

Technical Assistance Topic

September 2026

ESEA Who? WSIF What? School Improvement Where? - A quick guide for school and district leaders

So...why do we have School Improvement?

School improvement exists to support schools and systems when students are not getting the outcomes they need for success. It is a process for identifying areas of need, understanding what is driving those needs, using evidence to select strategies, and monitoring whether those strategies improve outcomes.

The federal government has required states to identify and support schools needing additional improvement for decades. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) became federal law in 1965 as a civil rights law focused on expanding educational opportunities, primarily for students and communities facing poverty.

Over time, ESEA was reauthorized and changed. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) increased the focus on accountability and made achievement gaps visible. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB in 2015. ESSA continued the expectation that states assess school performance and identify schools that need additional support to improve outcomes.

So what does Washington do?

Washington uses the Washington School Improvement Framework (WSIF) as part of its state ESSA plan. WSIF combines state and federal accountability measures into a singular 1–10 score. The score includes the following measures:

Academic Achievement

- ELA proficiency
- Math proficiency

Student Growth

- ELA student growth
- Math student growth

Graduation

- Four-year graduation rate
- Extended-year graduation rates

English Language Progress

- Progress toward English language proficiency



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

School Quality & Student Success

- Regular attendance
- Ninth grade on-track
- Dual credit

The data are reported for the school and for student groups, helping schools look beyond the overall average and examine how different groups of students are experiencing school. A score identifies where to look more closely. School leaders then need to use additional quantitative and qualitative data to understand what is happening and why.

Why does Washington have Tiers?

Tiers are identified every three years to help match the level of support to the level and type of need.

Washington uses WSIF results and identification criteria to place schools into different levels of support. The purpose is not to rank schools. The purpose is to determine what level of support and improvement action is needed.

- **Foundational Support**— Schools that are not identified for one of the following tiers.
- **Tier 1** — Targeted Support: Focuses on one or two student groups that need additional support.
- **Tier 2** — More Targeted Support: Focuses on three or more student groups needing additional support.
- **Tier 3** — Comprehensive Support: Focuses on the school as a whole, including schools with significant overall performance concerns or graduation concerns.
- **Tier 3 Plus** — Highest Level of Support: Provides additional support for schools that continue to meet Tier 3 identification criteria across cycles.

Start Here

Check your school's WSIF (and local) data → Identify the area(s) of greatest need → Ask what the data are telling you → Examine the system and resources contributing to the problem → Take action → Monitor the impact.

The goal is to improve the system so all students experience better outcomes.

To learn more or request support, contact: [School Improvement](#).