



Equitable  
Access  
Support  
Network

# State Plans to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators

## Implementation Tips Sheet #1: Setting Equity Goals

February 2016

Before a State can develop effective strategies to address its equity gaps, it needs to clearly define the problems it is trying to solve. This brief describes three tools State Education Agency (SEA) staff can use to clarify their thinking about why equity gaps exist and why particular strategies may work better than others to close them: theories of action, logic models, and SMART goals. A theory of action can help a State develop a hypothesis it can then test using data. A logic model, or visual representation of a theory of action, depicts the connections between gaps and strategies to address them. SEA staff can use these tools to create concrete, tangible SMART goals to guide equity plan implementation.

### Theories of Action and Logic Models

A **theory of action** can be an important tool to support State equity plan implementation. A theory of action is an “if..., then...” statement that demonstrates a causal relationship between the action and the intended outcome. Developing a theory of action can help SEA staff clarify the outcomes the State would like to achieve as a result of the equity work and, ultimately, ensure that the strategies described in the State’s equity plan clearly connect to these targeted outcomes.

A **logic model**, which guides the design and implementation of a program or policy, is a planning tool that can visually represent the work required to accomplish a theory of action. Logic models can serve as tools for building a relevant evaluation design.



### State Spotlight: Arkansas

During an equity plan development meeting, staff from the **Arkansas Department of Education** (ADE) developed a set of “if..., then...” statements to help clarify the SEA’s long-term outcomes and to connect the equity gaps outlined in the State plan with strategies to address them. With the support of the **South Central Comprehensive Center** (SC3), ADE formalized these statements into a theory of action in subsequent meetings. By connecting each “if..., then...” statement to its associated root causes and equity gaps, ADE was able to formalize their hypotheses about which evidence-based strategies were likely to improve learning outcomes for students. The actions and outcomes in the theory of action support ADE’s overall vision of “improved learning experiences for students in high poverty, high minority schools, which will in turn lead to greater preparedness for college and careers.”

ADE and SC3 also created a logic model to visually depict how equity gaps connect to root causes, strategies, and progress metrics outlined in the State’s equity plan.

In addition to guiding equity work internally at ADE, the theory of action and logic model have helped Arkansas districts understand their role in implementation.

The Equitable Access Support Network, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, offers collective and individualized technical assistance (TA) and resources to all 50 States and their districts. The Network will assist in the development and implementation of statewide equity plans and will provide assistance to States as they put in place strategies to ensure equitable access to excellent educators for all students.

## SMART Goals

SMART goals make a vision for change concrete and progress towards that vision measurable. A State can translate the outcomes identified in the theory of action or logic model into tangible goals.

SMART goals are:

- **Specific and Strategic:** Goals address what, why, who, where, when, and which and are aligned with the State's top equitable access priorities.
- **Measurable:** Goals are quantifiable and/or establish tangible indicators of progress.
- **Action-oriented:** Goals use active verbs to identify key actions.
- **Rigorous, Realistic, and Results-focused:** Goals are challenging but doable and articulate what will be different when they are achieved.
- **Timed and Tracked:** Goals contain specific deadlines.



### State Spotlight: Connecticut

In its *Equitable Access to Excellent Educators* plan, the **Connecticut State Department of Education** (CSDE) outlines clear, measurable objectives for each of its six strategies to address equity gaps.

For example, the objectives for Strategy 2 – Strengthen Preparation, Support, and Ongoing Development of Teachers are:

1. Between 2017 and 2020, the percentage of beginning teachers who report that their pre-service field placement prepared them well for their job will increase by 5% each year.
2. Between 2017 and 2020, the percentage of teachers from identified schools who serve as CSDE Field Advisors will increase by 5% each year.<sup>1</sup>
3. Between 2017 and 2020, the percentage of teachers who stay 5 years or more in high-poverty, high-minority schools will increase by 5% each year.

These goals meet the SMART criteria: They are **Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Rigorous and Realistic, and Timed**.

<sup>1</sup>This objective addresses Sub-strategy 2C: "Provide teachers with increased opportunities to serve in leadership roles." CSDE Field Advisors are part of the Connecticut Practitioner Network of teacher leaders. Field Advisors serve on short-term, task-based projects such as reviewing curriculum frameworks.

## Progression from non-SMART to SMART Goals

The sample goals below show how non-SMART goals can be modified to incorporate all of the SMART criteria.

Sample Goal	Missing Smart Criteria	Smart Goal
By 2022, State X will reduce the gap in inexperienced, unqualified, and out-of-field teachers between schools in the highest and lowest poverty quartiles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific and Strategic: The goal does not address how it will reduce the gap in inexperienced, unqualified, and out-of-field teachers.</li> <li>• Measurable: The goal is not quantifiable and does not establish concrete indicators of progress.</li> <li>• Action-oriented: The goal does not identify key actions for the State.</li> </ul>	By 2022, State X will reduce by 50% the gap in inexperienced, unqualified, and out-of-field teachers between schools in the highest and lowest poverty quartiles by requiring educator preparation programs to train and place more effective teachers.

**Practice:** In the table below, write one of the goals from your State’s plan, evaluate it against the SMART criteria, and rewrite to make it a SMART goal.

Goal	Smart Criteria	Revised Smart Goal
	<input type="checkbox"/> Specific and Strategic <input type="checkbox"/> Measurable <input type="checkbox"/> Action-oriented <input type="checkbox"/> Rigorous, Realistic, and Results-focused <input type="checkbox"/> Timed and Tracked	

## Engaging LEAs in Goal Setting

A SEA's theory of action will likely include strategies that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) will be responsible for implementing. LEAs may also have a deeper understanding of the extent of equity gaps and the root causes, so it is important to include LEAs as partners in the goal-setting process. For example, States can provide to LEAs<sup>2</sup>:

- Written **guidance documents** outlining LEAs' roles and responsibilities for equity work. Guidance documents can be printed or online, and can also include webinars and presentations.
- **Virtual support** and opportunities to engage with SEA staff, including webinars, conferences, and videos.
- Opportunities to collaborate and share resources and strategies with other LEAs at regional or statewide **conferences or convenings**.
- **Direct, targeted technical assistance** to build LEAs' capacity for equity work.

## Where Can My State Find More Information?

States that would like to refine their theory of action, logic model, and/or equity goals may reach out to the **EASN, comprehensive centers**, or program officers in the U.S. Department of Education's **Office of State Support** for assistance.

Additional resources include: AEM's **Logic Model Toolkit** that provides essential information needed to create high-quality logic models and includes an annotated

<sup>2</sup> Center on Great Teachers & Leaders at American Institutes for Research, *The Equitable Access Implementation Playbook* (2015), accessed February 3, 2016, [http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/Supporting\\_LEAS.pdf](http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/Supporting_LEAS.pdf).



## State Spotlight: Massachusetts

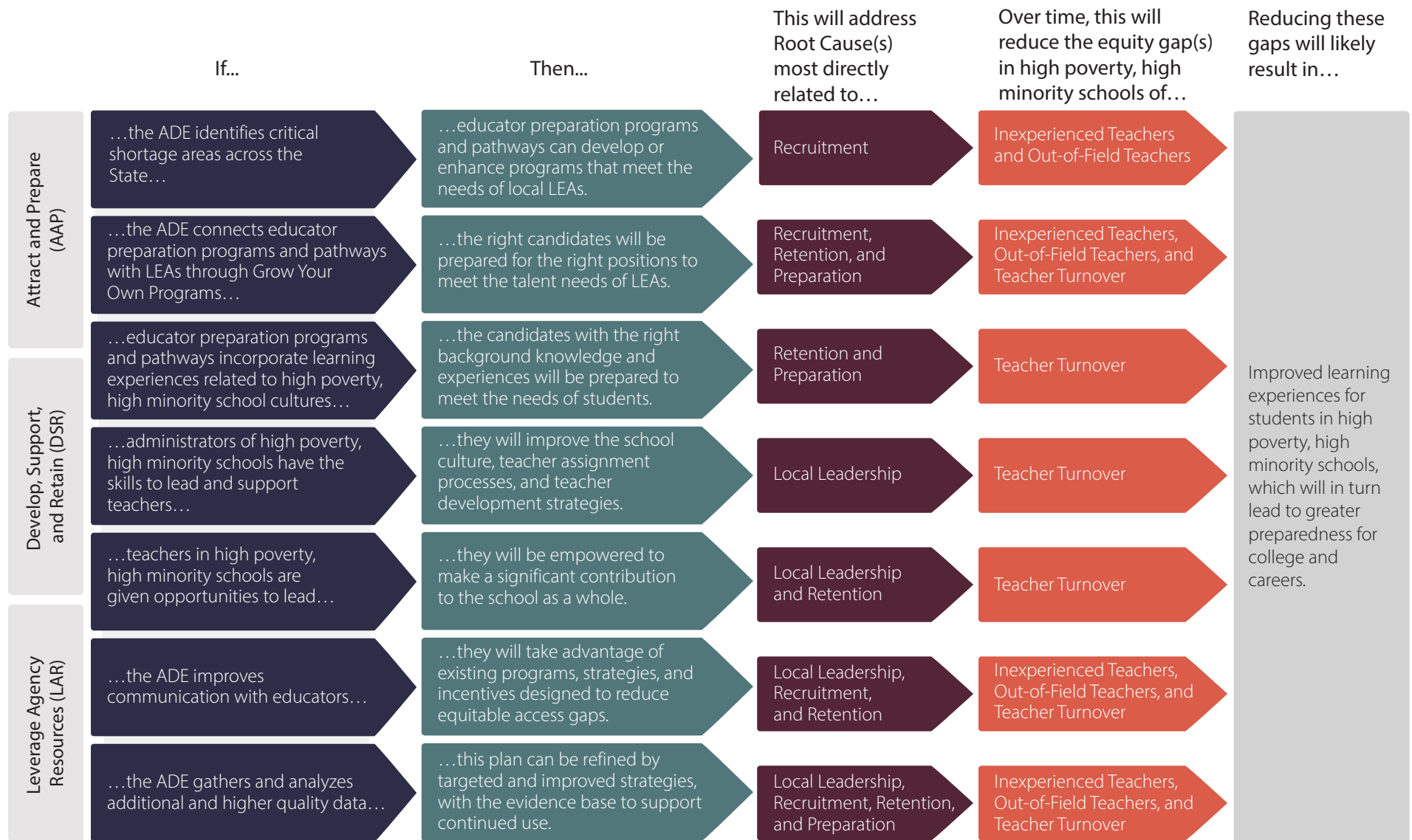
The **Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education** engaged nine LEAs in goal setting through the State's Professional Learning Network. During one-day assessment workshops facilitated by the **Education Delivery Institute**, the LEAs identified equity gaps using district- and school-level data, showing student subgroups' access to experienced teachers, out-of-field teachers, and teachers rated Proficient/ Exemplary. Participating LEAs prioritized one to two strategies from the State's equity plan, defined outcomes, and began to discuss metrics and feedback loops.

The LEAs in the Professional Learning Network met again for a mid-point convening to share strategies, identify outcome metrics, set goals and benchmarks, and determine progress metrics. The SEA holds monthly check-in calls with each LEA to track progress against goals, and LEAs will participate in cross-site visits to collaborate and share their progress.

logic model template that offers a basic structure and instructions for developing logic models, and REL Pacific's **Logic Models: A Tool for Effective Program Planning, Collaboration, and Monitoring**. This tool explains how the four components of logic models—resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes—relate to one another to provide a visual display of a program's mechanics and structure.

# Appendix A: Arkansas Department of Education's Theory of Action and Logic Model<sup>3</sup>

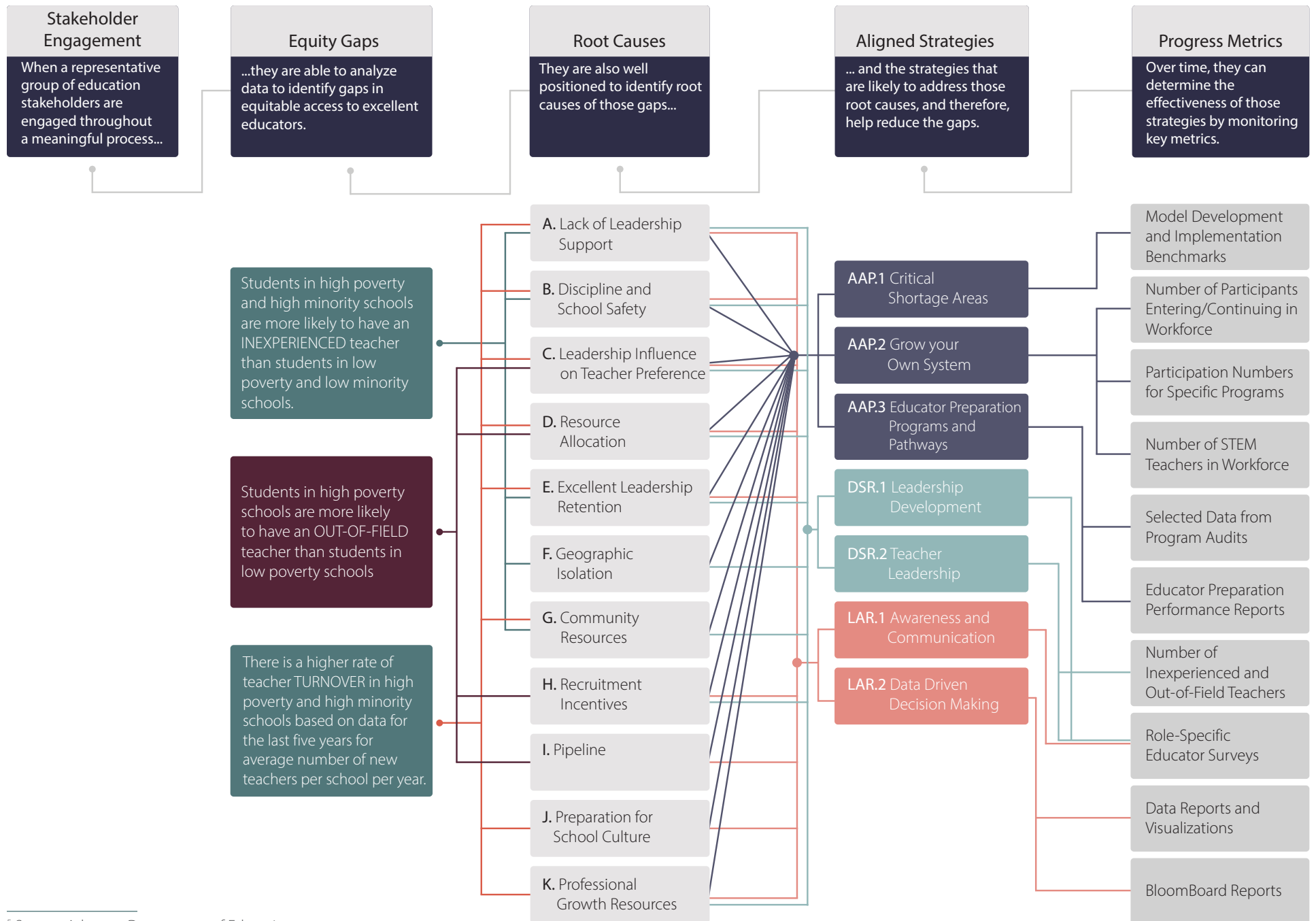
Figure 1: Arkansas Equitable Access to Excellent Educators Plan Theory of Action<sup>4</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Arkansas's Equitable Access to Excellent Educators Plan is available at: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/equitable/arequityplan081315.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Source: <http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/human-resources-educator-effectiveness-and-licensure/equitable-access>

Figure 2: Arkansas Equitable Access to Excellent Educators Plan Logic Model<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Source: Arkansas Department of Education

This publication features information from public and private organizations and links to additional information created by those organizations. Inclusion of this information does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any products or services offered or views expressed, nor does the Department of Education control its accuracy, relevance, timeliness or completeness.