CEEDAR ICs incorporate Course Enhancement Modules that are designed to support both EPP faculty and professional development providers in strengthening preparation and professional learning for teachers. These tools have been cited by SSIPs to identify EBPs and to inform and support high-quality professional learning efforts in pilot districts.

CEEDAR State Policy and Practice Highlight

The State of Utah, with CEEDAR Center support, established a state leadership team (SLT) including representatives from the state office of education, institutions of higher education, and local practitioners. At the time of initial SLT collaboration, Utah was responding to and implementing multiple initiatives and working to develop several state plans (e.g., the state’s SSIP and Equity Plan). As part of CEEDAR’s technical assistance, and with leadership support from the Utah State Office of Education, the SLT completed a series of facilitated activities to identify existing initiatives and commonalities across proposed goals and outcomes. These activities were designed to minimize redundancies and align CEEDAR efforts to support broader state initiatives. This resulted, in turn, in the identification of common needs and proposed goals and activities across state initiatives as follows (see also Table 2 below):

- Low mathematics achievement across student populations
- Inexperienced teachers working with high-needs students
- Low educator expectations relative to struggling learners

Featured State: Utah

Visit the CEEDAR webinar: [Keeping Our Promise: How the CEEDAR Center is Partnering with States to Improve Professional Learning Systems](#) and learn how Utah is working to advance initiative alignment through CEEDAR.

Table 2. Utah Alignment

	Shared Data: Root Causes	Shared Vision: Common Outcomes	Shared Ownership: CEEDAR Blueprint
SSIP	Attitudes and beliefs: Students with disabilities will not be able to demonstrate mathematics achievement.	Positively influence attitudes and beliefs: All students can achieve to high standards.	Administrators and teachers will hold high expectations for each and every student, including students with disabilities, as evidenced by applying instructional practices that are aligned with the <i>Utah Effective Teaching Standards</i> and by collaborating across disciplines to ensure student mastery of grade-appropriate Core mathematics standards.
Equity Plan	Need to support educators’ understanding of how to address the diverse needs of learners by increasing expectations based on core standards.		
SSIP	Teachers lack understanding of mathematics standards and effective instruction.	Improve educator knowledge and skills.	Increase the ability of all teachers and teacher candidates to create engaging opportunities for each learner through mathematical content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge of mathematical content, effective instruction, formative assessment, and accountability for student
Equity Plan	Inadequate professional learning supports and access to preparation programs by geographic location		

	Shared Data: Root Causes	Shared Vision: Common Outcomes	Shared Ownership: CEEDAR Blueprint
			learning.
SSIP	Decreased general education instructional supports and interventions in secondary settings when mathematics concepts become more rigorous and abstract.	Prepare and retain teachers and leaders who can effectively meet the needs of diverse learners.	Prepare all educators to work within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework (i.e., universal screening, tiered instruction driven by data-based decision making around critical components of learning, and progress monitoring) that supports students' receipt of effective instruction and instructional supports and that furthers mathematical achievement at the school level.
Equity Plan	Lack of preparation that addresses the changing landscape of education and the diverse range of pedagogical skills required.		

Moving Forward: Leveraging the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to Create and Sustain Alignment

Alignment does not merely happen; it is created through purposeful action. Collaboration across departments and initiatives at the federal, state, and local levels can be facilitated through:

- **Common Language and Expectations:** All stakeholders at all levels need to experience the connections among initiatives through the use of common language and expectations. ESSA provides an opportunity to align federal requirements through the development and implementation of a consolidated state plan that can advance common goals and shared accountability.
- **Blending and Braiding.** Blending and braiding of funding streams across initiatives advances alignment through the sharing of resources to achieve common program improvements (e.g., utilizing funds from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Title I to address significant behavior challenges through an MTSS framework; leveraging Title II-A and CEEDAR funds to strengthen educators' capacity to operate effectively within an MTSS system).
- **Strong Leadership.** Leaders need to establish infrastructures that advance, recognize, and reward collaborative systems. Without such structures, the demands of excessive meetings and time spent assisting others can lead to increased burnout, disengagement, and lower productivity.

Alignment Opportunity Within the Every Student Succeeds Act: Consolidated State Plans

Beginning in the 2017–18 school year, ESSA calls for consolidated state plans that are coordinated with other programs; e.g., the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (20 U.S.C. 701 et seq.), the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.), and other legislation.

How can the consolidated plan be leveraged to create and sustain improved alignment?

Questions about CEEDAR alignment efforts? Please contact the CEEDAR Center at www.ceedar.org.

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