

# Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

*Low-Performing Districts and Schools, Improvement Planning and Statewide Support*

*Dr. Jeremy Gibbs, Deputy State Superintendent  
Division of District and School Support Services*

*Ron Dixon, Assistant State Superintendent  
Office of School Improvement*

# Introduction and Context

Legal Basis, Timelines, Requirements, and Reporting

# Report Requirements

G. S. §115C-12(25) requires the State Board of Education to submit a report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee (JLEOC) annually regarding:

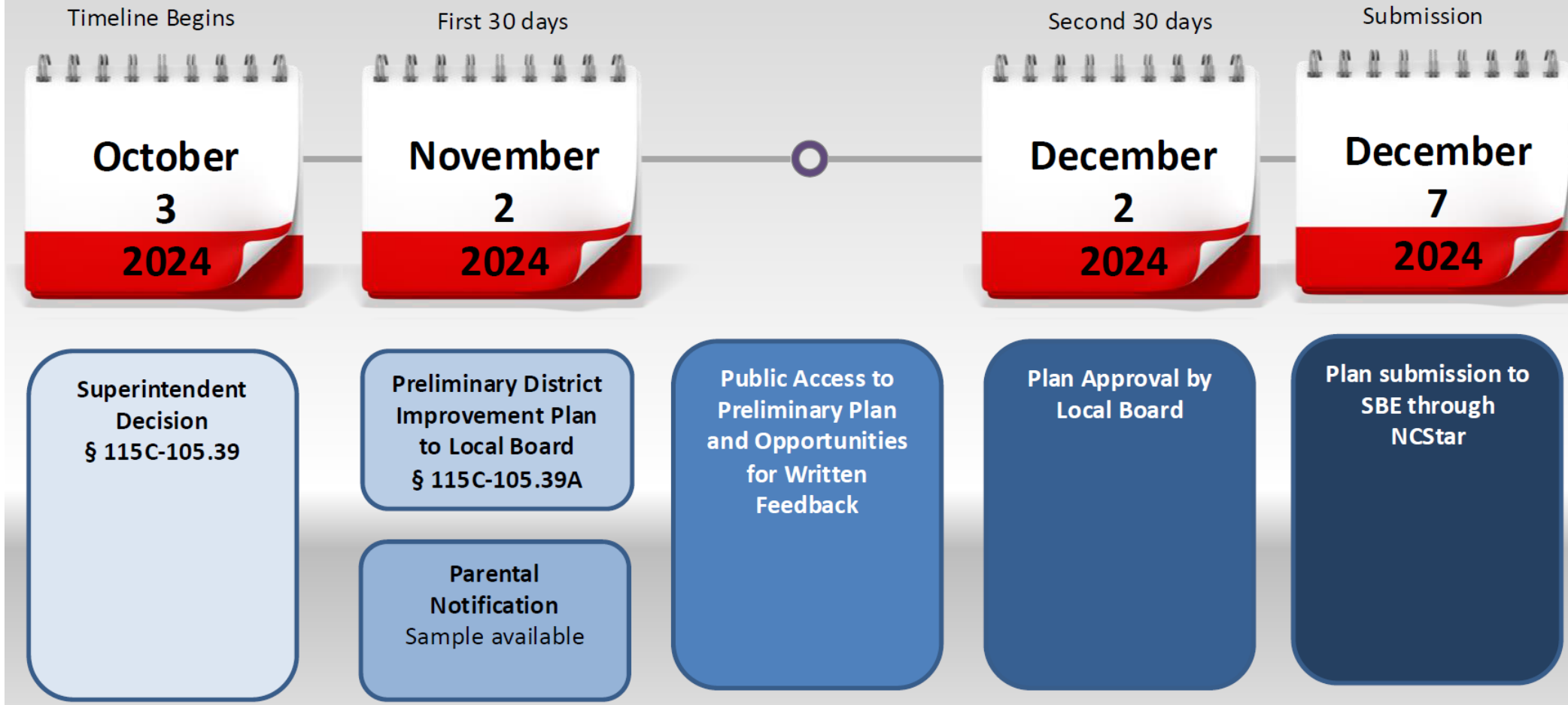
- schools identified as low-performing,
- school improvement plans found to significantly improve student performance,
- personnel actions taken in low-performing schools, and
- recommendations for additional legislation to improve student performance and increase local flexibility.

# Applicable Statutes

This report contains information regarding the implementation of:

- G. S. §115C-105.37. Identification of low-performing schools
- G. S. §115C-105.37B. Reform of continually low performing schools
- G. S. §115C-105.39A. Identification of low-performing local school administrative units
- G. S. §115C-105.39. Dismissal or removal of personnel; appointment of interim superintendent.

# State Designation Timeline for Districts or Schools



# Other Report Contents

- Summary of the steps and processes developed and implemented by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to support those districts and schools identified as low performing based on the 2023-2024 performance results
- Analysis of submitted school and district improvement plans based on the review of NCDPI
- Overview of resources, documents, and calendar of events provided to districts and schools across the state with low-performing state designations

# Additional Reporting Included

- Obtained information from local superintendents on principal assignments in low-performing schools. § 115C-105.39.
  - Each district (99 LEAs) asked to report on principal assignment action for each designated school:
    - (i) recommend to the local board that the principal be retained in the same position,
    - (ii) recommend to the local board that the principal be retained in the same position and a plan of remediation should be developed,
    - (iii) recommend to the local board that the principal be transferred, or
    - (iv) proceed under G.S. 115C-325.4 to dismiss or demote the principal.
    - Some instances were not applicable due to resignation, retirement, school closure, etc.
- SBE-appointed interim superintendents
  - Northampton County Schools
  - Weldon City Schools
- Flexibility for districts significantly impacted by Hurricane Helene for reporting and school improvement plan timeline

# Follow Up Needed

- Gathering information and data for continuous improvement
  - Following up with agency staff and local district/school examples
  - Match qualitative data with quantitative data
  - Implement pilots and early strategy shifts while monitoring for impact (rapid cycle improvement)
- External program evaluation and analysis of support initiatives
  - Ongoing work with research partners to identify and look for opportunities to scale up
- Case studies on “school improvement plans found to significantly improve student performance”
  - Requirement in law to include in this report
    - Information may be added for an addendum submitted in 2025
- Additional recommendations for legislation
  - The SBE may provide recommendations for additional legislation to improve student performance and increase local flexibility



# Overview of Data

State Low-Performing Designations

Federal Designations

# Low-Performing Schools & Districts

## State Designation Definitions

### Low-Performing School

A low-performing school has a School Performance Grade of 'D' or 'F', and a growth status of 'Met' or 'Not Met'.

### Low-Performing District

Low-performing districts are defined as districts that have greater than 50 percent of schools identified as low performing.

### Continually Low-Performing School













Is identified as low performing in any two of the last three years. A low-performing school has a school performance grade of 'D' or 'F' and a growth status of 'Met' or 'Not Met'.

### Continually Low-Performing Charter School

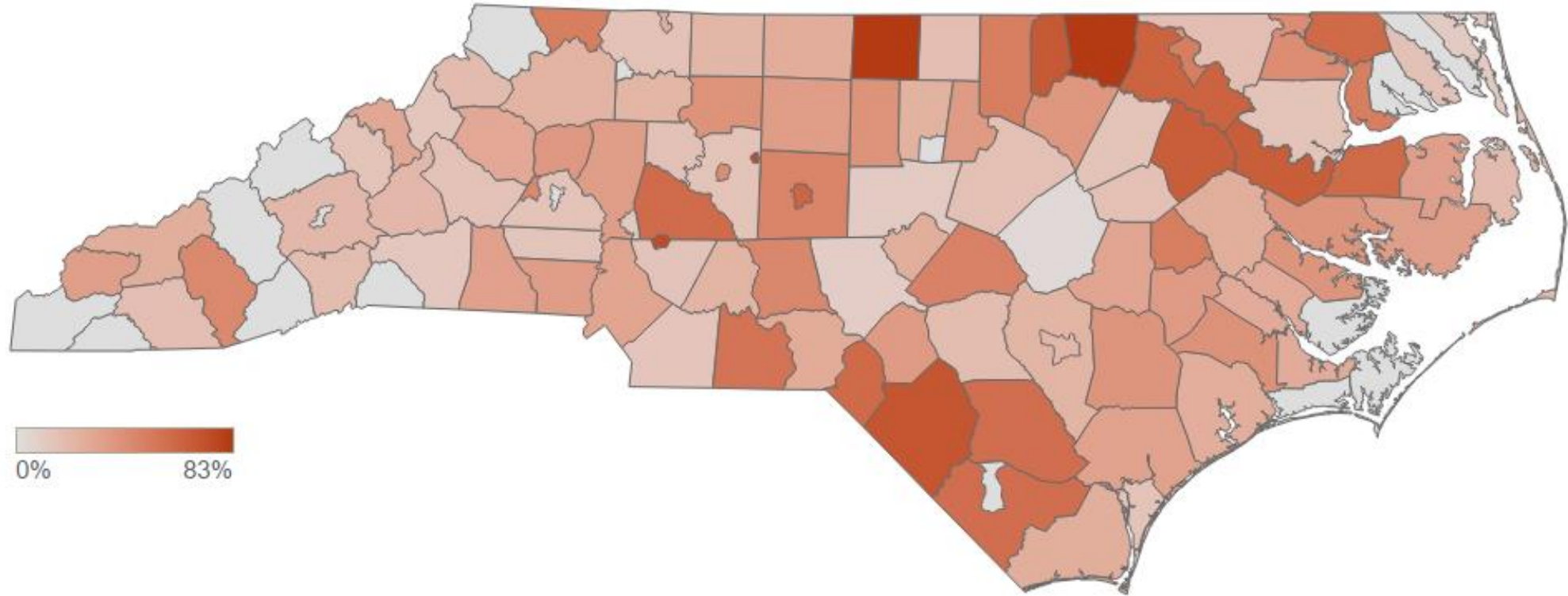
Is identified as low performing in any two of the last three years. A low-performing charter school has a school performance grade of 'D' or 'F' and a growth status of 'Met' or 'Not Met'.

# Low-Performing Schools and Districts

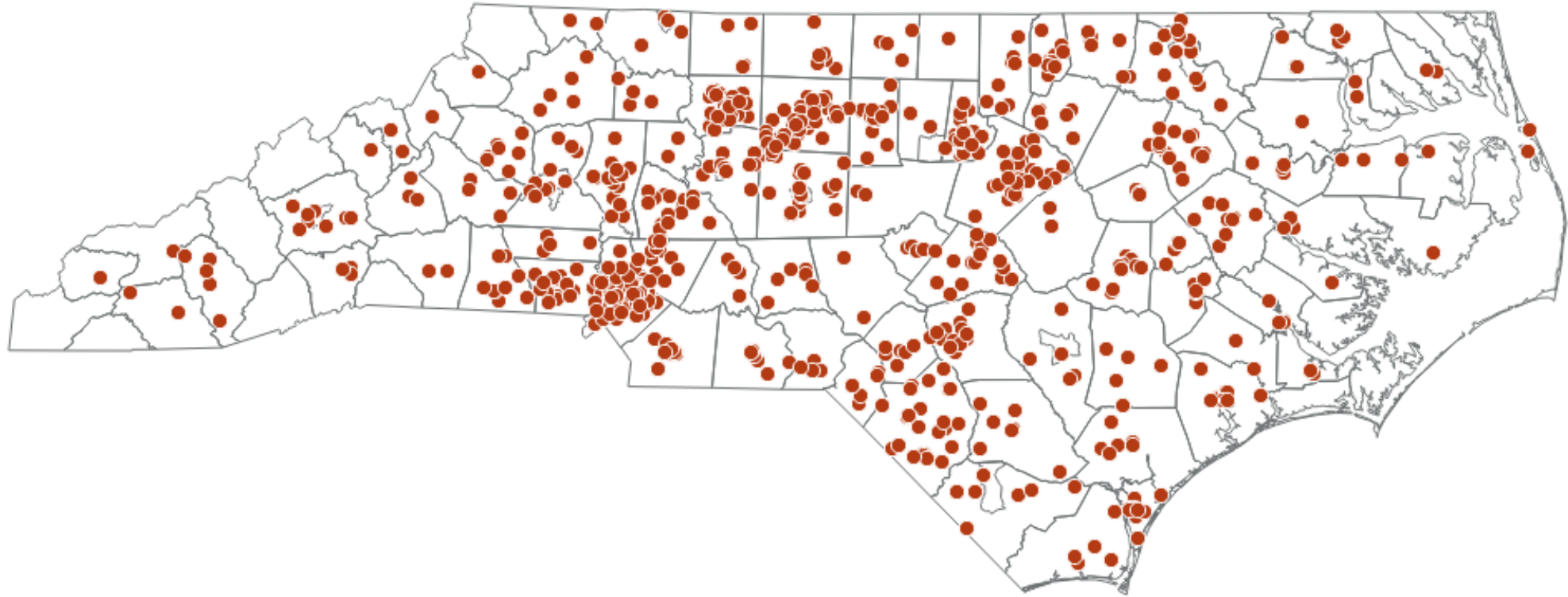
Number of schools by state designation

	2022	2023	2024
Low-Performing School	 864	 804	 735
Low-Performing District	 29	 25	 23
Continually Low-Performing School	 464	 658	 730
Continually Low-Performing Charter School	 35	 57	 59

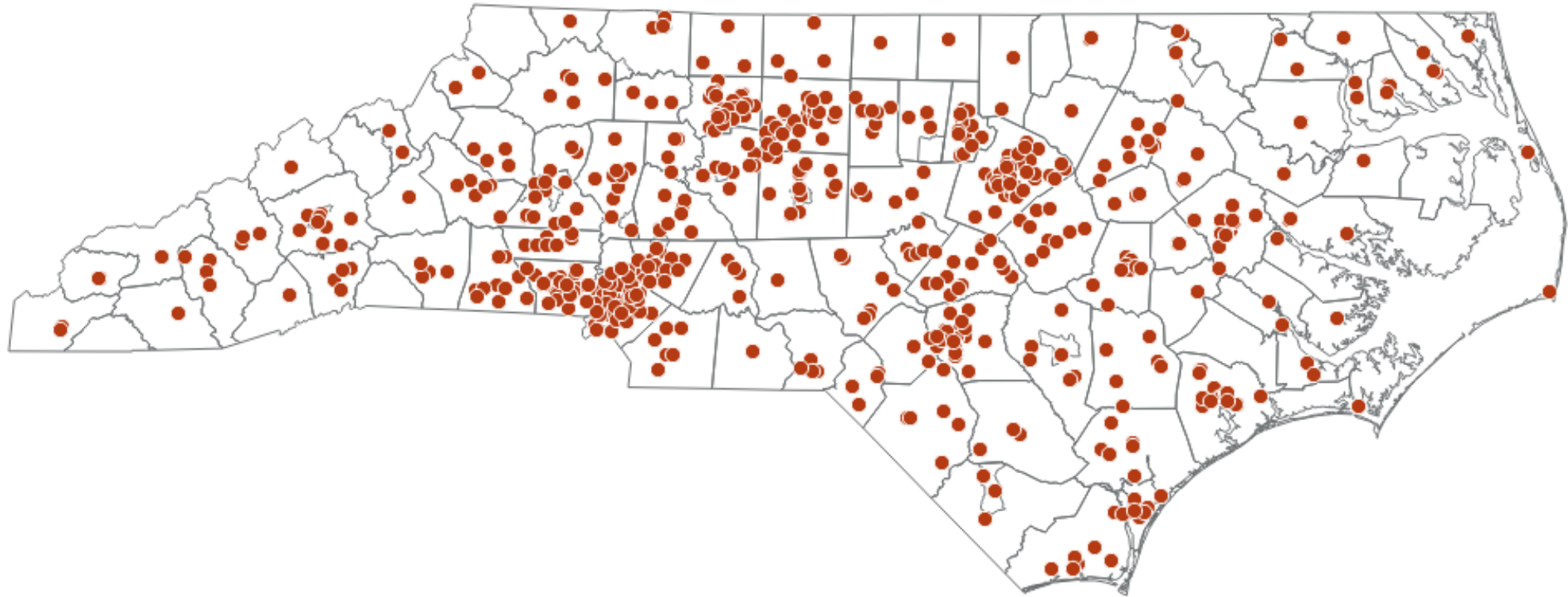
# Percentage of Low-Performing Schools by LEA



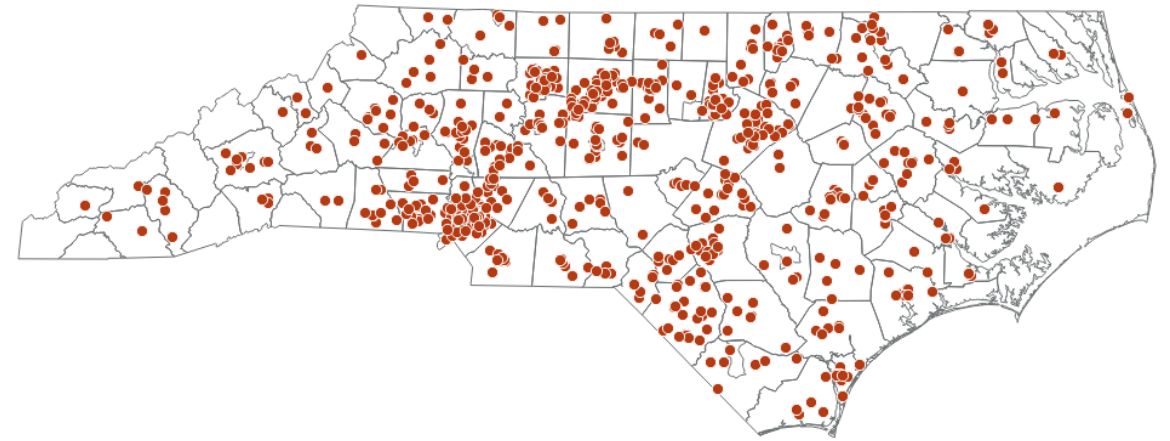
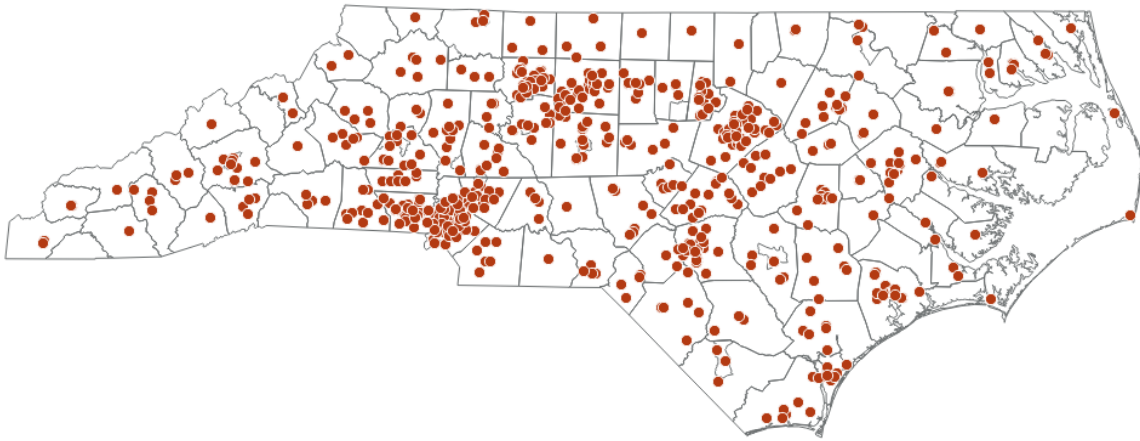
# 735 Low-Performing Schools (STATE)



# 582 TSI-Additional Targeted Support Schools (FEDERAL)



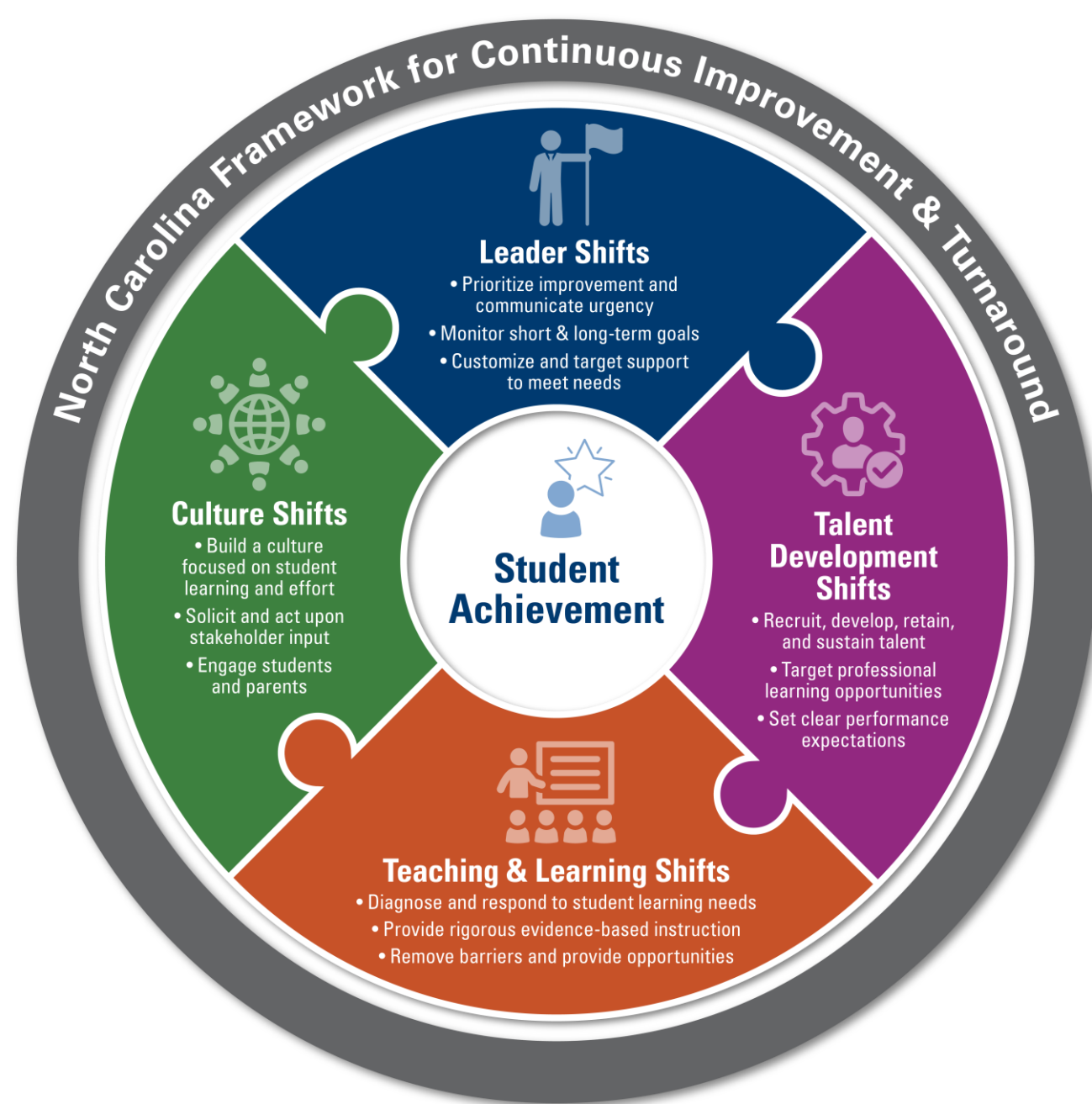
# Which Designation?





# Support for School and District Improvement





# School and District Improvement Plans

- Office of District & Regional Support and the Office of Charter Schools provided feedback to low-performing districts, schools, and charters within each region through NCStar.
- Plans for improvement submitted by low-performing districts and schools focused on practices that would help achieve yearly goals and were submitted in December 2023.
  - Many of the plans contained similar strategies for addressing the needs in low-performing schools, and the data suggests implications for ongoing professional development to continue to build the capacity of district and school personnel.
- In addition to the common themes observed, one common finding is the **limited coaching statewide that is occurring from district to schools regarding school improvement**. Many districts lack the human capital and resources to devote time to assist school administrators and/or school improvement teams.

# Trends And Patterns From Review Of School And District Plans

## Areas for Growth

- Plan is a compliance artifact that helps meet statutory requirements instead of a guiding, living document that drives improvement
- Inconsistent School Improvement Team meetings and documentation of meeting minutes that demonstrate actions taken regarding the plan
- Lack of understanding of a tiered-instructional model that contains interventions that help all students achieve success

## Promising Improvements

- Distribution of action steps and indicators in plans resulting in leadership capacity being built schoolwide and sustainability of transformative practices
- Increased use of performance measures that help the school keep track of progress towards goals and allow for data-driven decisions to be made throughout the school year
- Increased participation and membership of school improvement team members such that more voices are heard in decision-making process
- Stronger evidence of vision and aligned action for school implementation of effective practices

# ***Comprehensive Needs Assessments (CNA) and Follow-Through Support***

## 2023- 24 school year Diagnostic Services Overview:

- 71 CNA visits were conducted (69 schools visits and 2 district visits – a district visit consists of all schools in a district receiving a CNA and a culminating district office visit).
- 29 Targeted School Quality Reviews (TSQR) were conducted by the Diagnostic Services team – these visits are conducted for schools receiving Innovative Partnership Grants.
- Most schools that participated in a CNA also received a two-day unpacking training with their school improvement teams to support use of the report in planning around NCStar indicators using research-based protocols. Other follow-up support provided including additional check-ins.

**NEW!** Changes to this process being piloted in 2024-2025 with the new **Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL)** Pilot in partnership with WestEd and SERVE/RC6 Center

- New support structure for needs assessments

# Collective Efficacy: Agency-Wide Support for Improvement in Low-Performing Schools

## Office of Regional Support Services

Customized support for low-performing schools and LEAs include:

- Priority partnerships in each region focused on those LEAs requesting the most assistance and support with student performance
- Intensive planning with LEA leadership to customize support from NCDPI to increase academic achievement
- Professional learning on MTSS implementation
- Customized district and school level framework development and professional development on increasing student engagement in classrooms
- Middle school leadership and instructional support
- New principal transition and coaching support for instructional leadership
- Principal mentoring ESSER pilot project
- Working with central office leaders on high expectations and instructional rigor

# Collective Efficacy: Agency-Wide Support for Improvement in Low-Performing Schools

## Office Of Federal Programs

Ensures that federal and state education funds contribute to the goal of all students meeting or exceeding rigorous state standards. The office manages a large portfolio of federal grant funds while also monitoring and supporting schools and districts in their implementation of various improvement initiatives.

An analysis of agency staffing assigned in direct support of school improvement initiatives results in the following breakdown of funds between federal funds (across all ESEA funding sources) and state appropriations (estimates based on budget as of September 18, 2024):

- Federal Funds Salary & Benefits: 24 FTE - \$3,666,871.00
- State Appropriation Salary & Benefits: 8 FTE - \$1,195,442

Total Investment in School Improvement Agency Personnel: 32 FTE - \$ 4,862,313.00 (Federal Grants + State Appropriation)

- Agency personnel focused on school improvement support, but not necessarily exclusively assigned to providing support for state-designated low-performing schools or districts.
- Complexity of multiple designations applied to schools across North Carolina as required by federal accountability reporting in addition to requirements contained in state law.
  - Many schools with a low-performing state designation may also have a federal designation of CSI (Comprehensive Support and Improvement) or ATSI (Additional Targeted Support and Improvement), as well. This creates multiple layers of reporting and a significant number of required actions for school and district personnel when a state low-performing designation and associated requirements are in place in addition to a federal designation.

# Collective Efficacy: Agency-Wide Support for Improvement in Low-Performing Schools

## Office of Early Learning

The Office of Early Learning has developed a tiered coaching model to support an aligned system, from the state to student. The model includes 115 Early Literacy Specialists (ELS) assigned to each NC school district. These positions are designed to collaborate first and foremost with district leaders who support literacy implementation across the local school system. They should be a consistent member of the district's local planning team to bridge communication, support and resources aligned to ongoing evidence-based literacy best practices developed and provided by the state. Furthermore, each ELS directly provides an additional layer of support within at least two or three local schools each week. The ELS collaborates with the school leadership team to identify goals and priorities at each of their assigned focus schools. This support includes PLC guidance, professional development, ongoing coaching cycles and modeling in classrooms as needed. Support is differentiated based on school data and specific needs. The ELS coaching framework is unique to most coaching models with an intentional support that puts an emphasis on the overall larger system, funneling attention and support throughout the whole district, as well as an intentional, narrower stream of support for specific schools based on needs and data. Unlike most practices of selecting only low-performing schools, which extends temporary focused support until scores improve, this model is two-fold, supporting the larger system as well as priority schools within the larger system.

## Office of Charter Schools

The Office of Charter Schools (OCS) established a school improvement workflow in July of 2023 to elevate support for low-performing charter schools. OCS utilizes indicators of distress for early identification of struggling schools and collaborates across its office and within NCDPI to develop prevention strategies. Site visits occur pursuant to a site visit protocol and with standardized data forms and focus questions.

# Support for School and District Improvement

Looking Ahead



**“Do what you can, with what  
you've got, where you are.”**

Theodore Roosevelt

*Although this quote is widely attributed to Theodore Roosevelt, he credits it, in his Autobiography, Chapter IX, to Squire Bill Widener of Widener's Valley, Virginia—  
Theodore Roosevelt Center at Dickinson State University*

# Taking Stock: Where are we now?

Less, not more

- **Subtraction, not addition**

Piloting and refining existing tools

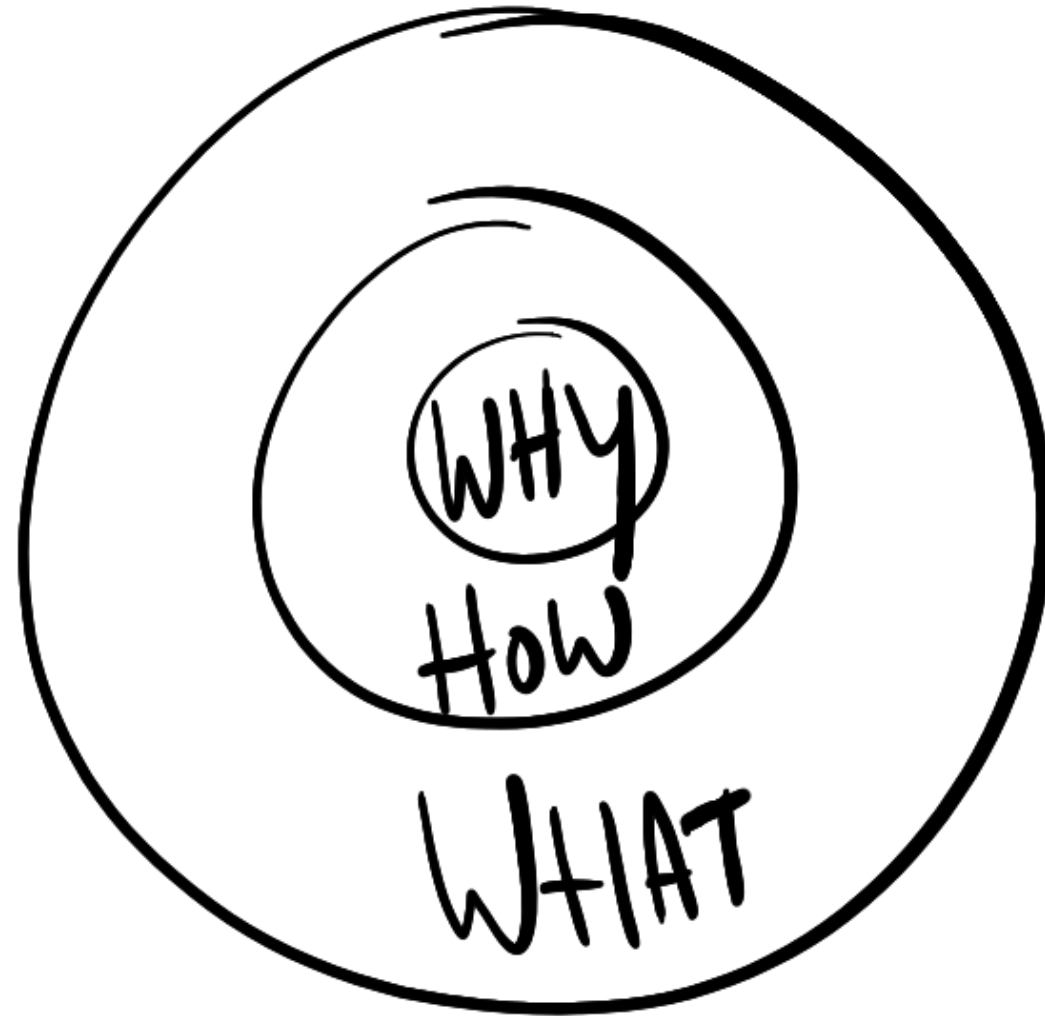
- CNA redesign (CALL), NCStar simplified form option, leveraging partnerships with districts
- Lessons learned from CARES, NCILA and Principal Mentoring Pilot

Focus on continuous improvement for all

- Not just low-performing

Intentionality and focus with framework and vision

- Pulling offices and program areas together at NCDPI
  - Intentional, regular collaboration
  - Coordinated communication when providing district support



# Focus Areas

## Intentional Continuous Improvement

- Partnerships supporting school and district improvement, regardless of designations or labels. Want to get better? We want to help.

## Building Capacity

- An agency strategy that supports improvement at the district level through partnership and relationship.

## Self-Efficacy and Empowerment: A continuum

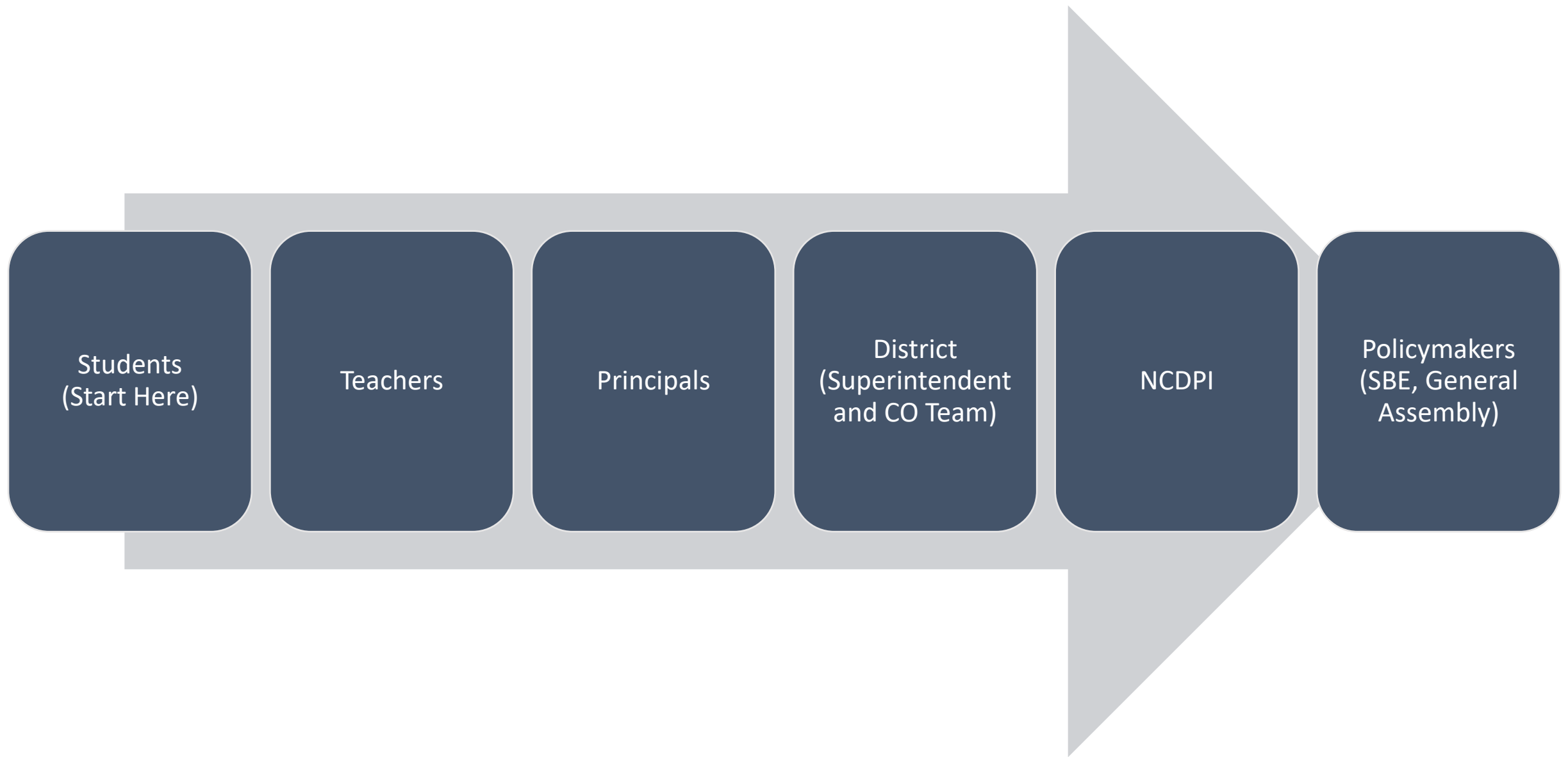
- Students are the focus, teachers are doing the work, principals guide improvement through instructional leadership, district leaders support principals and schools, and NCDPI supports superintendents and their leadership teams.

## Sustainability and Simplicity

- When growth happens, the students and teachers can say “we did this” and know how to keep improving.
- Leaders, at all levels, look for things to stop doing, stop reporting, or stop requiring—look for opportunities to streamline and simplify so teachers can teach, and principals can lead.

# Developing a Theory of Action:

A system of support from student to state.



# Next Steps

# Next Steps

- Continued coordination for best approach to providing support
  - Office of School Improvement, Regional Support, and Federal Programs
    - Regular protocols aiming for seamless integration of support
  - Regional Support Teams (cross-agency support)
    - Focus on improvement and partnerships with districts
    - Prioritized approach that also considers readiness and reciprocation of effort
  - Collaboration with other offices and divisions at NCDPI
  - External partnerships
    - NCPAPA: Assistant Principal Accelerator and Early Career Principals Academy
- Revisit strategy continuously
- Build initial **theory of action** with SBE in December



**"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."**

Shunryu Suzuki

