

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction
State Systemic Improvement Plan

Qualitative Analysis of the PIER Tool Reports
2022-23



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Background Information

To align special education and general education continuous improvement strategies, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is focusing on some key initiatives to reduce dropout rates while increasing graduation rates. DPI's goal is to increase districts' capacity around using effective middle and high school tools that will improve outcomes for students with an IDEA Emotional Disturbance (ED), which will in turn improve the outcomes for all students with and without disabilities.

The North Dakota Planning, Implementing, Evaluating Report (PIER) is an annual, online reporting tool that special education units complete to detail their efforts to increase 6-year graduation rates for ED students. This tool is designed to provide a framework to help organize, contemplate, and report efforts made by the special education units to support the state's ongoing, aligned continuous improvement process.

This report summarizes the 2022-23 PIER Tool reports submitted by 25 of 31 special education units in North Dakota.

Summary Statements from the State Systemic Improvement Plan PIER Tool Reports

1. Theory of Action

Special education units were asked to state their Theory of Action on how to improve graduation rates for students with ED in the form of an If-Then statement. Across Theories of Action, strategies encompass data collection and monitoring through tools like Early Warning Systems (EWS), using intervention frameworks like Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS), developing Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs) based on Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs), emphasizing evidence-based practices (EBPs), addressing executive functioning and supporting independence, involving parents through education and positive communication, promoting self-efficacy and self-regulation through social-emotional learning (SEL), and investing in staff professional development.

Such strategies aim to promote classroom success, cultivate an environment where students become lifelong learners, and foster choice readiness. This was envisioned to lead to improvements in emotional/behavioral health, increased engagement, and ultimately, improved graduation rates. Theories of Action focus on enhancing skills, social-emotional wellness, and the overall quality of academic and non-academic experiences. By prioritizing positive school experiences, improved retention, and advancements in self-regulation, the goal is to ensure that students derive significant and positive benefits from their educational journey.

As written, some Theories of Action are broadly inclusive, targeting all students with and without disabilities, including those in the general education setting. Other Theories of Action specify students with disabilities in general, and some explicitly center students with ED.

Examples of If-Then statements included in the PIER Tool reports:

- *“If all learners are supported through a continuum of evidence-based practices that promote academic, behavioral, and mental health then graduation rates for students with disabilities will improve.”*
- *“If we increase the amount of proactive behavioral interventions and social emotional learning strategies in elementary, middle, and high school, then graduation rates for students with disabilities, including students with Emotional Disabilities will increase.”*
- *“If special education and key regular education staff receive appropriate training and have the tools and curriculum to provide high quality instruction, then our graduation rate for students with disabilities will improve.”*
- *“If students build their self-efficacy, agency and independence, and if they are given opportunities for voice and choice in their programming, students will improve their social/emotional/behavioral skills resulting in an increase in graduation rates.”*

2. Key Indicators of Early Warning Systems

2.1 Key indicators used to determine if students are on-track to graduate

Special education units outlined key indicators used in their Early Warning Systems (EWS) to gauge students' progress towards graduation or identify deviations from the graduation path. These indicators spanned various domains, including academics (e.g., assessment data, grades, credits, course completion, assignment completion, participation), behavioral aspects (e.g., referrals, incidents, detentions, suspensions), attendance/tardiness, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals and progress, information from teachers and parents, and SEL-related measures (e.g., scores on surveys). Attendance was most frequently cited with 22 of 25 units indicating its role as a key indicator. Nearly all units reported monitoring of academic data and behavioral-related data, although units varied in the specific academic and behavior-related indicators they tracked.

2.2 Key indicator data

Special education units shared a range of data-driven practices and outcomes regarding their key indicators. Data collection methods involved accessing formal and informal assessments, grades, transcripts, and leveraging Professional Learning Community (PLC) and MTSS meetings. Units highlighted that training sessions were conducted to recognize and collect EWS data effectively. Data points informed decision-making, allowing for identification of student needs, efficient communication, and collaboration among staff to provide targeted interventions.

Quantitative data provided more holistic insight into attendance, assessment scores, social skills instruction effectiveness, and behavioral goals. Additionally, qualitative assessments like social skills improvement screenings, teacher relationship goals, and reviews of parent involvement strategies, student engagement surveys, and teacher inventory surveys were part of the evaluation process.

Examples of special education units' responses include:

- *“The key indicators are allowing problem solving teams to have data informed decision making for students’ needs.”*
- *“Data is tracked through a data sheet that is generated by the [Behavior Advantage FBA/BIP] program. Case-managers can input data from the daily point sheets into the program and graph data to visualize student progress for analyses. All case-managers have received training on the use of the program.”*
- *“Information from PLC and MTSS meetings is kept and analyzed so students don't fall through the cracks. Data includes MTSS data, informal/formal assessment measures, grades, transcripts....This has [led to students’ teams being] on the same page while increasing individual student success....Individual school districts noted that when there is an issue or “red flag” staff are quick to communicate and address necessary measures. Some schools have noted an improvement in both ADA (averaged daily attendance) and failure rates because of the actions taken from reviewing data pertaining to their key indicators.”*

3. Implementation Status for Evidence-based Practices (EBPs) and Fidelity Data

Special education units were queried about the adoption of evidence-based practices (EBPs) in the previous year. When implemented, these units shared details about how EBPs affected student engagement and behavior, along with fidelity data. Additionally, they proposed ways to enhance the effectiveness of these practices. EBPs covered four specific EBPs: (1) behavior-specific praise, (2) Check-in Check-out, (3) Teacher-directed opportunity to respond, and (4) Check & Connect. Units also furnished information about other EBPs beyond these mentioned practices.

3.1 Behavior-Specific Praise

11 of the 25 special education units implemented behavior-specific praise during the 2022-2023 school year. Positive impacts of behavior-specific praise were noted, such as increased student engagement and improved behavioral outcomes. Advanced training and Accelerated Instruction Model (AIM) programs were instrumental, providing staff with tools to recognize and reward positive behavior effectively. Accountability measures included collaboration with mental health professionals and using data from the EWS. Fidelity checks were conducted at the district level through building walkthroughs, and evaluations specifically employed the Zones of Regulation fidelity profile to assess adherence. However, there were challenges identified in measuring fidelity, with some areas lacking data or reporting no fidelity checks. Despite this, progress reports linked to IEPs, BIPs, and the identification of behavior-specific praise showcased attempts at integration. Additionally, staff training and professional development in trauma-based supports and behavior-specific praise were either ongoing or planned for future implementation.

To improve outcomes, special education units suggested coaching teachers on effective implementation, emphasizing the significance of behavior-specific praise, formalizing training programs, and implementing structured plans to ensure consistency and effectiveness. They also recommended increasing the frequency of behavior-specific praise, engaging more staff members, and extending its application across various settings. The emphasis was on continuous data collection, fidelity evaluation, and professional development to refine strategies and maximize the impact of behavior-specific praise.

Regarding behavior-specific praise, special education units stated the following:

- *“This year, our school district has continued to implement the AIM program. This program includes a curricular resource to teach social-emotional skills to large groups, small groups, and individual students. A behavior reward system that includes rewarding positive behavior is implemented as part of this program. This year, [one of our special education units] trained 13 teachers in using the AIM program. Evidence of behavior-specific praise can be found in individual behavior plans.*
- *“Behavior-Specific Praise is part of each district’s Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports- Behavior (MTSS-B) language for all students – general special education. For those with an Emotional Disturbance, more advanced training is given to paraprofessionals and special education staff and tracked through a student’s BIP.”*

- *Students who have positive behavioral supports identified in their IEPs all receive behavior-specific praise. This increases clarity in expectations and provides forward feedback to incrementally build confidence and comfort within the school setting. Student engagement has increased as shown by work completion, increased attendance, and improved behavior linked to fewer removals from the classroom setting.*
- *We should continue with this initiative for identified students. This initiative can be implemented for all students with disabilities in a seamless manner. Staff capacity needs to be developed so that staff become fluent in the language of behavior-specific praise.*

3.2 Check-in Check-out (CICO)

18 of the 25 special education units implemented Check-in Check-out (CICO) during the 2022-2023 school year. Some units highlighted successful implementation, citing improved student outcomes, enhanced goal attainment, and the effectiveness of CICO in helping students manage emotions, schoolwork, and focus. They noted its inclusion in BIPs and IEPs. Challenges were also mentioned, including difficulties in documentation and data collection, indicating gaps in feedback and challenges in systematically monitoring its impact. While some reported no discernible impact, others reported ongoing efforts and indicated plans for future implementation.

Units provided varied responses regarding the fidelity of implementing CICO Responses encompassed aspects like Behavior Advantage tracking and CICO documentation. Fidelity check schedules, checklists, and upcoming training were also mentioned. The varying fidelity levels were indicated by notes of implementation with fidelity, inclusion in IEPs, insufficient data, and the absence of fidelity in monitoring. Monitoring occurred at the building level, with differing frequencies, and resulted in monthly reports. Some activities were integrated into the daily schedule, involving school psychologists and School-Wide Information System (SWIS) tracking.

Suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of CICO encompass addressing evolving district needs and aligning strategies with district goals. Strategies such as consistent usage and thorough data analysis were proposed. Recommendations also included evaluating fidelity, formalizing training, and mitigating student absences and resistance. Increasing staff numbers for wider implementation, professional development, refining processes for efficiency, and personalized tailoring to individual students were also highlighted as potential approaches for improvement.

Regarding CICO, special education units stated the following:

- *“Using CICO has given us the ability to make goals with individual students each day and follow up to keep them accountable. It also gives the student an adult that they can come to when they have issues with friends or other adults in their lives. We have been able to keep some of our more emotional students on track throughout the day and allowed them a place to vent and someone to listen to them. We have seen a decrease in our office referrals with those students as well as less classroom issues. This is effective for most students as there is a person and a place for them to help keep them organized and held accountable. At the high school: Did not impact behaviors or student engagement; At the elementary school: Only implemented with one student and did assist that student on a large scale. Difficult to quantify in first year of data collection.”*

- *“[CICO] provides accountability for students, visual representation of progress and ability to set goals, increases clarity in expectations and provides forward feedback to incrementally build confidence and comfort within the school setting. Student engagement has increased as shown by work completion, improved grades, and improved behavior.”*
- *“We utilize SWIS to keep track of our major and minor behaviors. We run a report each month to track behaviors. We also keep a document that is dated each time we CI with a student and the goals that they made. When they CO, we make notes of our conversations and any follow up we may need. Often, we have all hands-on deck with our CICO. You can see students moving at the same time every day heading to their CICO points. It is not implemented with fidelity due to the lack of data tracking and inconsistencies.”*
- *“One particular student resisted attending the short sessions so that she could be with her friends. She is a new student and did not make a connection with a trusted adult, which is vital for the intervention to be effective. Some positive reinforcement and allowing the student to choose the time for the sessions needed to be implemented, and a new paraprofessional that connected with the student has improved the outcomes for the CICO with this student. Flexibility may be needed with other behavioral students, who may resist this intervention as invasive.”*
- *“Before this intervention is removed, we consider adjusting the target behaviors, frequency of check-in/check-out, manner in which it is being reviewed with the student, and provide additional teacher and/or paraprofessional training.”*

3.3 Teacher-Directed Opportunity to Respond (TD-OTR)

3 of the 25 special education units implemented Teacher-Directed Opportunity to Respond (TD-OTR) during the 2022-2023 school year. Units expressed intermittent use, intentions to improve efficacy in other interventions prior to full adoption, and challenges in quantifying the impact of TD-OTR on student engagement and behaviors. While specific metrics might be hard to capture, participants acknowledged the practice's beneficial effects on student engagement and behavior. One unit stated, *“Opportunities to respond is essential for increasing overall learning, eliciting important academic feedback from students and increasing on-task behaviors.”*

Units shared varied approaches to gauge fidelity in implementing TD-OTR. Methods included using formative assessments and teachers tracking their adherence to the practice. One unit mentioned the principal's weekly review of grades as an indicator. Additionally, integrating Zones of Regulation lessons based on IEPs was highlighted as part of the fidelity assessment process. However, there were mentions of insufficient data, indicating a lack of comprehensive metrics.

Suggestions to improve the use of TD-OTR encompass enhancing data collection methods, implementing district-wide initiatives, and evaluating fidelity. Additionally, respondents emphasized the need to formalize training programs to ensure consistent and effective implementation across educational settings.

3.4 Check & Connect

12 of the 25 special education units implemented Check & Connect during the 2022-2023 school year. Positive outcomes included improved attendance, behavior, and engagement, along with decreased office referrals and suspensions, suggesting a positive influence on student conduct. Units noted challenges in documentation and data collection, emphasizing the difficulty in quantifying specific impacts. One unit indicated that Check & Connect's impact on student engagement and behaviors is impossible to quantify, and that fidelity is not applicable. Other units mentioned a general lack of fidelity checks.

To improve the effectiveness of Check & Connect, units recommended adding more mentors and improved alignment with EWS and platforms for documentation. Suggestions also included fostering staff commitment and buy-in and evaluating fidelity. Some mentioned plans for future implementation and the need for ongoing professional development.

Regarding Check & Connect, special education units stated the following:

- *"[One high school] expanded implementation of the Check and Connect program in order to reach at risk students on a pathway to dropping out. [The high school] had more staff trained with many being in the alternative high school setting. The connections staff made with students increased student engagement and fewer office referrals. This led to a slow decrease in dropout rate for students with Emotional Disturbance with the 21-22 school year being an outlier."*
- *"All mentors are trained to use the Check and Connect application to document strategies and interventions and results are reported in an electronic fashion on the check and connect application purchased from the University of Minnesota. The data on the application needs to improve to cite and align with early warning system data. A lead C&C mentor was assigned and facilitated monthly meetings with the mentors to problem solve and ensure fidelity of implementation of the intervention."*
- *"We are making positive gains but identified a need to continue to ensure fidelity of implementation. We have 12 mentors trained across grades 7-10. We want to offer additional stipends for teachers/paras who take on the role of check and connect mentor and have successfully done this through funding of the ND Behavioral Health School Grant."*

3.5 Other EBPs

Special education units shared an extensive array of other EBPs implemented in middle and high schools to enhance the engagement and graduation rates of students with ED. Various strategies, programs, and interventions were cited, including one-on-one contact, goal-setting, adult attention, comprehensive four-year action plans, counseling services, after-school tutoring, summer school programs, alternative school models, mentorship programs, parental involvement, Positive Behavior Support Plans (PBSPs), student ownership, sensory breaks, visual supports and schedules, Response to Intervention (RTI), behavioral pathways within MTSS, the Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) Tool, behavior management tools (e.g., Behavior Advantage), and credit recovery courses. Additionally, several interventions focused on SEL were mentioned, such as the Nurtured Heart Approach, Second Step social-emotional curriculum, Trauma-Sensitive Schools (TSS) training, and Zones of Regulation.

Units reported diverse impacts of the listed EBPs on various aspects of student engagement, behaviors, and outcomes. Positive outcomes included improved attendance, attitudes towards school, behavior, credit accumulation, grades, and graduation rates. Some noted that these interventions reduced social, emotional, and behavioral issues, emphasizing the positive impact on students' individual experiences. The implementation of these EBPs seemed to empower student voices and their desire to achieve goals. Additionally, teachers' access to data for making necessary adjustments was highlighted as a beneficial aspect. However, some respondents expressed uncertainty regarding the impact or indicated that certain interventions (e.g., modified school days) had no effect on attendance.

Units provided varied indicators regarding the fidelity of implementation for the listed EBPs. Some indicators included attendance rates, attendance at mental health sessions, and support from programs like BARR and Behavior Advantage. Departments monitored implementation, utilizing data from EWS and providing feedback. Plans for future implementation in the upcoming academic year were noted, with intentions for additional training and technical evaluations using tools like the Technical Adequacy Tool for Evaluation (TATE).

Units indicated diverse perspectives on determining the impact of EBPs and potential improvements if positive impacts were lacking. Responses included suggestions to contact alumni for feedback, develop creative plans to enhance specific-EBP effectiveness, and formalize coaching and training methods. Emphasis was placed on data collection and evaluation of fidelity to assess impact accurately. Some mentioned discontinued practices, indicating a need to reconsider their implementation.

Examples of special education units' responses include:

- *“In our unit our Social Emotional Behavioral teacher has really been focusing on having students having ownership in their plans, the expectations, barriers they might have, etc. This allows the student to feel like their voice is heard. She has seen lots of success with using the SISS-SEL program with her students. The outcomes of using this program have been great as they students want to meet the goals that they are setting for themselves and their goals are really driven by them with the assistance and guidance of the teacher.”*
- *“The ease of [Behavior Advantage] has made developing appropriate FBAs less of a daunting task. The program data collection and graphing element provides teachers a usable format to analyze data and to make adjustments as needed to increase student success.”*
- *“With the alignment of SEB facilitators in our middle and high schools starting in the 2023-2024 school year, we have a great opportunity to formalize the process of training, coaching, and collecting data to monitor the impact of Evidence-Based Practices within our secondary schools.*

4. Family Engagement Efforts

Family engagement efforts surrounding graduation include a multifaceted approach integrating various strategies and programs, such as effective communication channels (e.g., newsletters, social media), family participation in intervention planning and monitoring, family engagement nights, and family education and workshops. Some units report that their family engagement efforts are supported by grants and parent advisory committees.

Efforts encompass holistic support, focusing on job preparation, supporting mental health, and reducing transportation barriers. School counselors, vocational rehabilitation staff, and transition coordinators work together with families and students to identify and address needs. Many units prioritize staff training and professional development regarding involvement with families. More specifically, teams dedicated to family engagement craft plans, establish objectives, and gather input through surveys to enhance their engagement efforts.

Examples of special education units' family engagement efforts include:

- *“Family engagement has been a focus of professional development from North East Service Cooperative (NESC), our Regional Education Association and through grants applied for by our unit school districts. [We have] nationally certified staff trained in both Nurtured Heart Approach and Love and Logic. We have frequently offered family workshops on these topics. We work closely with our area schools on their family engagement activities and our staff participate and promote positive events throughout our communities. Several of our schools have school improvement goals related to Family Engagement and our staff assist with the planning and activities identified in those schools to engage all families. [Schools in our unit] worked diligently on developing positive community images. They utilized a positive social media presence, community awareness projects of positive school activities and events and kept families involved and active in school events.”*
- *“The school district adopted a communication platform to communicate with families. Staff and family were trained to use the platform to communicate with each other. Each school in the district has a Family Engagement plan with one goal reviewed and approved by the superintendent. The counselors and special education teachers work with families to connect them to community support whenever appropriate and necessary.”*
- *“For students with disabilities, teams meet with individual students and families to design four-year plans, develop transition plans for post-secondary goals and furnish information to parents about resources that are available. School counselors and Vocational Rehabilitation staff work closely with students, parents, and district staff to ensure that students and parents are aware of choices, prepare for future needs and identify resources, such as developmental disabilities services from DHS. Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in all activities at each district. Parents and schools work together to develop plans for credit recovery, early job shadowing activities and alternate paths to reach graduation that largely involve CTE coursework and CDE (Center for Distance Education.)”*

5. Community Wraparound Supports

Community wraparound supports for graduation encompass a diverse array of resources and collaborations aimed at ensuring comprehensive support for students. These initiatives span community partnerships. Important entities represent social work and mental health services, law enforcement, and the Department of Human Services. Units also collaborate with Career and Technology Centers, transition coordinators, and Vocational Rehabilitation staff to promote co-op and transition activities. Local businesses and organizations support after-school programs, offer financial incentives for academic achievements, and provide meal supplements to bolster support for students who may face challenges.

Examples of special education units' community wraparound supports include:

- *“While there are many support systems and resources in place, the frequently remain siloed, especially in smaller, more rural towns. [We] seek to build connections between those silos by strengthening relationships between special education and regular education, outside agencies, community stakeholders and businesses in the schools of [our] region. [We have] focused discussions with common language across agencies to demonstrate positive outcomes for students. As part of the engagement of stakeholders, [we] seek to scale-up and implement a comprehensive planning process for school teams, parents, and community partners to support students who may otherwise struggle with graduation.*
- *“[We] continue to provide information for, search for, and help districts access community wraparound supports that, in turn, support graduation rates of students....We offer a Backpack Program through the school with donations from the community for students that may not get enough to eat at home. Bags are packed each Friday with the students to supplement meals during the weekend. One church in town offers an after school program for all age students on Wednesday's. They play games, do crafts, and have music to bring students of all ages together. The businesses in town come together to support our students and celebrate their graduation. We try to offer work study for our students with the community businesses.”*

6. Stakeholder Engagement Efforts

Special education units' stakeholder engagement efforts surrounding graduation demonstrate significant overlap with family engagement efforts and community wraparound supports. Strategies include collaborative efforts across schools and community partnerships. Governance plays a pivotal role, evident through Multidistrict Board of Directors meetings, monthly board meetings, and initiatives by school boards to bolster graduation rates. Referral protocols, progress reports, and transparency with stakeholders ensure open communication and accountability. Tools such as one unit's Parental Handbook and North Dakota Protection and Advocacy services further empower families and students.

Examples of special education units' stakeholder engagement efforts include:

- *“Our unit is working collaboratively with ND Protection and Advocacy to develop training for other agencies in our area to better understand IDEA and the IEP/special ed eligibility process. Additionally, our partnership with TNT fitness and ABLE education will continue to help student develop the physical and mental endurance to sustain employment after graduation from high school.”*
- *The unit has maintained several active community partners and continues to do so. The unit works closely with the North Dakota Autism Center, Full Circle, the Anne Carlson Center, and Solutions Behavioral Health to support our students with IEPs. These community agencies work with student teams to provide consultation and coaching on Functional Behavior Assessments and Positive Behavior Support Plans, as well as direct support for students when needed.*
- *“Every month our unit partners with 5 community agencies: PYB, Police Department, Burleigh County Human Service Zone, West Central Human Services, and Juvenile Courts to discuss gaps and supports needed for students and families. Social work support is also at the high school level.”*

7. Graduation Rates: analysis of 2019-20 cohort's 6-year graduation rate

7.1 Graduation Rate for Students with ED

The NDDPI set a 2025-26 target of 67.63% for the six-year graduation rate for students with ED. Based on an analysis of their 2019-20 cohort six-year graduation rate, ten units are below target, four are at target, and 11 are above target. The graduation rates for students with ED across special education units vary considerably. The rates range from as low as 33% to as high as 100%. The data showcases a mix of decreases, increases, and consistently low rates, highlighting the need for ongoing strategies and support tailored to the diverse needs of these students to ensure higher rates of successful graduation. It is important to note that many units have a very small number (5 or fewer) of students with ED.

7.2 Graduation Rate for Students with Disabilities (SWD)

The graduation rates for SWD across special education units show significant variation. Rates range from 60% to 100%. There have been noticeable improvements in some instances, with rates increasing from as low as 60% to as high as 100%. Despite this range, many units' rates fall above the target set, with some surpassing the state average, showcasing substantial achievements in supporting students with disabilities towards graduation.

7.3 Graduation Rate for Students without Disabilities (SWOD)

The graduation rates for SWOD range significantly. Rates range from less than 80% to perfect rates of 100%. There are instances of decreases noted, and some rates are reported as lower than the state average. However, the majority of rates fall within a higher bracket, with many hitting impressive milestones, including rates of 90% and above.

7.4 Graduate Rate for Students with ED Compared to SWD

Among the units surveyed, findings reveal that in three units, students with ED exhibit higher graduation rates compared to SWD. Conversely, in 11 units, SWD achieve higher graduation rates than those with ED. One unit reports comparable rates between these groups, while three units have unclear comparison groups. Additionally, in two units, comparisons cannot be drawn due to a lack of data (N=0 for ED). Five units did not provide direct responses regarding this comparison.

7.5 Graduate Rate for Students with Disabilities Compared to SWOD

Across the units surveyed, findings indicate that in four units, SWD achieve higher graduation rates compared to SWOD. Conversely, in ten units, SWOD exhibit higher graduation rates than SWD. Three units report comparable rates between these groups, and eight units did not provide direct responses to this comparison. It is important to note that many units have small numbers of SWD.

8. Sustaining and Improving on Efforts Surrounding Graduation

The plan to sustain and improve efforts surrounding graduation for students with emotional disabilities is extensive and multifaceted. It involves promoting flexibility and investigative approaches, identifying and expanding wraparound services, increasing the use and fidelity of EBPs, and fostering early engagement initiatives in middle school. Leveraging tools like Behavior Advantage, Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) methods, and culturally relevant curricula are part of this strategy. Collaboration is key, occurring through PLC meetings, community partnerships, and district-wide collaborations. The plan emphasizes competency-based interventions, continuous implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), and the creation of foundational Social Emotional Learning District Frameworks and Guidelines. A data-driven approach underlies decision-making, focusing on data collection, monitoring, and sharing. Additionally, hiring more support staff like school psychologists and social workers, professional development, and mentorship are part of the plan.

Regarding strategies to sustain and improve efforts surrounding graduation, special education units stated the following:

- *“[We] will continue to train in the area of Trauma Informed Practices. We will use a Train the Trainer model to help sustain our efforts. The Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) method being used in our district will assist staff in conducting appropriate useful functional behavior assessments, writing effective behavior plans and implementing those plans with fidelity. The unit will provide training to district staff to deescalate crisis situations and teach replacement behaviors using CPI a crisis prevention program. High Reliability Schools systems and practices will also keep us accountable and help sustain these efforts. Restorative Practices will also be introduced into our district.”*
- *“We plan to scale-up by continuing to research additional evidence-based tools, practices, and curriculum that will provide positive outcomes for students with disabilities. Furthermore, [we] plan to explore counseling and mental health services for students that may be struggling in this area. School avoidance has additionally become a large barrier to graduation for students with disabilities. [We] plan to explore evidence-based practices and training for its staff in order to develop an early warning system and response practices to school avoidance. In addition, [we] plan to provide professional development for staff on executive functioning skills, which is hypothesized to have a positive impact on student engagement and as a result, graduation rates.”*
- *“[During the 2023-2024 school year we will have] PAES labs within all our high schools. With the labs, we will maximize the potential of our students with disabilities (particularly those with an ED diagnosis) to achieve competitive integrated employment through PAES jobs as that will allow the student to transition from high school to post-secondary education programs and/or competitive integrated employment. Data collection is a major focus of our district and will continue to be through our PD/PLC Learning Cohort structure. Our SPED teachers will be able to choose a PD/PLC pathway, related to their interests and role, in which they will receive PD periodically throughout the year, and time to PLC with a small group in their same cohort to reflect, apply learning, as well as analyze and respond to student data. Our high school teachers will have the opportunity to receive PD focusing on Indicator 13. Our vision as a department is to*

increase student voice and choice in all aspects of the IEP process, starting with their FBAs and PBSPs. We believe that this will work towards improved process on goals and objectives, and continued growth in graduation rates.”

- *“[We] will provide ongoing coaching and training on Zones of Regulation which uses self-talk and social thinking practices. In addition to social skills and self-regulation resources. [We are] committed to provide Zones of Regulation curriculum, resources, and on-going training to all students and staff within the Unit in order to support the critical need to increase graduation rates. [We] will continue to collaborate with our school psychologist(s) to increase the use of quality functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) to write effective behavior intervention plans (BIPs) for students who qualify for a disability under Autism or ED and display inappropriate and non-preferred behaviors in the school setting. Ongoing support and collaboration for the Transition Coordinator, Vocational Rehabilitation, and social skills groups such as Best of Buddies (BOB) will be provided within the Unit and available to all districts.”*

9. Technical Assistance Needs

The technical assistance needs for the upcoming school year span various critical areas. There's a clear emphasis on enhancing expertise in evidence-based practices (EBP) and Early Warning Systems (EWS) through additional training to ensure consistency state-wide. Ensuring compliance with NDDPI special education guidance is also a priority. Moreover, Units seek to bolster proficiency in existing systems and leverage community/state resources while securing funding for programs like BARR.

Support and guidance are sought for utilizing tools like the graduation snapshot activities with administrators and aligning SSIP goals and strategies in meetings with superintendents and special education directors. Units expressed wanting to develop a larger candidacy for special education vacancies, and a desire to hire additional staff.

Additional priorities include implementing Social Emotional Learning (SEL) initiatives such as Zones of Regulation, scaling up SEL expectations, and providing training for staff on MTSS. There's also an interest in family engagement activities with a stronger academic and SEL focus, alongside adopting new platforms for assessments and data management.

These technical assistance needs reflect a commitment to enhancing practices, fostering student support, and aligning efforts to provide comprehensive educational experiences for students with diverse needs.