



NEBRASKA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Federal Designation Overview and Support Guidance

2024-2025

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Purpose of document

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires each state to identify schools for support and improvement through a statewide system of annual meaningful differentiation. The identifications result in differentiated supports and resources for the lowest-performing five percent of Title I, Part A (Title I) schools, high schools with low graduation rates, and schools with underperforming student groups.

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) operates two school accountability systems to meet both state and federal accountability requirements. You can learn more about the AQuESTT state classification system by visiting, <https://aquestt.com/resources/>. This guidance document is designed to provide educators and leaders with centralized information regarding school support and improvement requirements under Title I of ESSA. Additionally, this guidance document intends to provide coherence and alignment to other federal and state requirements such as Continuous Improvement, Special Education, and Career and Technical Education.

This document is intended for educational leaders, including but not limited to administrators, teachers, support staff, and families to build a common understanding of federal requirements and supports for schools, which can lead to a collaborative approach and guides continuous improvement.

Please send any inquiries regarding this document to: Dr. Shirley Vargas, shirley.vargas@nebraska.gov.

Commonly Used Terms

ATSI - Additional Targeted Support and Improvement

AQuESTT - A Quality Education System for Today and Tomorrow, Nebraska's Accountability System.

CNA - Comprehensive Needs Assessment

CSI - Comprehensive Support and Improvement

CSI-ATSI - Designation given to schools when a student group does not exit after a specific number of years.

ELP - English Language Proficiency

EBP - Evidence Based Practices as defined by ESSA.

ESSA - Every Student Succeeds Act

Federal designations - As required by the U.S. Department of Education (USED), every state education agency must identify schools for different levels of support such as CSI, TSI, and ATSI.

HQIM - High Quality Instructional Materials

More Rigorous Intervention - Applies only to a CSI school that does not exit the status after 3 years. The school must engage in additional, required activities to support improved student outcomes, such as classroom observations led by NDE and partners, targeted technical assistance with completing grant applications, differentiated professional learning, etc.

SQSS - School Quality and Student Success

State classifications - Schools and districts receive ratings based on a combination of multiple indicators. There are four levels, Needs Support to Improve, Good, Great, and Excellent.

Student group - For the purposes of federal accountability, student group means students who identify as: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Economically Disadvantaged, English Learners, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Students with Disabilities, Two or More Races, White.

TSI - Targeted Support and Improvement

ESSA Designation Overview

Federal Designations

In accordance with ESSA, the NDE must identify the lowest-performing 5% of Title I schools, high schools with low graduation rate, and schools with underperforming student groups. The graphic below depicts the federal designation categories and definitions, as described in the state approved ESSA plan.

Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)

CSI – Low Performing

The lowest 5% of overall performance of Title I schools.

Identified every 3 years

CSI – Low Graduation Rate

Any public high school with a 4-year cohort graduation rate less than 67%.

Identified every 3 years

CSI – Non-exiting ATSI

Any public school with an ATSI designation that has not exited after 3 years.

Identified every 3 years

Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI)

ATSI Schools

Any public school with one or more student groups* performing at or below the lowest 5% of Title I schools.

Identified every 3 years

Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI)

TSI Schools

Any public school with one or more student groups* performing at or below the lowest 25% of Title I schools.

Identified annually

*For TSI/ATSI, the student group must have at least 10 students.

The student groups are:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Economically Disadvantaged
- English Learners
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Students with Disabilities
- Two or More Races
- White

Identification of schools

The ESSA school designations use the same indicators as those for the AQuESTT classifications. The indicators are arranged in a filter-like process to illustrate the different stages a school or student group might go through in order to be identified for support. The table below depicts the alignment.

ESSA Indicator	Academic Achievement	ELP	Academic Progress	Graduation Rate	SQSS
AQuESTT Indicator*	Status	Progress toward ELP	Growth Non-proficiency	4- and 7- year Cohort Graduation Rate	Reduction in Chronic Absenteeism Science Status
Filter Process	Stage 1 (For High Schools Non-Proficiency is included here)		Stage 2 (Elementary/ Middle Schools Only)	Stage 2 (High Schools Only)	Stage 3

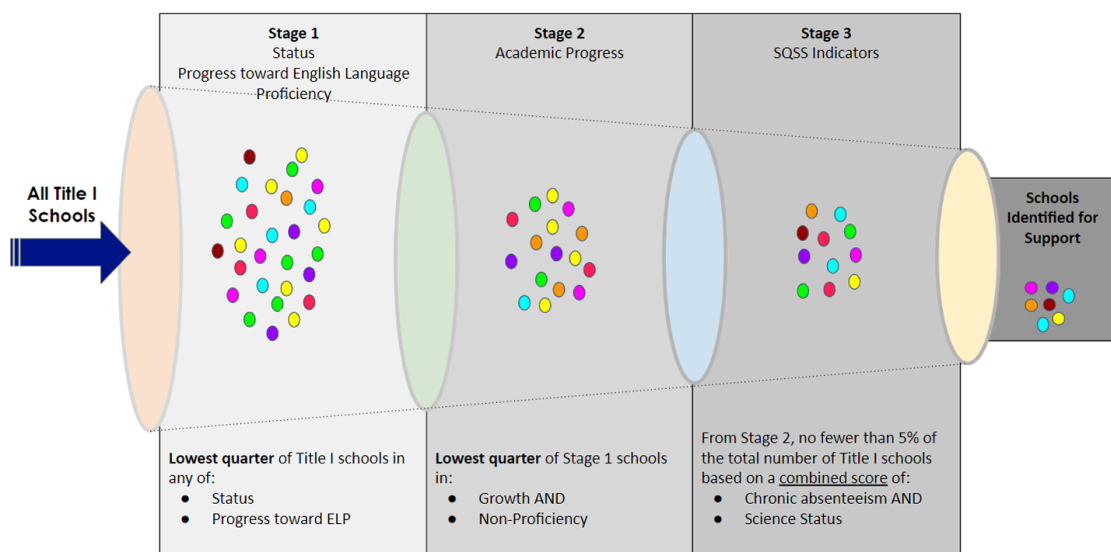
*Find the definitions of the AQuESTT Indicators [here](#).

Identification Process

All eligible schools are funneled through a filter process, starting with Stage 1, Status and Progress towards ELP. These indicators are required by the USED to be of equal importance. As such, not exceeding the threshold for either indicator in this stage moves a school to the next stage.

Below is an example of the filter process, specifically for CSI, and additional filters and methodology can be found on the [ESSA Designation Business Rules](#).

CSI: Title I Elementary and Middle Schools



Exit Criteria

Exit criteria means the conditions under which a school is no longer considered for a designation; these vary for each designation type and initial identification year. Below are the exit criteria for each designation type and the initial identification year. See Appendix A for a flowchart.

CSI Exit Criteria

- Cohort 1: Identified in Fall 2018 (using 2017-2018 school year data)
 - Exit Criteria:
 - Not re-identified for CSI, AND
 - Not in lowest 10% of Title I across Stage 1: Status and/or ELP indicator, AND
 - Made significant progress across all indicators.
 - CSI schools in this cohort that do not meet exit criteria are required to engage in more rigorous options as outlined by the NDE.
- Cohort 2: Identified in Fall 2022 (using 2021-22 school year data)
 - Exit Criteria:
 - Not re-identified for CSI, AND
 - Not in the lowest 10% of Title I across the first filter (Status & ELPA), AND
 - Made significant progress across all indicators.
 - CSI schools identified in this cohort are eligible to exit every year through Fall 2026. CSI schools in this cohort that do not meet exit criteria by Fall 2026 are required to engage in more rigorous options as outlined by the NDE.
- Cohort 3: Identified in Fall 2023 (using 2022-23 school year data)
 - Exit Criteria:
 - Not re-identified for CSI, AND
 - Not in the lowest 10% of Title I across the first filter (Status & ELPA), AND
 - Made significant progress across all indicators.
 - Schools identified in this cohort will be eligible for exit in Fall 2026. CSI schools in this cohort that do not meet exit criteria are required to engage in more rigorous options as outlined by the NDE.

CSI-low grad rate

- Any cohort
 - Exit Criteria:
 - Have a 4-year cohort graduation rate above 67 percent AND
 - Have two consecutive years of 4-year cohort graduation rate improvement.

CSI-ATSI Exit Criteria

- Any cohort
 - Exit Criteria:
 - Not re-identified for ATSI for the same student group AND
 - Made sufficient growth in Stage 1: Status and/or ELPA indicator.

ATSI Exit Criteria

- Cohort 2: Identified in Fall 2022 (using 2021-22 school year data)
 - Exit Criteria:
 - Not re-identified for ATSI for the same student group AND
 - Made sufficient growth in Stage 1: Status and/or ELPA indicator

- ATSI schools identified in this cohort are eligible to exit every year through Fall 2026. ATSI schools that do not meet exit criteria in Fall 2026 will be designated for CSI in 2026 based on data from the 2025-26 school year.
- Cohort 3: Identified in Fall 2023 (using 2022-23 school year data)
 - Exit Criteria:
 - Not re-identified for ATSI for the same student group AND
 - Made sufficient growth in Stage 1: Status and/or ELPA indicator
 - ATSI schools identified in this cohort are eligible to exit in Fall 2026. ATSI schools that do not meet exit criteria in Fall 2026 will be designated for CSI in 2026 based on data from the 2025-26 school year.

Designation Timeline by Cohort

Designation Type	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
CSI-Cohort 1 (Identified in 2018)	Eligible to exit; engaged in More Rigorous Intervention				
CSI-Cohort 2 (Identified in 2022)	Eligible to exit				If school does not exit, More Rigorous Intervention
CSI-Cohort 3 (Identified in 2023)		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	If school does not exit, More Rigorous Intervention
CSI-Grad Rate (Identified in 2023)		Year 1	Year 2	Eligible to exit	
CSI-ATSI Cohort 1 (ATSI identified in 2019)	Eligible to exit				
ATSI-Cohort 2 (Identified in 2022)	Eligible to exit				If school does not exit, move to CSI-ATSI
ATSI-Cohort 3 (Identified in 2023)		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	If school does not exit, move to CSI-ATSI

More Rigorous Interventions

Per ESSA section 1111(d)(3)(A)(i)(I), states are required to outline and implement more rigorous interventions for any CSI school that does not meet the exit criteria after a designated number of years. The NDE has matched this intervention with processes at the state level pertaining to Priority Schools.

When a CSI school moves to a more rigorous intervention:

- The school's improvement plan must be evaluated by NDE, in consultation with the district, to determine if:
 - A significant revision of the progress plan is necessary,
 - An entirely new progress plan is developed, or
 - An alternative administrative structure is warranted.
- The school will be required to complete a new comprehensive needs assessment.
- The school will engage in an external review of their classroom instructional practices, led by NDE staff and/or external partners and receive technical assistance on data interpretation, root cause analysis, and rigorous goal setting and action planning.
- The school will also receive periodic implementation site visits by an NDE cross-functional team to identify strengths, areas for improvement, and determine if any adjustments to their plans need to be made.

Requirements for Designated Schools

Requirements for support and improvement plans and activities vary based on the designation type. The table below provides an overview of the requirements. The NDE is required to ensure all districts with TSI, ATSI, and CSI schools comply with federal and state requirements. Schools and districts are typically notified via phone and email of the designation and next steps in late fall.

Requirements	CSI/CSI-ATSI	ATSI	TSI
Develop an improvement plan in partnership with stakeholders	Required	Required	Required
Improvement plan is based on annual comprehensive needs assessment	Required	Recommended	Recommended
Improvement plan is informed by all accountability indicators	Required	Required	Required
Improvement plan identifies and addresses resource inequities determined through a resource allocation review	Required	Required	Recommended
Improvement plan includes evidence-based interventions/strategies	Required	Required	Required
Approval of goals/plan	State and District	District	District
Monitoring implementation	State and District	District	District
Eligible for federal funds (see Grant Support)	Yes	No	No

Resource Allocation Review

Schools identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) or Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) are required to identify any resource inequities that exist in their school and/or district. These findings should be addressed through the creation and implementation of an improvement plan (ESSA Sec. 1111(d)(1)(B)(iv) & Sec. 1111(d)(2)(C)).

- CSI schools are required to submit an improvement plan to the NDE that incorporates actions to address resource inequities, through the grant application process.
- ATSI schools are not required to submit an improvement plan to the NDE but can leverage an existing plan to address resource inequities. Districts with ATSI schools are required to support and monitor the implementation of the plan.

The purpose of the review is to support districts and schools connect resource allocations and student outcomes, as well as uncover opportunities for more strategic resource use.

A Resource Allocation Review is...	A Resource Allocation Review is not...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A collaborative process to ensure students have equitable access to resources, specifically funding, time, and human resources• A driver of meaningful change for districts that serve under-performing schools• A tool to support school improvement efforts• A component of your continuous improvement processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An evaluation or accountability measure• A punitive action against a school or district• A standalone activity completed in isolation of other improvement planning

How to conduct a resource allocation review

- A. Form a Resource Allocation Review Team
 - a. To make the resource allocation review process meaningful, ensure multiple stakeholders are involved. This team could be an existing team such as a School or District Leadership Team, School Improvement Team, MTSS Committee, etc.
- B. Gather all necessary data (including but not limited to...)
 - a. Detailed district and school level budget (outlining Title I, SPED, local funds, etc.)
 - b. Educator effectiveness data (ineffective, inexperienced, or out-of-field teachers)
 - c. Student and teacher demographic data
 - d. Attendance and behavior data
 - e. Improvement plans (CIP, ESSA Consolidated App, MTSS, TIP, etc.)
- C. Engage in deep conversations regarding patterns and trends across financial resources, schoolwide schedules, and allocation of teachers.
- D. Capture findings from the resource allocation in the school's improvement plan, for example (from [Identifying Resources Inequities](#), Region 15 Comprehensive Center):
 - a. Staffing at schools was decided solely based on a per-pupil formula. After reviewing for resource inequities, staffing decisions were shifted to account for additional needs of students (e.g., multilingual language specialists, intervention specialists, etc.) by school and grade level.

- b. The same district-wide professional learning in English language arts has been offered to all teachers in the district. After reviewing for resource inequities related to English learners and students with disabilities, reallocating resources allowed differentiated professional learning, emphasizing these specific areas.
- Review the [Resource Allocation Review Guide for Schools & Districts](#) for additional guidance.

Evidence-based practices/strategies

Schools with any designation must include one or more evidence-based interventions to be implemented to improve student outcomes. The definition of “evidence-based” in ESEA section 8101(21) includes four levels of evidence from which interventions may be selected:

Description	Demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on...
<i>Strong Evidence</i>	At least one well-designed and well-implemented <i>experimental study</i>
<i>Moderate Evidence</i>	At least one well-designed and well-implemented <i>quasi-experimental study</i>
<i>Promising Evidence</i>	At least one well-designed and well-implemented <i>correlational study</i> with statistical controls for selection bias
<i>Demonstrates a Rationale</i>	Based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes.

To support schools with selecting the best evidence-based intervention to match the improvement goal, please review the following resources:

1. NeMTSS Program Comparison Tool: <https://nemtss.unl.edu/program-comparison-tool/>
2. Evidence for ESSA: <https://www.evidenceforessa.org/>
3. What Works Clearinghouse: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

When drafting or adjusting an improvement plan to address the school designation, be sure to note which evidence-level matches the strategy or intervention that will be implemented. For CSI/CSI-ATSI, you will be able to note on your grant application the appropriate evidence level for each goal submitted.

Compliance and monitoring

CSI and CSI-ATSI are required to be monitored every year. TSI and ATSI schools are typically monitored during their district’s ESSA Consolidated Monitoring visits, but may be monitored at any time by the NDE. Designated schools are expected to comply with all required activities.

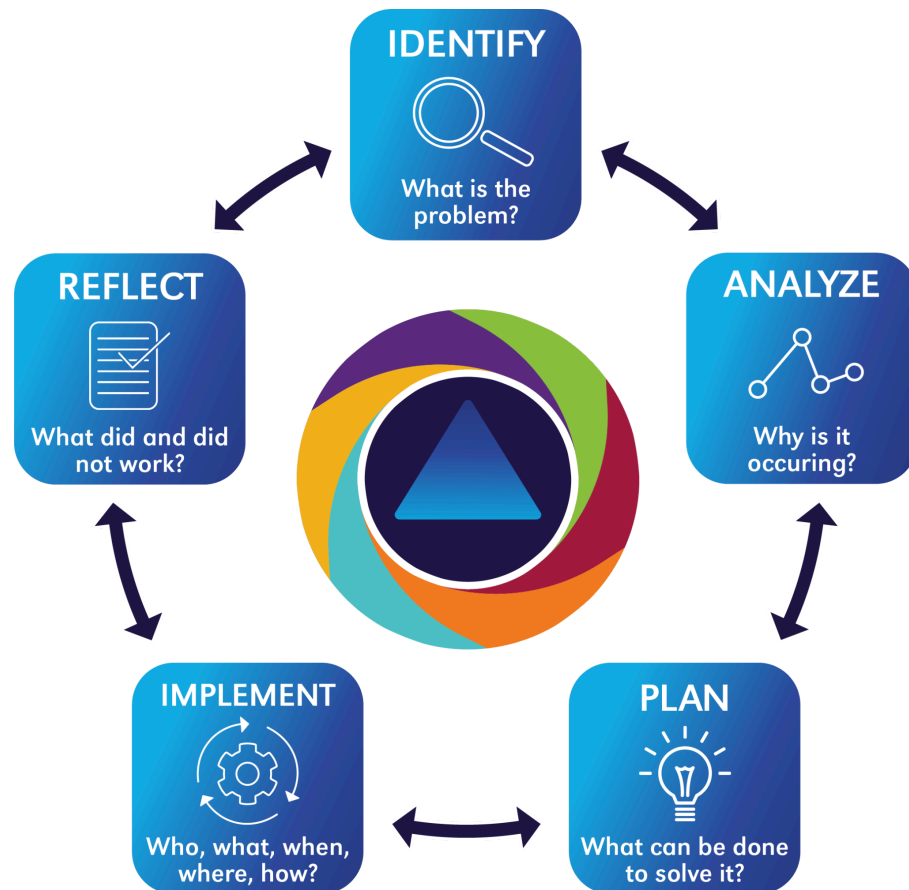
If there are more questions or would like to review some Frequently Asked Questions, click here for more [CSI/CSI-ATSI information](#) and [TSI/ATSI information](#).

Planning for Improvement

To better understand the designations and ensure alignment between school and district priorities, as well as ensure connectedness to other plans, it is important to engage in an established process for improvement planning. The NDE provides designated schools with guidance from [the NeMTSS framework for continuous improvement](#). Districts and schools may have established processes for improvement planning and are asked to consider how the following components are included and applied in their designated schools.

NeMTSS Problem Solving Process

This framework guides teams through a five-step process:



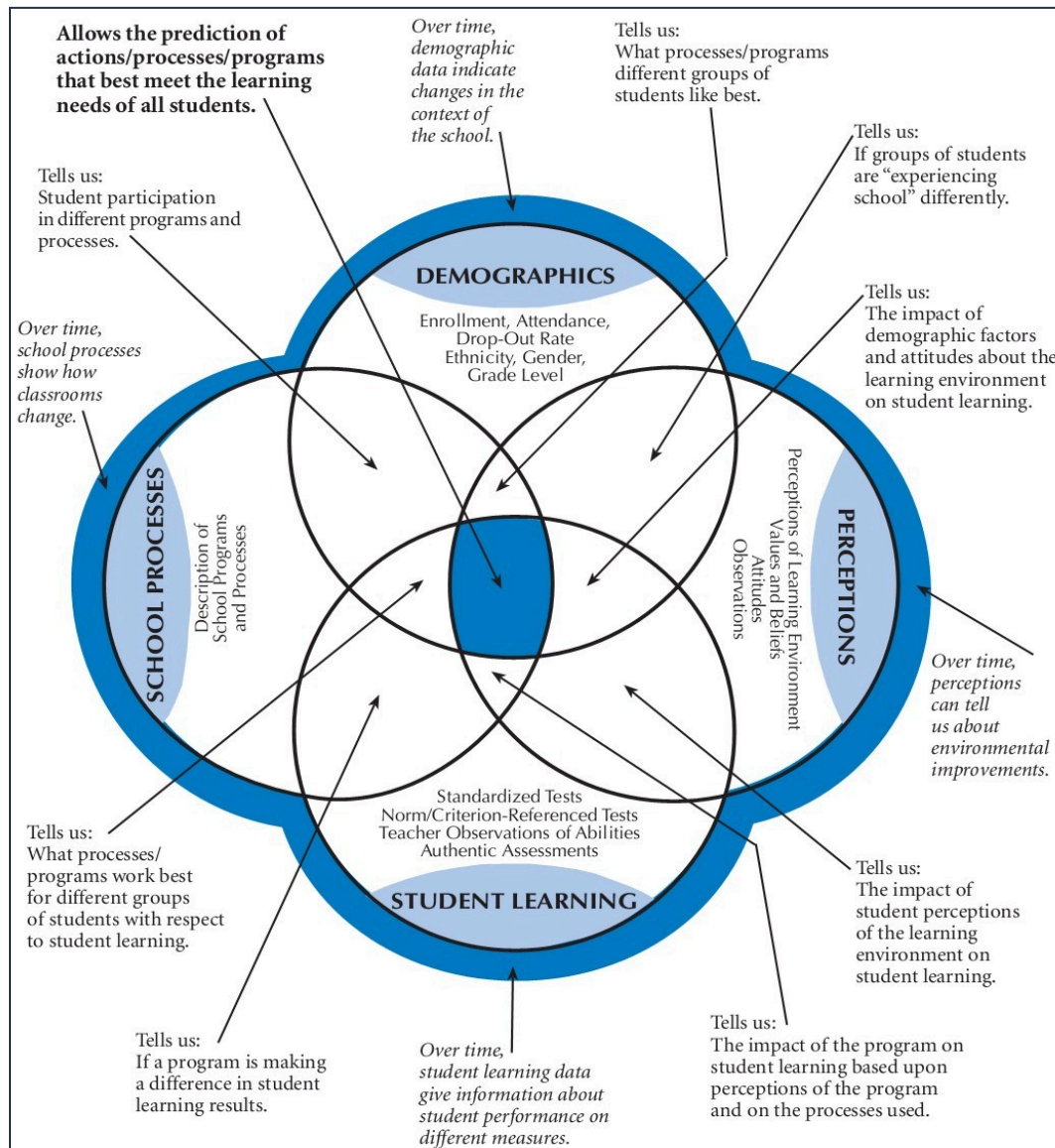
1. **Identify:** What is occurring?
2. **Analyze:** Why is it occurring?
3. **Plan:** What can be done to solve it?
4. **Implement:** Who, what, when, where, how?
5. **Reflect:** What did and did not work?

1. **Identify: What is occurring?**

In this step, schools identify the difference between the desired outcomes and the actual student performance by looking at various sources of data.

4 Types of Data

- **Demographic data** provides descriptive information about the school school community.
- **Perceptual data** helps leaders understand what students, parents, teachers, etc., think about the learning environment.
- **School Process data** helps to define what teachers are doing to get the results schools are getting.
- **Student Learning data** provide student performance information on different measures.



Source: [Bernhardt, Multiple Measures](#)

Comprehensive Needs Assessment

The purpose of this tool is to help school teams assess current practices, determine areas of strength, and identify priority areas for improvement. School teams can use the needs assessment results to:

- Examine root causes of areas in need of improvement,
- Identify strategies and interventions to address root causes,
- Determine action steps for implementing strategies and interventions,
- Identify areas for professional learning, technical assistance, and resources to support implementation of strategies and interventions,
- Set goals for continuous improvement and progress monitoring.

The NDE Comprehensive Needs Assessment is grounded in the AQuESTT Domains and Tenets and aligned to the NeMTSS Essential Elements. The first time any CSI school is identified, the entire CNA must be completed. Every year thereafter, the school can identify which tenet(s) are most important to complete. CSI-ATSI schools must complete the Educational Opportunities and Access tenet to identify areas of need for the identified student group. CSI-ATSI schools may choose to complete additional tenets.

For more information regarding the CNA, check out:

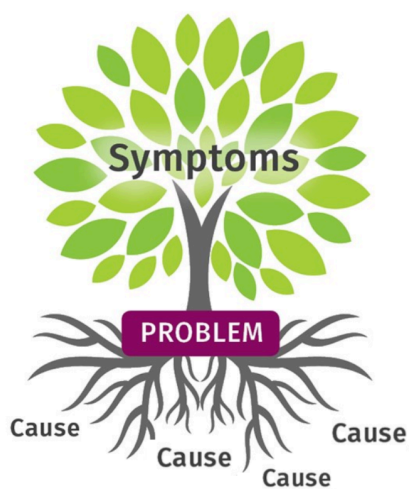
<https://www.education.ne.gov/csds/comprehensive-needs-assessment/>.

2. **Analyze:** Why is it occurring?

In this step, schools examine what are contributing factors to the outcomes observed in step 1, and conduct root cause analysis to better understand why the outcomes exist or persist.

Root cause analysis

A root cause analysis is a process of discovering the underlying causes for a problem. The image below depicts a tree with the leaves signifying the symptoms which are easily observable, the trunk and ground signifying the problem which is the gap from the goal, and the roots, which signify the various potential causes for the symptoms and problem.



Symptoms

- Result or outcome of the problem
- What you see as a problem (obvious)

Achy, weak, tired

Problem

- Gap from goal or standard

Fever

Causes

- The “roots”- system below the surface bringing about the problem

Infection

Brief Example

- Excessive absenteeism
- Office referrals for behavioral interventions
- Low interim and summative assessment results

Disparities in academic and nonacademic outcomes between students with disabilities and students without disabilities.

- Lack of professional learning and job-embedded coaching for teachers to appropriately scaffold instruction
- Lack of systems for behavioral supports

Resources to conduct root cause analysis:

- [5 Why's Protocol](#)
- [Fishbone Diagram](#)

3. **Plan:** What can be done to solve it?

This step highlights the importance to creating a plan that addresses the identified and prioritized gaps from the previous step. Schools can create goals to impact the observable symptoms and action plans to address the root causes.

SMART Goals

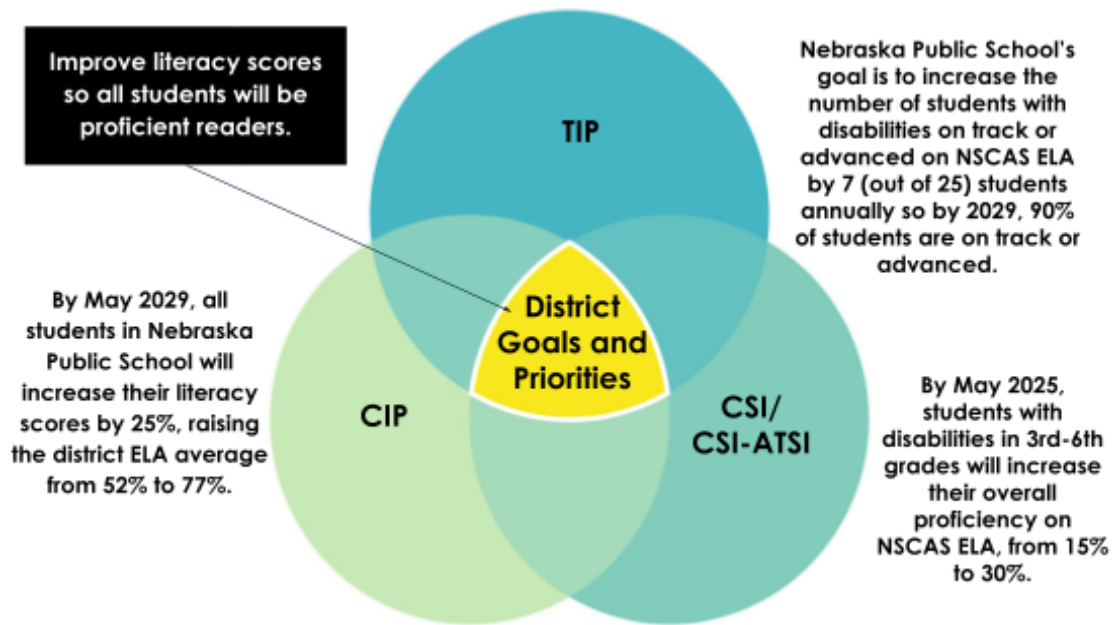
When creating plans, it is important to establish SMART goals to ensure all stakeholders know what is trying to be achieved. The image below outlines SMART goal components.



In drafting goals, you can use the following template:

By (date), (student group: all students, students with disabilities, etc.,) will increase their performance of (content and assessment) from (current performance) to (target performance).

Schools should consider the overlap between the requirements of CSI/TSI/ATSI and other plans that require goals such as a district's Continuous Improvement Plan or Targeted Improvement Plan. The image below shows the alignment between multiple plans and its connection to the overall district priorities.



4. **Implement:** Who, what, when, where, how?

In this step, schools focus on ensuring a connection between stated goals and action plans. Schools should identify specific actions, necessary resources, and person responsible to ensure execution of strategies. Below is an example of a SMART Goal and action plan.

School Goal: By May 2025, all students in grades 3-6 in Nebraska Elementary School will increase their NSCAS ELA scores by 10% from 48% to 58%.		
Action Steps:	Supports/ Resources:	Timeline (or) Frequency:
1. Collaborate with colleagues to share resources and plan instruction based on the literacy program from the district adopted HQIM.	Team colleagues, curricular materials	Weekly
2. Explicitly model the components of a high-quality open response and build opportunities to practice these into class at least once per week, in addition to daily writing activities	Exemplars and strategies developed with colleagues	Daily writing, Weekly formal open response
3. Provide students with explicit feedback on their open responses and have them revise their work. Give student opportunities to read and revise each other's work.	HQIM unit assessment, grade team meeting	Weekly
4. Monitor student progress and adjust literacy instructional groups as needed	Educlimber	Weekly
5. Provide targeted review and intervention for students in whole-group, small group, and one-on-one settings depending on the percent of the class struggling to demonstrate improvement.	Framework developed w/ team to determine appropriate levels of intervention, re-teach materials	Weekly

As you develop the steps you will take to reach your goals, use the questions below to strengthen your plans:

- How will these action steps integrate into my daily and weekly routines?
- What artifacts will be produced by taking these action steps? How will I collect and/or organize the artifacts? and how do they connect to district goals?

- What professional learning opportunities exist or will be needed to achieve the goal?
How can I build these learning opportunities into my action steps?
- How/when will I take time to reflect on progress toward my goals and make any necessary adjustments to the plan? How can I build this periodic reflection into my action steps?

Reflect: What did and did not work?

In this step, schools determine the effectiveness of the action plan and make adjustments as needed.

What are we going to continue doing or change in terms of:

- Did we do what we said we were going to do?
- What is working? How do we know?
- What is not working? How do we know?
- What needs to be continued as is?
- What needs to be adjusted?
- What needs to be eliminated?
- What is missing?

After engaging in reflection, be sure to go back to **Identify** to continue the cyclic process of improvement.

Grant Application Support

Schools that are designated as a CSI or CSI-ATSI school are eligible to receive additional funding allocations to support the work needed to increase student achievement. Title I 1003 funds are provided specifically for this purpose. The NDE awards these funds based on a formula. Since the federal allocation amount fluctuates each year and the number of schools that are on these two lists also fluctuates each year, the formula amount may change from year to year.

Schools are provided an allocation amount and required to complete a funding application with details of their needs assessment findings which indicate areas of growth and greatest need. The application is completed through the Grants Management System (GMS).

The grant is divided into the following sections:

- District Support given specifically to the building(s), and Instructional Materials
- School Information; Educator Effectiveness, Comprehensive School Needs Assessment (CNA), Assessments and Inventions
- Goal pages; SMART goals, Description of how funds will be used to support the goal Activities for implementing, Evidence Level, Person responsible, and data that will be reviewed and monitored to evaluate the progress toward goal achievement.

The application typically opens in the winter after the assessment and accountability data has been publicly released. All applications are due within a 6-week period. Cross functional NDE review teams rate all applications submitted using a scoring rubric to ensure quality and intentions for spending the allocations, in alignment with other plans and improvement efforts.

Schools can choose to spend their allocations in a variety of ways and as listed above should always make decisions based on the findings of their needs assessment, data review, and resource allocation review. Title I 1003 funds can be spent in the following ways;

- School improvement activities directly related to the work of the individual school. SEA's may not use these funds for school improvement activities that are district-wide if all the schools in the district are not identified as a CSI or CSI-ATSI School.
- Personnel costs to support the goals and needs of the building, such as instructional coaches, additional teachers, etc.
- Strategies that are supplemental to the current activities at the school rather than supplanting by paying for something that the school is already doing.
- Transportation costs to increase school diversity
- Dual enrollment costs to support secondary students
- Professional development costs to support needs
- HQIM Curriculum purchases and curriculum-based professional learning to support implementation of the materials
- Intervention materials

This is not an extensive list and serves as some examples of appropriate ways to use funding.

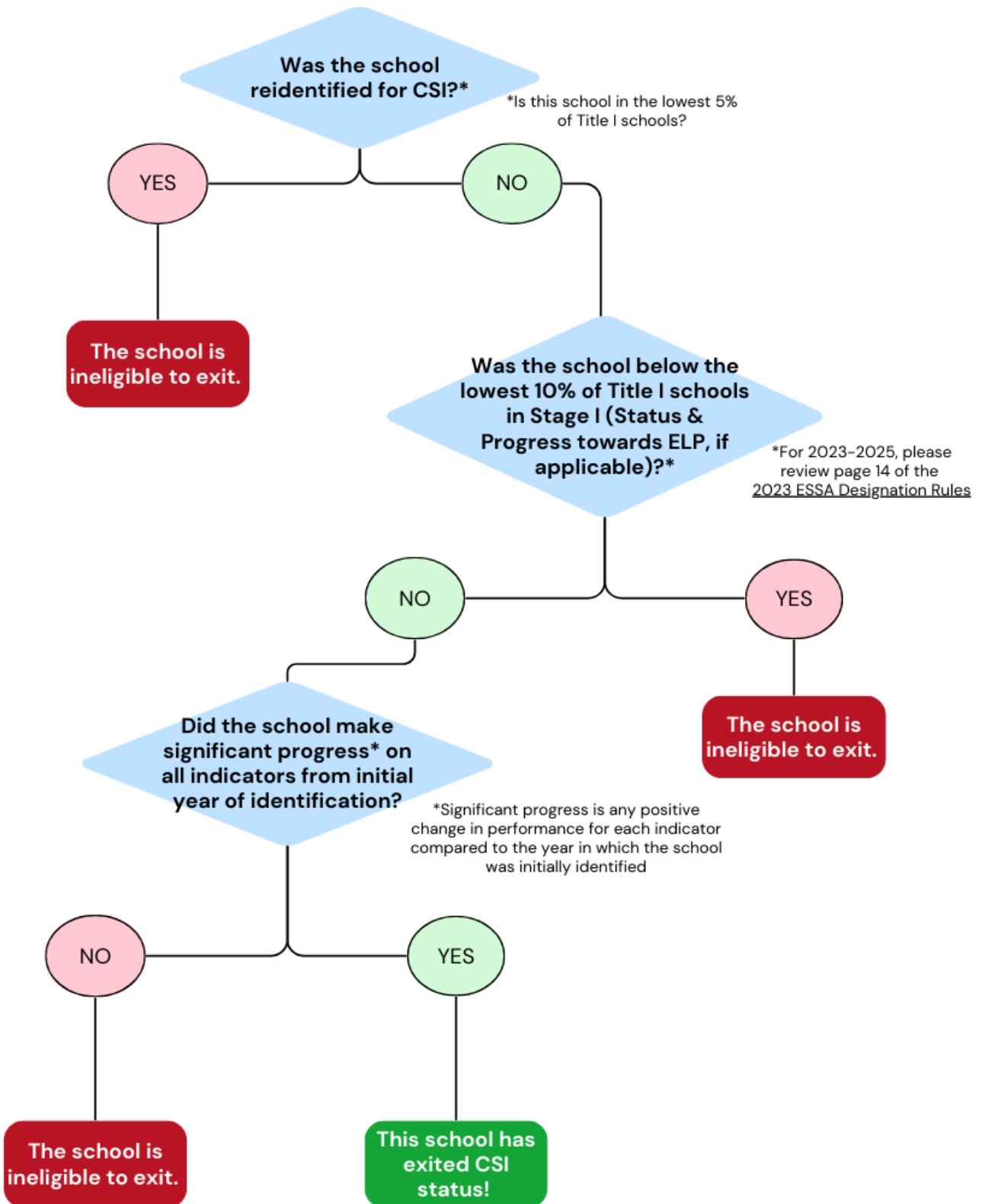
NDE School Support Contact List

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Additional Emails/Webpages		
ADVISER Helpdesk: ADVISERHelp@NebraskaCloud.org Teacher Certification: nde.tcweb@nebraska.gov Coordinated Student Support Services: https://www.education.ne.gov/csss/		

Appendix A

CSI Cohort 1 & 2 Exit Flowchart



CSI-ATSI Exit Flowchart

