

# Empowering Action for School Improvement (EASI)

## Exploration Supports

EASI Route: Exploration Supports


**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

### INTRODUCTION

The Exploration route of the Empowering Action for School Improvement (EASI) application is focused on identifying needs and exploring options through external reviews, stakeholder engagement, and effective planning. There are several offerings to assist LEAs identifying areas of strength and need (External Review), building a plan centered around those prioritized needs (Improvement Planning) as well as how to engage a variety of stakeholders in improvement conversations (Stakeholder Engagement). New to the 2018-2019 EASI application, the opportunity for LEAs/schools to explore their school systems centered on a particular population of students or areas (i.e., English Learner, Students with IEPs, Literacy).

The Exploration route operates a bit differently than the other routes within the EASI application -- namely, the application process is simplified. Reviewers assess readiness and fit, rather than awarding points through a competitive grants process.

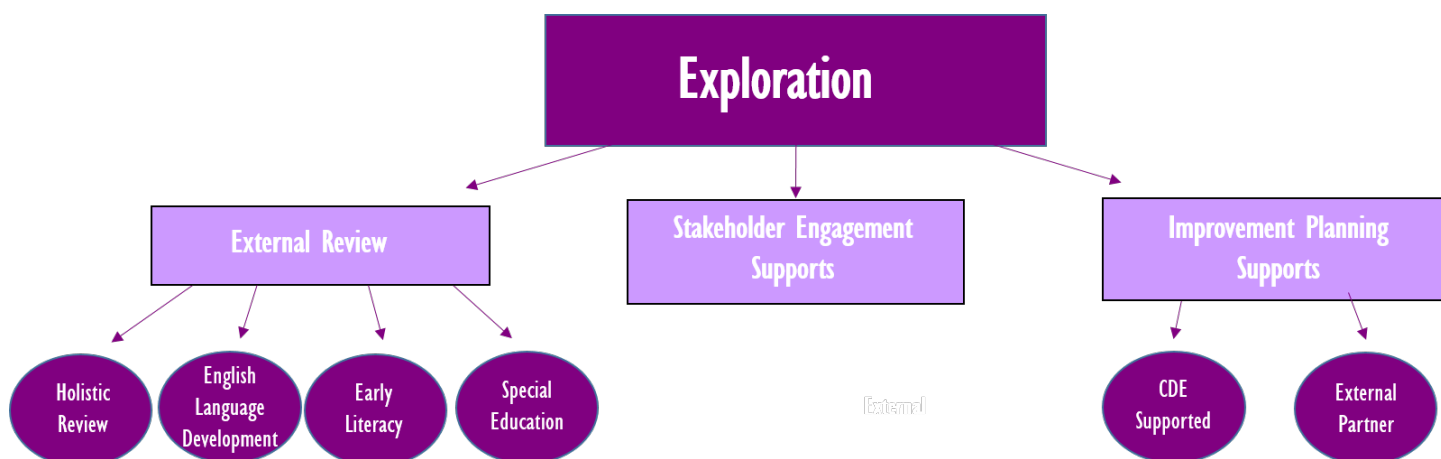
If the collective amount of requests exceeds availability of funds, then a prioritization process will be used. The duration of the awards are typically shorter than the other EASI routes and span for the same year as the award year (e.g., January 2019 until July 2019). A short extension is available (i.e., December 30, 2019). Based on the exploration work, LEAs may build in a small amount of funding for initial implementation, with CDE's approval.

Applicants are encouraged to apply for services in external review (holistic or specialized), community and family engagement **and** improvement planning (external partner or CDE) to ensure a thorough exploration process. However, EASI is a needs-based process, so LEAs should only opt schools into the services that are needed. Note that applying for subsequent implementation activities through EASI will require evidence of an external review, meaningful community engagement and a well-developed improvement plan. Below is a flowchart that describes the paths within Exploration. There is a detailed sheet for each support that details the process, allowable use of funds, timelines and eligible applicants and prioritization.

### Who Can I Contact For More Information?

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## EXTERNAL REVIEWS

Based upon years of best practice, the department has identified external reviews as an important component in helping a school prepare for rapid, effective turnaround work. The types of reviews has expanded within the last year 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 EL students, special education students 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-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 detailing how the school's infrastructure supports a culture of performance, instructional transformation, talent development and leadership.
2. Facilitate an in-person 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 to release next year for district level reviews. Unlike in previous years, the external partner must be selected prior to the award. CDE will then provide training to selected partners to ensure they understand the intent of the grant and reporting expectations.

**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.

**Special Education Program Review.** This school level review of Special Education program(s) emanates from the premise that children with disabilities have access to the general education program alongside their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible. The review begins with a one-day visit. A CDE representative will guide the school team through the *SWIFT* protocol. Based on the information gathered, CDE will assist the school in identifying priorities, action steps and available resources.

**READ Act Data Interpretation.** Aimed at elementary school staff (e.g., school leaders, instructional coaches, K-3 teachers), a CDE representative works with leadership to understand trends and instructional next steps as aligned to READ Act data. Support is focused on leadership and coach capacity to analyze the data and plan for grade level team meetings. The CDE literacy consultant will model the use of the information at the school level with teachers and gradually release this work back to school leadership. While the work is focused on K-3 teachers, intermediate grades could be included if that fits better within the school structure.

## 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 facilitator 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 Partnerships office at CDE is available to provide technical support related to high quality stakeholder engagement strategies. It is recommended that a team of diverse stakeholders conduct high-impact strategies that are aligned to the National Standards for Family-School Partnership. Additional resources are available at: <http://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 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. It is recommended that LEAs select the same provider for the external review, stakeholder engagement and improvement planning work – or at least negotiate a way for the different providers to align their work. Funds may be used for hiring a facilitator, staff time (e.g., subs, stipends) and materials.

## 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 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 \$10,000 to \$65,000 per eligible school. As a reminder, exploration activities should typically span January 1, 2019 – June 30, 2019. An extension may be provided until December 30, 2019, if needed.

Exploration Activity	Request Amount	Notes
<b>Diagnostic Reviews</b> (Only one type of diagnostic review service may be requested.)		
Holistic	\$25,000 per school	Includes dollars to contract with a trained external provider and other expenses to support process.
ELD Focus (school or district level)	\$10,000 per school/district	CDE provides services. Dollars support costs to the school or district for participating.
Special Education Focus	\$10,000 per school	CDE provides services. Dollars support costs to the school for participating.
Early Literacy Focus	\$10,000 per school	CDE provides services. Dollars support costs to the school for participating.
<b>Stakeholder Engagement</b>		
External Provider	\$10,000 per school/district	Includes dollars to contract with a trained external provider and other expenses to support process. May be used at school or district levels.
<b>Improvement Planning</b> (Only one type of improvement planning service may be requested.)		
External Provider	\$25,000 per school	Includes dollars to contract with a trained external provider and other expenses to support process.
CDE Supported	\$10,000 per school/district	CDE provides services. Dollars support costs to the school or district for participating.
<b>Initial Implementation</b>		
Early Implementation	\$5,000 per school/district	Upon completion of EASI Exploration work, the school may begin some early implementation with approval by CDE. School may apply for additional implementation opportunities during the next EASI window.

## ALLOWABLE USE OF FUNDS

Funding from this opportunity **may** be used for:

- Costs related to the external review (e.g., external partner, stipends, subs)
- Costs related to stakeholder engagement (e.g., facilitator, childcare, translation services)
- Costs related to planning based upon the review (e.g., external partner, stipends, subs)
- Costs for FTE to coordinate efforts to implement an improvement plan
- 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 fiscal year will be returned to the CDE.

## EVALUATION AND REPORTING

Schools receiving funds under this grant opportunity are required to:

- Update the UIP during the standard window to reflect the exploration work (i.e., external review, parent and community engagement, improvement planning). CDE will review the plan during the school's standard window (e.g., January for schools on the accountability; April for remaining schools).
- Schools identified for support and improvement through ESSA (i.e., CS, TS, Additional TS schools) must use the exploration results to meet the comprehensive needs assessment requirements. CS schools should document these expectations in the UIP; TS and Additional TS schools may use the 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 covered on pages 52 of the EASI application.