



## **Align continuous improvement plans with goals, funding**

Michigan adapted a new process in which districts plan for continuous improvement and then apply for funding to meet those goals. Many states are now following suit by adopting similar cycles of continuous improvement that connect improvement plans to districts' consolidated applications.

"There are other states that do parts of what we did," said Theresa A. Nugent, [Michigan Integrated Continuous Improvement Process](#) lead for the Michigan Department of Education. "Georgia has a really nice system that links plans into consolidated applications."

MICIP is a new process that requires local educational agencies to set goals for continuous improvement and then apply for funding to meet those goals. MDE began creating MICIP in 2018 to make the process easier for its districts.

Under the previous processes, LEAs created annual improvement plans, received federal and state funding, and then hoped that money would meet students' needs, Nugent said. With ESSA, states saw an opportunity to change mindsets from compliance to continuous improvement.

Now the process involves applying for grants that fund continuous improvement practices. Other districts can learn from Michigan's process to implement continuous improvement plans that improve school and student outcomes. Nugent outlined some important steps:

- **Assemble continuous improvement teams.** Assign a leader, usually an assistant superintendent or someone else at an executive level. The team should include a representative from every school, grade level, subject, and department, including transportation, safety, and nutrition. Meetings should generate conversations about the whole-child factors affecting achievement, not just about how to raise reading and math scores, Nugent said.
- **Assess needs.** ESEA [Section 1114\(b\)\(6\)](#) and ESEA [Section 1115\(e\)\(2\)](#) require comprehensive needs assessments for schoolwide Title I programs and for targeted assistance Title I programs.
- **Determine root causes.** Teams should analyze reasons why students are not achieving. By prepopulating the MICIP application with data LEAs previously submitted to the state, districts in Michigan are able to spend less time gathering data and more time analyzing it. For example, are students not meeting math goals because they miss instruction due to transportation issues? Could the district change bus routes to get students to school on time?
- **Create goals and assign to schools.** Districts should set and assign measurable interim and end-term goals and describe what data will show if they are being met. For example, a district can target early literacy in its continuous improvement plan and assign the elementary school to meet that goal. A district may also want to target achievement in Algebra 1, for example, and assign a high school to carry out activities and strategies.

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- **Assign ownership to the strategy and to the activities.** Districts should assign a particular educator to each strategy and activity. "It's more likely to be completed with fidelity by having an owner," Nugent said. With ownership, activities and strategies are more likely to reach the targeted students.

- **Implement plan.** Leadership changes, budgets are cut, or pandemics arise. Meanwhile, students' needs remain or increase, Nugent said. When plans go awry, district improvement teams need to figure out why, what can be done to meet the plan another way, or when to adjust the plan. For example, if a district lacks capacity to hire the eight math coaches in its plan, consider how to reallocate resources to hire more math coaches, or adjust the plan.

- **Evaluate plan.** Are schools meeting some goals ahead of target dates? Is progress faltering on other goals? Districts need to reassess needs, determine root causes, and begin the cycle again.

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