

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 of applications for the EASI Exploration Route assess readiness and fit for this set of supports, 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 of the award year through June of the following year). 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 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. The Exploration Route has been designed as a cohesive bundle (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.*

For More Information, Contact:

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EXPLORATION SUPPORTS

Diagnostic Review
Holistic - AEC / Online - Language Learner

**Improvement
Planning**

Stakeholder Engagement
Family - School - Community

**Early
Implementation**

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). The Exploration Route also offers district-level services for Specialized Reviews or Strategic Planning.

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.

For a list of preferred service providers approved by the CDE, visit [CDE's Advisory List of Providers](#).

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. See the [Diagnostic Review and Planning for AECs and Online Schools fact sheet](#) for more information.

Language Learner Partnership (formerly *English Language Development Program Review*). The Language Learner Partnership offers targeted services for districts and schools seeking to improve their English language development instruction. It includes a CDE-led diagnostic review focused on identifying strengths and areas for improvement in systems, supports, and opportunities for English Learners (ELs)/Multilingual Learners (MLs). The review is followed by collaborative action planning and supports and by quarterly progress monitoring and short-cycle planning support. See the Language Learner Partnership fact sheet (PDF) for more information.

District Strategic Planning. This opportunity provides funding to districts who are seeking to strengthen district systems that are necessary to support sustainable school improvement in one or more identified schools. These district systems may include Talent Management, Instructional Infrastructure, Turnaround Leadership development, and/or Culture and Climate. Grantees will partner with an approved external provider to conduct a systems review, stakeholder engagement activities, and prioritization and improvement planning. See the District Strategic Planning fact sheet (PDF) for more information.

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 through CDE's [Office of Family, School and Community Partnerships](#) page.

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 On Watch) type on the most recent School Performance Framework

Prioritization. See individual program information sheets.

Available Funds and Allowable Use of Funds

The duration of the services within the Exploration route is eighteen months (January of the award year through June of the following year). Award amounts depend on the services that the LEA selects for eligible schools. Grantees will receive funds according to the schedule of awards and recommended allocations in the tables below. Note that an LEA/school may use the information obtained through the review and improvement planning process to develop an application for additional funds in the District Design and Led route in a subsequent EASI application.

	Total Award Amount	Recommended Funds Allocations			
		Review	Stakeholder Engagement	Improvement Planning	Early Implementation
School-level award with Holistic Review and Improvement Planning (External Provider)	\$80,000	\$25,000	\$10,000	\$25,000	\$20,000
School-level award with Specialized Review and Improvement Planning (CDE provides services)	\$42,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$2,000	\$20,000
District Strategic Planning (External Provider)	\$80,000 - \$150,000	Award amounts will vary based on district size, identification status, and number of schools identified for improvement. Reach out to Sam Schneider, Schneider_S@cde.state.co.us or Lindsay Cox Cox_L@cde.state.co.us with any questions.			
District-level award with Specialized Review (CDE provides services)	\$42,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$2,000	\$20,000

Funding for this opportunity should be used for:

- Costs associated with hiring an approved external provider to facilitate reviews and/or planning activities outlined above.
- Costs associated with stakeholder engagement (stipends, translation, childcare, etc.)
- Costs associated with development of an improvement plan (or strategic plan, at the district level)
- Costs associated with early implementation of the plan activities (e.g., leadership or teacher development, stipends to support job-embedded training or teacher collaboration, etc.).
- Other expenses to support process (e.g., stipends, substitutes, etc.)

Funds from this opportunity must be used to **supplement and not supplant** any federal, state, and local funds currently being used to provide activities. Each year, funds should be obligated by June 30 and schools are able to request reimbursement on federal funds through September 30. A district/school may carry funds forward within the grant duration years. However, this amount should be reasonable and based on the school's grant and/or improvement plan and approval must be obtained. Note: At the end of participation in the grant period, any non-requested federal funds will be rescinded by CDE and any unspent state funds should be returned to CDE.

Important Program Dates

Exploration activities may span January 1 of the award year through June 30 of the following year.

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