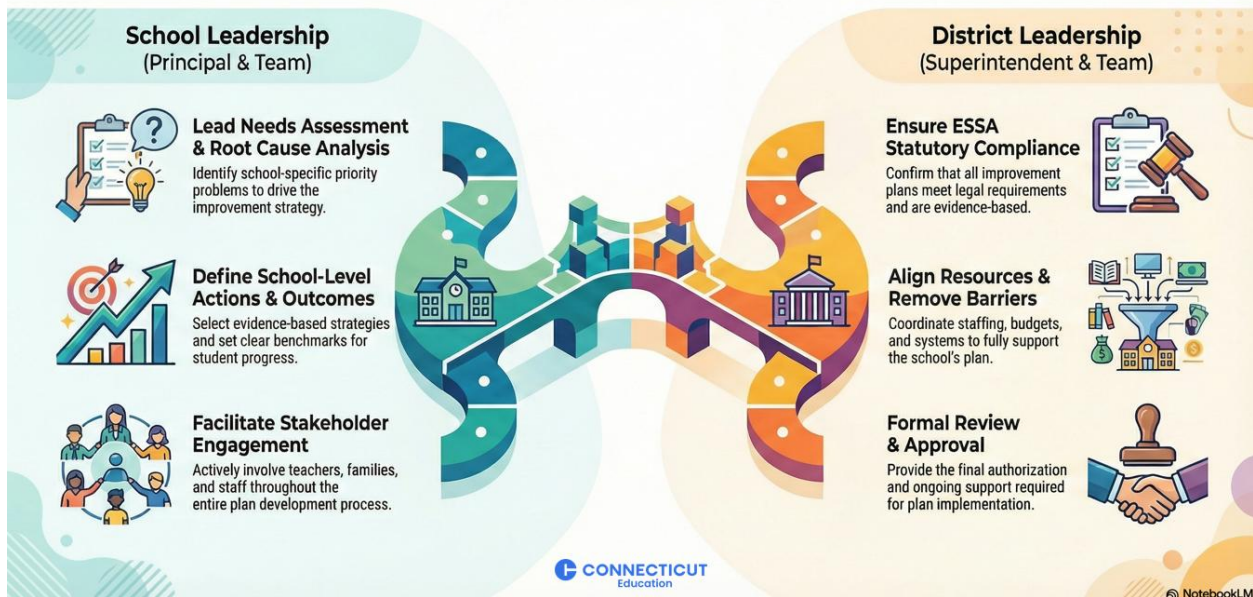# Shared Leadership in School Improvement
Roles, Responsibilities, and Accountability

School and district leadership roles differ in scope and focus throughout the school improvement process. School-level teams lead work grounded in local context and day-to-day implementation, while district leadership provides systemwide alignment, support, and compliance. Effective school improvement under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) depends on this collaborative leadership across levels of the system. While responsibilities are distinct, progress relies on how these roles connect and reinforce one another. School leadership drives the identification of needs and the design of school-level actions, while district leadership ensures alignment, resources, and statutory compliance. Together, these roles form an interconnected system that supports high-quality planning, implementation, and sustained improvement.

Phase I: Plan Development

Phase I centers on the intentional design of the school improvement plan. For Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) and Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) schools, this phase requires deep analysis of student outcomes, instructional practice, and school conditions to identify priority needs and select evidence-based strategies. School leaders drive the development of the plan to ensure relevance and ownership, while district leaders provide oversight, alignment, and support to ensure the plan is feasible, compliant, and positioned for success.

School Leadership	District Leadership
The principal and the school team focus on the ground-level development and execution of the improvement plan. Their primary responsibilities include: **Conducting Analysis**: Leading the comprehensive needs assessment and root cause analysis to pinpoint specific issues within the building. **Problem Identification**: Identifying school-specific priority problems that need to be addressed. **Strategy Selection**: Choosing evidence-based strategies that are directly responsive to the needs of their specific student population. **Defining Metrics**: Establishing the school-level actions, benchmarks, and outcomes that will measure progress. **Stakeholder Engagement**: Actively involving teachers, families, and staff in the development of the plan.	The superintendent and the district team provide system-level oversight and resource alignment. Their primary responsibilities include: **Ensuring Compliance**: Verifying that the improvement plan meets all ESSA statutory requirements. **Quality Control**: Confirming that the selected strategies are coherent and truly evidence-based. **Resource Management**: Aligning budgets, staffing, and resources to ensure the school has what it needs to execute the plan. **Removing Obstacles**: Identifying and removing system-level barriers that might hinder the school's progress. **Formal Approval**: Reviewing, approving, and providing formal support for the plan.

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Phase II: Plan Implementation

Phase II translates the improvement plan into action. For CSI and TSI schools, this phase centers on consistent implementation of evidence-based strategies and the use of data to monitor progress. School leaders guide implementation at the ground level, while district leaders align systems, sustain resources, and ensure that implementation efforts remain focused and supported over time.

School Leadership	District Leadership
The principal and school team focus on day-to-day execution and continuous improvement. Their primary responsibilities include: **Leading Implementation**: Overseeing the daily execution of the approved improvement plan across classrooms and schoolwide systems. **Monitoring Progress**: Using short-cycle and outcome data to track implementation fidelity and student impact. **Adjusting Practice**: Making timely adjustments to instructional and schoolwide strategies based on evidence of effectiveness. **Supporting Staff**: Providing coaching, feedback, and support to ensure staff can implement strategies as intended. **Communicating Challenges**: Identifying implementation barriers and communicating needs or concerns to district leadership. **Documenting Evidence**: Maintaining documentation of implementation, progress, and outcomes to support monitoring and review.	The superintendent and the district team focus on enabling conditions, coherence, and sustainability. Their primary responsibilities include: **Monitoring Implementation**: Reviewing implementation for fidelity and impact, with attention to both progress and challenges. **Providing Targeted Support**: Offering technical assistance, professional learning, or staffing adjustments when implementation stalls. **Protecting Focus**: Ensuring district initiatives, expectations, and timelines do not undermine the school's improvement priorities. **Sustaining Resources**: Maintaining aligned funding, staffing, and operational supports over time. **Removing System Barriers**: Addressing policy, procedural, or cross-departmental obstacles affecting implementation. **Using Monitoring to Strengthen Practice**: Leveraging monitoring findings to refine supports while preserving school-level ownership of the work.

Phase III: Continuous Improvement and Accountability (CSI/TSI)

For CSI and TSI schools, continuous improvement is an ongoing, evidence-driven process. Schools are responsible for evaluating the impact of strategies and adjusting practice, while districts are responsible for monitoring progress, refining supports, and escalating intervention when necessary. Accountability is shared and sustained through regular review, alignment, and action.

School Leadership	District Leadership
The principal and school team focus on evaluating impact and refining practice. Their primary responsibilities include: **Analyzing Impact**: Using multiple data sources (student outcomes, implementation data, formative measures) to determine whether strategies are producing the intended results. **Adjusting Strategies**: Refining or discontinuing strategies based on evidence of effectiveness, not intent or effort. **Sustaining Effective Practices**: Identifying successful practices and institutionalizing them within school systems and routines. **Documenting Progress**: Maintaining clear documentation of implementation, outcomes, and adjustments to support ongoing review. **Leading Reflection**: Engaging staff in structured reflection on progress, challenges, and next steps.	The superintendent and the district team focus on oversight, coherence, and escalation. Their primary responsibilities include: **Reviewing Evidence:** Analyzing monitoring findings and outcome data to assess overall progress toward CSI/TSI goals. **Refining Supports:** Adjusting district-level supports, technical assistance, or professional learning based on school needs and evidence. **Ensuring Coherence:** Maintaining alignment across departments, initiatives, and resources to support sustained improvement. **Escalating Support:** Increasing intensity of support or intervention when progress stalls or outcomes do not improve. **Maintaining Accountability:** Holding the school accountable for results while reinforcing school-level ownership of improvement work.

Sustained improvement under ESSA depends not only on a well-written plan but also on clear leadership roles, aligned systems, and shared accountability over time. When schools lead implementation and districts ensure alignment and support, improvement efforts are more likely to result in sustained impact. Schools and districts are encouraged to use this guide as a shared reference point to align efforts, monitor progress, and strengthen collaboration across each phase of the improvement process.

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