How can state agencies support guideline implementation?
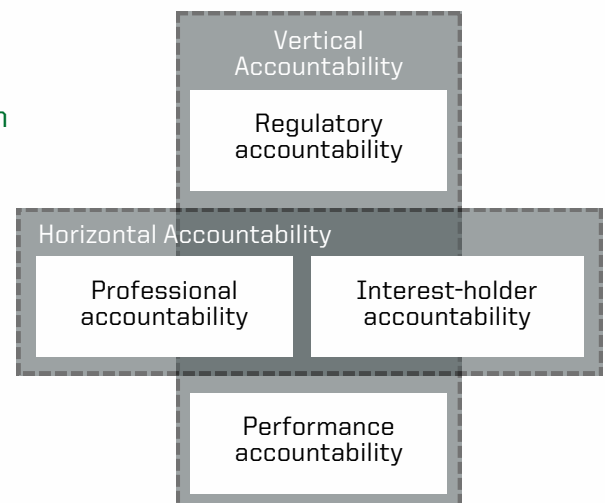
A brief summary of research related to English Learner (EL) Roadmap implementation
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What does the research say?

Guideline implementation research for EL initiatives is limited. However, two studies (one review, one case study analysis), from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) outline key elements of implementation success in education systems more broadly.[1,2]

Task Allocation & Accountability

- Identify who is responsible for implementing what and when
- Align vertical and horizontal processes of accountability to reduce tension and foster innovation (see figure)
- Develop high accountability standards that promote transparency and systematic evaluation of outcomes
- Uncouple monitoring from accountability by involving external evaluation groups; this can help avoid blame games between leaders across policy levels

Objectives & Tools

Setting only **THREE GOALS** helped improve implementation in Canada

- Clearly define goals in ways that are operational or actionable for all involved
- Set a small number of clear, high-priority, measurable, ambitious but feasible goals focused on student outcomes
- Provide specificity about the expected means to reaching these goals to increase the likelihood of success

Timing & Resources

- Create a timeline that is flexible and policy-specific
  - Studies suggest that at too fast a pace, interest-holders may not be able or willing to implement; too slow, the process may lose momentum or drain the system's resources
- Leverage multiple funding sources for implementation
  - A 2014 study of school-wide Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports found that states using multiple funding sources were most effective at large-scale implementation
- Consider teachers' and parents' knowledge and access barriers
  - New technologies can advance implementation but may create roadblocks without training

Engaging Interest-holders

Education policies are implemented by individuals and organizations, making them central to the implementation process because of their own characteristics and their interactions with other determinants.

- Engage key interest-holders and take into account their vision (if not done during policy design)
- Agree on the distribution of tasks and responsibilities, as well as simple ways to communicate
- Work with key actors to build their capacity and adapt accountability mechanisms to local contexts

Insights from English-Learner Policy Leaders

A study of state, district, and local leaders implementing EL policies across three states found:[3]

1 **Human capital** was the key resource for enabling implementation of EL policies
- Leaders described challenges to (a) hiring teachers certified to work with EL students and (b) encouraging existing staff to use district funds to become certified in EL-focused areas

2 **Educator networks** deepened leaders' understandings of EL policy and enabled them to be more transformative in their approach to implementation

3 **Clear guidance** was fundamental to success
- Vague policy implementation guidance and a lack of monitoring collided with leaders' understanding and approach to equity-focused implementation

Leadership & Trust

OECD's 2016 report highlights the importance of developing a guiding coalition to shape implementation guidelines and strategies, emphasizing the role of trust in the coalition's success.

Factors contributing to BREAKDOWNS IN TRUST	- Inconsistent messages and standards - Lack of dialogue with interest-holders - Insufficient accountability and transparency - Lack of capacity building at the local level
Policies related to RESTORING TRUST	- Communicate and engage with interest-holders in consultations, focus groups, negotiations or other forums to voice concerns - Assess and adjust accountability measures - Provide sufficient autonomy and professional development to implementers
SUSTAINING TRUST	Build a complementary approach: elements of interest-holder engagement, capacity building, and increased accountability must work in tandem so that a reform has a greater chance of success

Annotated References

1. Burns, T., F. Köster and M. Fuster (2016), Education Governance in Action: Lessons from Case Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264262829-en

This resource offers in-depth descriptions of priority setting, accountability, and capacity building for education policy implementation. The included case studies center on national-level policymaking, but is still highly relevant for state-level systems in the United States, given the similar structure and hierarchy between state and local education systems. This paper also emphasizes the importance of involving key interest-holders across levels of governance throughout implementation planning and processes. Of particular interest may be chapter seven, which directly relates to considerations for the implementation advisory group recently formed in California.

2. Viennet, R. and Pont, B. (2017), Education Policy Implementation: A Literature Review and Proposed Framework, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/fc467a64-en

This literature review focuses on education policy implementation, its definition, processes and determinants. It aims to clarify what implementing policies involves in complex education systems to support policy work, building on the literature and country examples. The most relevant parts of this paper are chapters three and four, which analyze the determinants that hinder or facilitate implementation and groups them under dimensions which support effective implementation: smart policy design, inclusive engagement, conducive context and a coherent implementation strategy. Based on these dimensions, chapter four outlines a generic framework and a complementary set of questions that can guide design, analysis, and education policy implementation.

3. Bartlett, C., Callahan, R. and Mavrogordato, M. (2024). Beyond a Transformative Approach and Deep Understanding: External Factors and Mid-Level Leaders' Policy Implementation to Expand Equity for English Learners. Educational Administration Quarterly, 60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X241230296

This qualitative study includes both SEA and LEA leaders across three states to understand how they leverage policy to guide English learner policies in their districts. Individuals' understandings of the policies, along with access to resources, professional networks, and human capital were key drivers of their ability to successfully support multilingual learners. This paper focuses on equity and is grounded in a theory of policy implementation that centers around how implementation is related to equity. This paper offers insights as to barriers and facilitators of EL-policy implementation based on personal experiences and in-depth interviews, but does not include broader attention to the implementation literature to the same extent as studies (1) and (2) above.

Methods

Findings presented in this brief come from a literature review of academic peer-reviewed studies, as well as a review of research and findings from non-partisan think tanks, foundations, and organizations. Given the rapid nature of this search, other relevant studies may exist. In addition, please note that we did not use formal methods for summarizing results, assessing study quality, or exploring reasons for differences in findings across studies.

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