

2024 OFFICE OF SCHOOL QUALITY REPORT FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY

A report to the General Assembly to overview the challenges,
five-year planning, and program of evaluation for the Office of School Quality

July 1, 2024



TRANSMITTAL LETTER



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

P.O. BOX 2120

RICHMOND 23218-2120

July 1, 2024

The Honorable Luke E. Torian, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
4222 Fortuna Plaza, Suite 659
Dumfries, VA 22025

The Honorable Sam Rasoul, Chair
House Education Committee
P.O. Box 13842
Roanoke, VA 24037

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas, Chair
Senate Finance and Appropriations
P.O. Box 700
Portsmouth, Virginia 23705-0700

The Honorable Ghazala F. Hashmi, Chair
Senate Education and Health Committee
P.O. Box 396
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Dear Chair Lucas, Chair Hashmi, Chair Torian, Chair Rasoul:

Please accept the Virginia Department of Education's Office of School Quality Initial Report on the current challenges, restructure and focus of the Office of School Quality with the Virginia Department of Education pursuant to the requirements of the School Improvement (18501) funding in item [120c of chapter 2, 2024 Acts of Assembly](#).

The Department of Education shall submit an initial report that contains: (i) the level of staffing, amount of funding, and opportunities and challenges of the office for FY 2023 and FY 2024; (ii) the planned organizational structure, staffing, and resource needs of the office over the next five years; (iii) the goals and expected outcomes of the office and how the office will collaborate with staff and units within the department of education to support schools based on their specific needs; and (iv) a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the office, including feedback from school divisions and stakeholders to determine both the impact and quality of the assistance received.

If you have questions or require additional information relating to this transmittal, please do not hesitate to contact Brendon Albon, Assistant Superintendent of School Quality, at brendon.albon@doe.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa Coons".

Dr. Lisa Coons
Superintendent of Public Instruction

CURRENT CHALLENGES OF THE OFFICE OF SCHOOL QUALITY

The Office of School Quality is part of the Division of Performance and Support within the Virginia Department of Education. The Office of School Quality (OSQ) focuses on schools identified by federal accountability and/or state accreditation systems and how they are improving overall student achievement, reducing performance gaps for federally identified student groups, and striving to meet overall student performance expectations. The Office of School Quality, hereby referred to as OSQ, accomplishes these focal areas by providing guidance, resources, and technical assistance grounded in evidence-based interventions to inform school improvement efforts and improve student outcomes.

Currently, Virginia is one of a few states that utilizes a bifurcated state and federal accountability system to identify schools for support, and as a result, this duplicative set of systems has been one of the largest challenges for OSQ to overcome. Within the two systems, the federal requirements (Every Student Succeeds Act-ESSA) for English learners, graduation, and overall student performance measurements are very different than the state expectations (Accreditation) for measuring English Learner performance, high school graduation, student mastery and student academic growth. As a result, both systems have different measurements for minimum student performance, reporting requirements, school identification criteria, and focal areas for intervention support. In the statewide accountability system, a school is either “accredited,” “accredited with conditions,” or not accredited. However, the federal accountability system identifies schools as Comprehensive, Additional Targeted, or Targeted Support and Improvement. OSQ manages both systems of supports, with over 200 schools identified across both systems. Schools and divisions have required significant guidance in navigating and understanding the requirements of each of the different systems and the varying implications of state identification versus federal identification.

Moreover, the recent impacts from the pandemic and data from the 2022 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) have shown that Virginia’s students struggled immensely during the pandemic. This gap in performance was even greater in 2023 when the SOL scores showed more than half of all third through eighth graders (334,687 students) are at risk or failed the Reading SOL. In Math, two thirds of all third through eighth graders (327,598 students) are at risk or failed. State level assessment results have also shown that some student groups have struggled to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. For example, Hispanic and Black third through eighth grade students experienced the most significant declines in math performance from 2018-2019 to 2022-2023, both at 20% and at 7% and 8% respectively in reading. However, the current accreditation system does not transparently communicate to the public the realities of student performance. In the current accreditation system, approximately 88% of schools were accredited in 2023 and were not identified as needing support in the 2023-2024 school year. Therefore, the outdated accreditation system signals that the overwhelming majority of schools are doing quite well while actual student performance data shows a very different story.

Additionally, both systems provide different improvement expectations with two separate sets of funds (federal and state). The federal plan and funds are “pass-through funds” and are designated

for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) as school improvement funds.¹ Title I allocations are the overarching funding for the direct support to Title I schools not meeting federal accountability criteria. Of these funds, 95% are distributed directly to schools to cover the costs of implementing evidence-based interventions. The remaining 5% are dedicated to OSQ personnel costs who work solely with federal identification and federally identified schools.

The state budget also allocates funds to OSQ to provide direct school division support, office staffing, and oversight of grant funds to schools and divisions for targeted implementation of programs. These funds support fully staffing the OSQ office and additional supports for schools identified under the current accreditation identification system and divisions in need of significant support currently under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)² with the Board of Education. MOU school divisions represent divisions that not only have composite schools struggling to make academic improvements, but also have broader division architecture that struggle to meet the overall basic expectations of the state's accreditation plan. Currently, the OSQ team supports five school divisions that have the deepest challenges statewide.

Therefore, OSQ currently runs two separate intervention and intervention planning and funding models to provide support for largely the same struggling schools across Virginia. Those with state identification can only use supports and funds from the state allocation for the Office of School Quality, while schools with federal identification must meet much narrower expectations for federal expenditures and support. This bifurcated system has caused major challenges to efficiently assign Department staff to schools, support corrective action planning, and allocate federal and state funds efficiently. These challenges have caused OSQ to focus primarily on the state's accreditation system and on state requirements in statute. As a result, OSQ has been unable to expend \$49 million of federal funds over the last five years, or approximately \$10 million dollars a year.

To compound the focused funding on school improvement, divisions have received a significant influx of federal ESSER funds (in both FY23 and 24) to support schools as they address the impacts of the pandemic and support students as they return from the pandemic. This one-time allocation (or disbursement) of ESSER funds has left divisions with an abundance of resources but has not always given them clear directionality on how to spend those funds to impact student achievement. Unlike the needs assessment and improvement planning requirements under school improvement awards, school divisions had a great deal of autonomy on how to use the federal ESSER funds in a decentralized fashion. As a result, the expiring funds have not necessarily

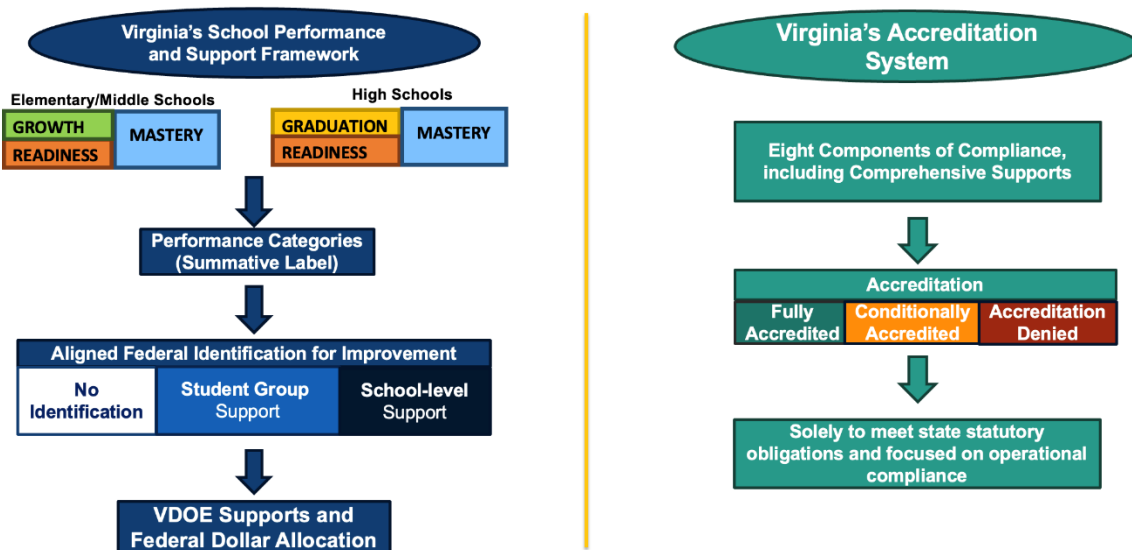
¹ The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that schools identified as comprehensive, targeted, and additional targeted support and improvement are required to develop and implement a support and improvement plan for the school to improve student outcomes. The plan must be informed by indicators used for identification, include evidence-based interventions, be based on a school-level needs assessment, identify resource inequities, be approved by the school division, and be implemented and monitored (ESSA § 1111 (d)(1)(B); § 1111 (d)(2)(B); § 1111 (d)(2)(C)).

² A Memorandum of Understanding: School divisions that do not demonstrate evidence of progress in adopting or implementing corrective action plans for a school or schools with indicators at Level Three shall be required to enter into a memorandum of understanding between the local school board and the board. The memorandum of understanding shall delineate responsibilities for the local school board, the board, school division staff, school staff, and department staff and shall also include required essential actions to improve student achievement and to improve performance on school quality indicators.

been focused on evidenced-based tools to improve student outcomes and many divisions have not yet spent all available funds to date.

SOLUTIONS IN THE PERFORMANCE AND SUPPORT FRAMEWORK

For these reasons and many other challenges, the Virginia Board of Education is currently working to revise the regulations establishing the Standards of Accreditation, creating one accountability system aligned to federal requirements defined in ESSA and creating one coherent system of school identification and support. Since 2022, the state board has had numerous state and national experts present and facilitate the design of a single coherent and transparent system. This new accountability model, the School Performance and Support Framework, has had many iterations over the past eighteen months based on over 20 public comment discussion sessions and several months’ working board meeting sessions, with the latest version clearly identifying schools that need the most support in providing high-quality instruction for all students. The new School Performance and Support Framework is grounded in assessing how elementary and middle schools ensure students’ year-over-year growth, their mastery of expected grade level standards, and their readiness to move to the next grade band. In high school, the performance framework focuses on student mastery, graduation, and readiness for postsecondary success in employment, enrollment in postsecondary education and/or enlistment in the military.



This School Performance and Support Framework will measure the overall performance of schools and will also report on the performance of federally defined student groups. Most importantly, the re-designed Framework merges the state and federal components into one accountability system that will allow both OSQ and school divisions to create one focused needs assessment, identify a clear set of evidence-based interventions, and develop one coherent support plan to improve the academic performance of students at the school. This framework

requires updates to Virginia’s ESSA plan as well as updates to the regulatory framework that governs the accreditation system.

The state Board of Education will vote on the final re-design of the ESSA state plan in July, and the regulatory changes for the state plan are expected to be complete in September 2025. The merged redesign of the new Performance and Support Framework will be a component of the accreditation system. Moreover, the merging of both federal and state systems will allow schools and school divisions to complete one needs assessment based on one coherent set of performance measurements, implement students supports around one set of intervention requirements, and will be able to maximize multiple fund sources into one program of supports for those students and schools that need the most. This will also ensure governing boards can better monitor progress, use of monies, and impact to date. Finally, the redesign will also create a stronger set of expectations, guidance, and support for those divisions in “MOU status.” MOU school divisions will be identified by standardized criteria, receive deeper organizational supports, and will be eligible for exit from MOU status on standardized improvement criteria.

OFFICE OF SCHOOL QUALITY RE-DESIGN TO AN EVIDENCE BASED MODEL

Beginning in the 2023-2024 schoolyear, the work of OSQ was guided by the new [Virginia Support Framework](#), released in the Fall of 2023. This Support Framework focuses on four critical areas and is based on the research-driven [WestEd Model](#) of rapid “turn around” and school improvement. The Virginia Support Framework contains four critical focal areas for school that are evidence-based:

- 1) Academic Supports
- 2) Staffing Pipeline Development
- 3) Professional Learning Supports
- 4) School Climate Supports

These areas provide a clear and collaborative focus for the OSQ office and help the Department’s team better support divisions and schools to analyze current student performance metrics, staffing patterns, and climate data through the required [needs assessment process](#). From the needs assessment, school divisions are required to create a school-based support plan that meets the requirements of the Virginia Corrective Action Plan and the requirements of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).³ School divisions work with OSQ staff to provide coordinated and collaborative support development when implementing the support plan.

³ Current regulations for the Standards of Accreditation, under [8VAC20-131-400](#), requires a Corrective Action Plan of schools “if any school quality indicator is at Level Three, the school and school division shall work cooperatively and in consultation with the department to develop a corrective action plan, which shall be incorporated as a component of the school's comprehensive, unified, long-range plan. In developing such plan, the school and school division, in consultation with the department, shall determine the issues and conditions that are likely contributing to the school's performance on the indicator and plan and implement essential actions and research-based strategies to achieve improvement to the Level One standard.”

Beginning in the 2023-24 school year, the needs assessment and support plan focused on these four research-based areas and allowed a common understanding between schools and OSQ on where to focus when determining evidence-based interventions and how to bring some coherence to school improvement. Moreover, a cross-functioning VDOE team now conducts virtual and in-person touchpoints with school division personnel to equip them to support their identified schools.

Office Structure

Since the pandemic, the number of schools struggling to meet state accreditation and/or federal accountability standards has continued to increase. While one-time federal funding through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) covered school supports and the initial expansion of OSQ, these funds will sunset during the 2025-26 school year. Five of the fifteen OSQ staff have been funded by federal ESSER recovery dollars over the past two years.

Given the impact of the pandemic on student outcomes, the Department chose to strengthen the leadership of the OSQ office and moved from a director-led team to an Assistant Superintendent led team that expands the oversight of the work within the OSQ. Further, the organization moved away from a historically compliance focus to prioritizing intentional supports and coaching for divisions and schools in need. This philosophical shift and the focus on the Virginia Support Framework mentioned earlier in this report has caused the need to restructure how the OSQ team manages workflow and supports to schools.

This new position allowed for an increased instructional focus and redesign of the support structure, while coordinating more efficiently across the Department's divisions. Direct support to those divisions that have a Memorandum of Understanding with the Board of Education is provided by the office's Director, who also leads the field teams working closely with the MOU divisions. The associate director currently manages the federal supports, including the allocation of federal school improvement grants and the selection of evidence-based interventions and more rigorous interventions, as well as manages all communications with the US Department of Education on ESSER compliance and communicates information to State Education Agency as well as Local Education Agencies. School quality coordinators and specialists are assigned to regions to lead support in developing needs assessment and support planning and collaborate with OSQ to ensure they have the resources they need.

The Department has also established contracts with subject matter experts who have deep knowledge and experience in school improvement and turnaround models, with a focus on the four areas of the Virginia Support Framework. These consultants bring current research and evidence-based interventions to support the OSQ team as they work to support schools and divisions more effectively.

Finally, the OSQ has worked to collaboratively approach school support with other divisions within the agency. The team has worked to create a continuum of supports under the Virginia Support Framework. Local school divisions receive varying levels of direct support based on their needs and student performance. Some receive Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports from program

offices like the Division of Teaching and Learning; and others may need more intensive Tier 3 supports directly from OSQ or from contracted experts. These supports are generated from the Support Toolkit. In this Support Toolkit, all research, agency resources, knowledge of approved programs, evidence-based interventions and grants are sorted according to the four critical areas of the Virginia Support Framework. Moreover, the Virginia Support Framework includes areas of focus beyond the work of its office and includes a coherent set of supports from the Teaching and Learning Division, the division of Teacher Education and Licensure, as well as supports from Special Populations, Parental Engagement, and Behavioral Health. OSQ will continue to work with each divisional office and external partners to provide a continuum of supports based on each school and division's overall support plan.

FIVE YEAR PRIORITIES

The work of OSQ over the next five years will continue to be grounded in the Virginia Support Framework: Academic Supports, Staffing Supports, Professional Learning Supports, and School Climate Supports. Much of the work of OSQ will focus on expanding the supports and services of the office in the four areas of the framework. For example, the OSQ office will partner with teaching and learning to ensure that struggling schools have the strongest supports for implementing the Virginia Literacy Act and will collaboratively review the required division literacy plan. Additionally, OSQ will work with those schools and divisions who continue to struggle with chronic absenteeism and help them receive coaching and support to develop individualized plans that reflect recommendations from the Office of Behavioral Health and Wellness.

There is great opportunity for OSQ in how they work with divisions and schools over the next five years given the work of the Virginia Board of Education to develop and implement the new School Performance and Support Framework to support student and school performance. The work of the Board is grounded in setting high expectations for every student and providing transparent actionable information to the public, but also aims to create one system of intentional support for schools. The new School Performance and Support Framework will be aligned to federal requirements, which is the primary source of funding for OSQ. The new Framework combines the federal and state systems and provides easier navigation for divisions and schools in developing support plans. Divisions that are under a Memorandum of Understanding will also be identified based on clear entry and exit criteria tied to the number of schools receiving support in their division, ensuring divisions with the highest need are receiving support.

As requested by the General Assembly, the department has outlined below the use of the additional 1.9 million dollars allocated in the final budget.

| | |
|--|--|
| Priority 1: Restructure and Expand the Office | |
| <p>The purpose for OSQ is to directly coach and support schools and divisions through their efforts to improve academic outcomes for all students. The school support specialists would be more effective if the Department lowered the ratio of support specialists to schools as indicated in the 2020 JLARC report. Current ratios require each specialist to manage continuous improvement needs assessments and improvement plans for 30 identified schools with most intensive needs</p> <p>Additional staff would reduce caseloads and allow specialists to provide deeper support for the most struggling schools.</p> | <p>Expenditure: Increase staffing by 5 school support specialists (into the general fund)</p> |
| | <p>Calculations: \$114,600 salary per specialist + benefits (30%) = \$149,000 per specialist</p> |
| | <p>Total Cost: \$745,000</p> |
| Priority 2: Develop Support Toolkit aligned to the Virginia Support Framework | |
| <p>As OSQ aligns all division and school support with the Virginia Support Framework, OSQ has started working with expert consultants to develop the Support Toolkit for divisions and schools. The toolkit provides both research and practical resources that will assist schools in designing their school improvement plans (corrective action plans). These resources also align to the work of division offices to ensure schools and divisions have coherence in their supports.</p> | <p>Expenditure: One time expenses for subject matter experts to design theory of action in toolkit</p> |
| | <p>Calculations: \$85,000 for subject matter experts to finalize the Support Toolkit</p> |
| | <p>Total Cost: \$85,000</p> |
| Priority 3: Develop a list of Virginia Support Framework Evidence-Based Interventions | |
| <p>School specialists will use the Support Toolkit to support and coach divisions and schools' selection and implementation of evidence-based practices as determined by local data identifying challenges that might be causing poor student academic performance. OSQ is beginning the process of collaborating with the divisions inside the agency and with national experts to include tiered evidence-based interventions for schools and divisions to select and implement using their school improvement federal funds for school improvement. In the future, schools will be able to use both federal and state flowthrough dollars to implement interventions.</p> | <p>Expenditure: One time expenses for subject matter experts to design evidence-based interventions in alignment with toolkit from Priority 2.</p> |
| | <p>Calculations: \$50,000 for each of subject matter experts for three of four VSP areas that are left to be developed. The academic framework is complete.</p> |
| | <p>Total Cost: \$150,000</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Priority 4: Collaborate with VDOE teams to develop the Tiered Levels of Support</p> | |
| <p>VDOE is embarking on a new support framework that is based on three tiers of support: Tier 1 (available to all divisions), Tier 2 (available to schools that need targeted supports), and Tier 3 (available to Comprehensive and Additional Targeted Schools and MOU Divisions). The primary work of OSQ in the long run is to provide direct support to those Tier 3 divisions who either have Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) schools, Board of Education MOU divisions, OSQ will also support the transition of Tier 2 supports for Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) schools and those schools accelerating out of their school improvement status. Schools that no longer need Tier 3 status will continue to receive Tier 2 and Tier 1 supports to ensure they have a successful transition out of school improvement status.</p> | <p>Expenditure: Time allocations for division coherence work within VDOE</p> |
| | <p>Calculations: n/a</p> |
| | <p>Total Cost: n/a</p> |
| <p>Priority 5: Develop collaborative regionally-based Professional Learning Communities with school divisions currently implementing the improvement process</p> | |
| <p>OSQ will establish eight regional support models similar to Early Childhood and Special Populations. While regional support teams will have expertise and provide support within those areas, the restructure of support specialists into regional support specialist teams will also work with geographically based institutions of higher education and will hire part-time consultants to provide specific support in implementing evidence-based strategies from improvement plans.</p> | <p>Expenditure: Subject Matter Experts to support evidenced-based interventions in each region</p> |
| | <p>Calculations: \$40,000 for each of the eight superintendent regions to engage with subject matter expert supports-dependent on regional need and availability of funds</p> |
| | <p>Total Cost: \$320,000</p> |
| <p>Priority 6: Redefine the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to provide intensive division-wide support</p> | |
| <p>Under the current regulations guiding the Standards of Accreditation, local school boards may enter a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Virginia Board of Education to receive additional support if they request this support. School divisions that do not demonstrate evidence of progress in adopting or implementing corrective action plans for a school or schools are required to enter a Memorandum of Understanding between the local school board and the Board. The MOU delineates</p> | <p>Expenditure: Subject Matter Experts to provide intensive supports to MOU school divisions</p> |
| | <p>Calculations: \$100,000 for each MOU school division to support additional</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>responsibilities for the local school board, the Virginia Board of Education, school division staff, school staff, and department staff and includes required essential actions to improve student achievement and to improve performance on school quality indicators.</p> | <p>accreditation needs (expected 5-7 MOU school divisions in redesign)</p> |
| <p>The redesign of the Board’s School Performance and Support Framework will require school divisions with a certain percentage of struggling schools to enter into a MOU to ensure that the school division and the struggling schools have deeper supports. This change will help to ensure that struggling schools and divisions are guaranteed the most intensive support from the OSQ office. MOU divisions will not only receive supports in the four areas of the Virginia Support Framework, but their MOU must also outline basic accreditation requirements around governance, central office staffing, operational management, and fiscal expenditures.</p> | <p>Total Cost: Estimated \$600,000</p> |
| <p>Overall Additional General Assembly Allocation</p> | <p>Total: \$1,900,000</p> |

PLANS TO EVALUATE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE OFFICE

The overall goal of OSQ is to sustain improvements for student achievement in every school across the Commonwealth and to ensure every student has a high-quality learning experience that allows them to reach their postsecondary goals.

To that end, the Department will be establishing a stronger program evaluation component within the OSQ.

Step 1: Develop a continuous evaluation process to learn more about the successes or challenges of school improvement within Virginia schools

Not only should there be greater emphasis on celebrating schools that exit federal identification status, but OSQ will be taking a greater role in identifying the processes and best practices that helped the schools rise out of identified status, as well as elevating the interventions that were selected and implemented to move them. The work of OSQ is heavily driven by data from the accountability system, and there is a myriad of school-level data that can identify the need for school improvement efforts and implementation of instructional best practices. With the Virginia Support Framework, the Virginia Continuous Improvement Process, and structures that are being developed by OSQ, the office can now become more data-driven in understanding how schools are or are not improving year-over-year and long-term.

A major component of this action is to assess how the schools improved and what interventions were effective. These data are valuable as they will be leveraged to inform improvement practices in subsequent and similar schools. OSQ will then be able to use the results of the research to help schools select evidence-based interventions, utilize federal funding effectively, ensure fidelity of implementation, and ultimately sustain school improvement practices.

Step 2: Evaluate and report the frequency of schools achieving goals

The effectiveness of OSQ is based on several factors, most notably the number of schools making progress toward improved student academic achievement and other goals associated with the Virginia Support Framework. As a part of the previous goal, OSQ will set annual programmatic goals as well as outcome-driven, measurable goals. The effectiveness of the work and the justification for the proposed expansion of OSQ will be measured against how schools are exiting identification for support, and how schools are improving in their student performance outcomes. OSQ will set office targets following an analysis of data, setting clear targets such as a certain percentage of schools achieving the goals, they set in their support plans. Following data analysis, OSQ will establish annual targets such as the expectation that a set percentage of schools attaining their goals as outlined in their support plans. The department will continue to monitor schools that have exited out of intervention/improvement status and spotlight their best practices to ensure that the Tier 2 and Tier 1 supports are continuing to ensure student gaps are closing and student overall performance is improving.

Step 3: Gather and evaluate division and school feedback on OSQ supports

OSQ is committed to providing high-quality customer service to divisions and schools grounded in evidence-based school improvement practices. In addition to ensuring schools are improving, OSQ must always be improving their practices and services as well. To continuously improve, OSQ will begin seeking feedback on how it provides supports to divisions and schools across the Commonwealth.

A. OSQ will develop formal and informal feedback processes with school division personnel including principals, division staff and division superintendents. The Department will survey school-level and division-level leadership to ensure that the OSQ team are providing high levels of customer service for the schools and school divisions it serves. OSQ will develop and administer school and division surveys for the first time in the 2024-2025 school year. The data collected will be analyzed and used to develop a baseline that will inform customer-service oriented goals for OSQ, such as the percentage of divisions served that found OSQ support to be beneficial.

B. OSQ will develop and administer partner surveys, including seeking input from parents, for the first time in the 2024-2025 school year. The data will complement the school and division surveys and will refine the customer-service oriented goals for OSQ.