

EXPLORATION SUPPORTS



COLORADO
Department of Education

EASI Route: Exploration Supports

Introduction

The Exploration route of the Empowering Action for School Improvement (EASI) application is focused on identifying needs and exploring options through external diagnostic reviews, stakeholder engagement, and effective improvement planning. The components of the Exploration route assist LEAs in identifying areas of strength and need (External Diagnostic Review), engaging a variety of stakeholders in improvement conversations (Stakeholder Engagement), and building a plan centered around those prioritized needs (Improvement Planning). The EASI application also offers the opportunity for LEAs/schools to focus their Exploration work on a particular population of students, content areas, or school models (i.e., English Learners, AECs/Online schools, or Early Literacy).

The Exploration route differs from the other routes within EASI. Reviewers assess readiness and fit, rather than awarding points through a competitive grants process. If the collective amount of requests exceeds availability of funds, then a prioritization process is used. The duration of the awards is typically shorter than the other EASI routes and spans 18 months (e.g., January 2022 - June 2023). Early Implementation funds may be available for initial implementation of activities and strategies associated with the review and planning process.

The components of the Exploration route are designed to work together to support the creation of a thorough improvement plan. A Diagnostic Review (either holistic or specialized) informs a rigorous process of Improvement Planning. The Improvement Plan also draws on initial Stakeholder Engagement work and incorporates future stakeholder input as a part of the planning process. Note that applying for subsequent implementation activities through EASI will require evidence of an external diagnostic review, meaningful community engagement and a well-developed improvement plan. Applicants are encouraged to apply for the full Exploration route (Diagnostic Review, Stakeholder Engagement, **and** Improvement Planning) to ensure a thorough exploration process. However, as EASI is a needs-based process, LEAs who have previously engaged providers for Diagnostic Reviews or Stakeholder Engagement work should only opt schools into the services that are needed. The diagram below outlines the four components of the Exploration route. *Because the different elements of the Exploration route work so closely together, LEAs are encouraged to select the same provider for the external diagnostic review, stakeholder engagement and improvement planning work – or at least negotiate a way for the different providers to align their work.*

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Exploration Supports



External Diagnostic Reviews

Based upon years of best practice, the department has identified external diagnostic reviews as an important component in helping a school prepare for rapid, effective school improvement work. The types of reviews have expanded within the last few years to include the traditional holistic diagnostic review that looks at the comprehensive school system, as well as specialized reviews for schools that want a more detailed look at programming for English Language (EL) students, Alternative Education Campuses and Online Schools, or Early Literacy (K-3).

Holistic Diagnostic Review. The Holistic Diagnostic Review is ideal for schools that would benefit from an external eye taking a comprehensive look at the school system to identify areas for improvement. LEAs are awarded funds on behalf of their schools to work with a CDE-approved and -trained partner to conduct a school-based diagnostic review. External partners will provide the following services:

1. Conduct a comprehensive, evidence-based review and corresponding report organized by the [Colorado Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement](#) detailing how the school's infrastructure supports culture and climate shift, instructional transformation, talent management and leadership for rapid improvement.
2. Facilitate a staff debrief, including key findings from the review, high-level observations, opportunities for improvement, and a timeline for next steps for turnaround work.

Currently, the holistic review is only available at the school level. CDE is working to update district level standards for district level reviews in the future. Note that the external partner must be selected prior to submission and a scope of work must be uploaded to the application. In January, CDE will provide training to selected partners to ensure they understand the intent of the grant and reporting expectations.

[View a list of preferred service providers approved and trained by CDE.](#)

Alternative Education Campus (AEC) and Online Review. Participating AECs and online schools work with CDE staff to conduct a school-based diagnostic review, discuss recommendations and major areas to build on, engage stakeholders in planning efforts, and visit other participating schools. The Diagnostic reviews result in a formal report, recommended improvement actions, and other partner sites for visits. The facilitated improvement planning process is designed to assist the school in designing implementation plans and refining the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) to incorporate priorities from the review.

English Language Development Program Review. The specialized review of English language development (ELD) program(s) is available at both the school and district levels. The results and recommendations will provide a framework to strengthen overall ELD programming and systems, including the unique academic, linguistic, and social-emotional needs of English learners. The review begins with a one-day visit. A CDE representative will guide the local team using the ELD Program Review Rubric and will assist in identifying priorities, action steps and available resources.

District Early Literacy Instructional Program Review. An opportunity for district leaders and staff to use the CDE literacy instructional program review process to review their current K-3 literacy instructional programs (core, supplemental, and/or intervention). This process assists participants in determining program alignment with scientifically and evidence-based reading research and instruction. As part of this support, a CDE literacy consultant will guide participants through the process of evaluating an instructional program using the 2020 CDE Literacy Instructional Program Rubric(s).

Stakeholder Engagement

State and federal expectations highlight the importance of stakeholder engagement (e.g., building leadership, teachers, families, community members, local board members) throughout the school improvement process. Funding for this opportunity may be used for (1) contracting with a CDE-approved provider that has knowledge of working with the selected stakeholders and background knowledge of the content area, and (2) costs associated with the stakeholder engagement proposed activities (e.g., substitutes, stipends, copying, translation services, child care, food for community events, travel). The Family-School-Community Partnerships (FSCP) office at CDE is available to provide technical support related to evidence-based stakeholder engagement strategies. It is recommended that a team of diverse stakeholders implement high-impact strategies that are aligned to the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships and Colorado's FSCP Framework. Additional resources are available at www.cde.state.co.us/uip/familyengagement.

Improvement Planning

All schools and districts are expected to have a coherent plan that meaningfully involves stakeholders, builds upon a thorough data analysis and needs assessment, and proposes evidence-based strategies that address the school's most pressing issues. The improvement planning component is intended to build upon the external diagnostic review and stakeholder engagement work. Available supports include

- Assistance on data gathering and organizing (pre-planning for data analysis)
- Review of student performance data
- Identification of trends and performance challenges
- Prioritization of performance challenges
- Root cause analysis (including integration of the external review)
- Target setting
- Action planning
- Progress monitoring

Grantees may select an external partner or CDE to facilitate the planning process. Typically, three to five days of onsite work is needed, as well as time to share feedback on the written plan. The facilitator **will not** write the plan for the school, but will provide feedback, ultimately assisting the school in completing the plan and advising on how to keep the plan updated as the school progresses in its improvement efforts. If working with an external partner, this must be done prior to submitting the application. The partner must participate in an annual, mandatory training on the planning process that includes recent updates on federal and state requirements.

Early Implementation

For schools that complete the Exploration route and develop a strong improvement plan, funds may be available for the early stages of implementation for this plan. Before accessing these funds, if they are awarded, schools must

1. update their Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) based on an improvement plan that draws on the results of a diagnostic review and incorporates stakeholder input, AND
2. submit a revised budget detailing the proposed use of implementation funds on evidence-based strategies incorporated into the updated UIP.

Eligible Applicants and Prioritization

Eligibility. Eligible applicants are LEAs that have schools that are:

- Identified for support and improvement under ESSA (i.e., Comprehensive, Targeted, Additional Targeted), OR
- Have a Priority Improvement or Turnaround plan (includes Watch) type on the most recent School Performance Framework

Prioritization. See individual program information sheets.

Available Funds

Award amounts depend on the services that the LEA selects for eligible schools. LEAs may apply for \$42,000 to \$75,000 per eligible school for the full Exploration route. Amounts for individual services are listed in the table below.

Exploration Activity	Request Amount	Allowable Use of Funds
Diagnostic Reviews (Only one type of diagnostic review service may be requested.)		
Holistic	\$25,000 per school	Funding from this opportunity may be used for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> contracting with a trained external diagnostic review provider costs related to the external review (e.g., external partner, stipends, subs)
AEC and Online Review	\$10,000 per school	CDE provides services. Funding from this opportunity may be used for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> costs related to the review (e.g., stipends, subs) <i>See individual program information sheets for more information.</i>
ELD Review (School or District Level)	\$10,000 per school/district	CDE provides services. Funding from this opportunity may be used for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> costs related to the review (e.g., stipends, subs) <i>See individual program information sheets for more information.</i>
Focused Review on Early Literacy (District Level)	\$10,000 per school	CDE provides services. <i>See individual program information sheets for more information.</i>
Stakeholder Engagement		
External Provider	\$10,000 per school/district	Funding from this opportunity may be used <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to contract with a trained external diagnostic review provider for other expenses to support process (e.g., childcare, translation services) at school or district levels
Improvement Planning (Only one type of improvement planning service may be requested.)		
Planning Partner	Up to \$2,000 to partner with CDE; Up to \$25,000 for external partner per school	Funding from this opportunity may be used for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to contract with a trained external planning partner costs for staff to coordinate efforts to implement an improvement plan other expenses to support process (e.g., stipends, substitutes)
Initial Implementation		
Early Implementation	\$20,000 per school/district	Upon completion of other EASI Exploration work, the school may begin some early implementation of strategies and activities identified during the diagnostic and improvement planning work. Funding from this opportunity may be used for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> costs for school leadership to attend related professional learning staff stipends and/or substitute pay to create time for job-embedded learning opportunities and/or time for collaboration leadership/teacher development

Funds from this opportunity must be used to **supplement and not supplant** any federal, state, and local funds currently being used to provide activities. There will be no carryover of funds. Unobligated funds at the end of the awarded timeframe will be returned to the CDE.



Important Program Dates

Exploration activities may span January 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023.

January	Award notifications
February – April	Complete external Diagnostic Review
February – August	Conduct Stakeholder Engagement work (in both review and planning phases)
May – August	Conduct Improvement Planning and goal setting
September – June (following year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon completion of external diagnostic review, stakeholder engagement, and improvement planning work, the school may begin some early implementation of strategies and activities identified during the diagnostic and improvement planning work. • Consider using information gathered during the Diagnostic Review and Planning to apply for additional EASI funds in the next grant round. Note that there is no guarantee of additional funds.

Evaluation and Reporting

Schools receiving funds under this grant opportunity are required to:

- Incorporate the findings of the review in the school's UIP during the school year to reflect the exploration work (i.e., external review, parent and community engagement, improvement planning).
- *[Schools identified for support and improvement through ESSA (i.e., CS, TS, and additional TS schools)]* Use the exploration results to inform their improvement plan that may be included in their UIP.
- Submit the Annual Financial Report (AFR) to CDE.

For the external partners on the Holistic Diagnostic Reviews, CDE-trained providers are required to submit the final report to grantee and to CDE for review within 30 days of the review date. Note that the final report is paid for with public funds and must be shared with the public, if requested.

Program Assurances

See individual information sheets for specific program assurances. Otherwise, there are no additional assurances for this route beyond the general assurances in the EASI application.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Colorado Department of Education's EASI Website

www.cde.state.co.us/fedprograms/easiapplication