

# **North Dakota State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)**

*Phase III Year 4 Narrative*

(Due April 1, 2020)

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## Executive Summary

North Dakota's (ND) State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) is focused on improving graduation rates for students with disabilities. Specifically, ND has defined its SSIP State identified Measurable Result (SiMR) as an increase in the extended six-year graduation rate for students identified as having an emotional disturbance.

### Phase 1 Summary

In Phase I of the SSIP, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI), in partnership with stakeholders from across the state, completed an intensive analysis including:

- Data Analysis
- Description of infrastructure to support improvement and build capacity
- Identified a ND State identified Measurable Result (SiMR)
- Selected 5 improvement strategies
- And developed a ND SSIP Theory of Action

This Theory of Action directed technical assistance, professional development, financial resources, staff time, and relationship building work to support implementation and evaluation efforts at the local level. These Phase I outcomes are further described throughout this report.

### Phase II Summary

In Phase II, a multi-year plan was developed based on the Theory of Action developed in Phase I. This multi-year plan included:

- Developing an infrastructure scale-up process

- Developing the process to support local education agencies in implementing Evidenced-Based Practices.
- Developing a plan to evaluate the SSIP work and the impact on improving graduation rates for students in ND's SiMR.

The NDDPI conducted four formative evaluations scheduled at the end of the 2015-2016 school year as part of its evaluation plan. The first three analyzed the effectiveness of the NDDPI technical assistance, professional development, financial, time and relationship building resources delivered during the first year. The fourth analyzed whether the efforts were effective in meeting the annual SiMR target.

During the SSIP planning phases, local special education units identified evidence-based practices chosen to improve graduation rates for students in ND's SiMR group. It was determined that the successful implementation of these practices would:

- 1) keep the targeted group of students in school
- 2) provide incentives to students to come back to school, and
- 3) assist students in graduating from high school.

The NDDPI implementation plan targeted five strategies to direct NDDPI resources to local special education units:

- 1) The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) worked with stakeholders from across the state and identified a continuous improvement process for local special education units to use. This continuous improvement process was aligned with the public school accreditation work done in local school buildings.

- 2) In cooperation with other NDDPI offices, the NDDPI Special Education office provided, and continues to provide, technical assistance and financial resources to assist local special education units to improve results for students with disabilities in the state. Evidence-based practices (EBP) were chosen and continue to be implemented at the local level to improve graduation rates for students in the SiMR group.
- 3) In cooperation with its partners, the NDDPI developed a plan to assist and support local special education units to design and deliver quality professional development that implements evidence-based practices and programs.
- 4) In cooperation with its partners, the NDDPI Special Education office worked with local special education units to develop tools to monitor progress toward improving graduation rates while also working with local special education units to evaluate their implementation efforts.
- 5) In cooperation with its partners, NDDPI has promoted increased availability of public and private mental health services for students identified with mental health needs, including those identified with emotional disturbance.

### Phase III

This Phase II work led to the implementation and evaluation work started in Phase

III. The NDDPI, and local special education units, started:

- Reporting on progress including:
  - Ongoing evaluation efforts
  - Progress that was being made

- Making efforts to align and adjust special education work across the state to increase long-term, positive outcomes for students with disabilities in ND.

ND's SSIP efforts are making progress. Progress on each of the five strategies described above is as follows:

Strategy #1 (SSIP continuous improvement planning model with stakeholders)

As part of the SSIP process, continuous improvement planning efforts aligned with local school plans were developed and implemented.

Strategy #2 (planning process with stakeholders that results in identification of evidence-based practices) were completed. While evidence-based practices have been identified, these practices are continually monitored for effectiveness and retooled as necessary to improve results for students in the SiMR group.

Strategy #3 (deliver quality professional development) is ongoing.

Strategy #4 (monitor progress and evaluate success) is ongoing. During Phase III, Year 5 (and beyond) ND will renew progress monitoring efforts and effectiveness of evidence-based practices. The NDDPI has initiated discussion with a technical assistance center to reconvene a state stakeholder group to further address ND SSIP progress monitoring and evidenced-based practices.

Strategy #5 (advocate with partners for an increase in mental health services)

Reflecting on SSIP work to date, ND has partnered with stakeholders across departments, agencies, and throughout the field, to further youth mental health services across the state.

Student engagement is now a measure ND uses for accountability purposes under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Many evidence-based practices are

part of schools' early warning systems and multi-tiered system of supports. While progress has been made in buildings and districts scattered across the state, further efforts, including planning for statewide scale up of an Early Warning Systems (EWS) in local schools will be a major focus statewide beginning in Phase III, Year 5. This will be part of improving ND's progress monitoring efforts. EWS will be used to determine when students are straying off the path toward graduation indicating the need for more intensive interventions and action plans.

Many ND local special education units are partnering with each other, and with their Regional Education Associations (REAs), to facilitate professional communication and professional development. Earlier in ND's SSIP work, a work group composed of the NDDPI SSIP Project Professional Development Team, Dr. Rose Iovannone (functional behavior analysis and behavior implementation expert from the University of South Florida), and representative local special education directors developed a plan for communication and coaching structures around the Prevent-Teach-Reinforce (PTR) model of Functional Behavior Analysis (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). While this work continues, adjustments are being made because the train-the-trainer model has turned out to not be as actionable as initially planned. Due to time and distance constraints, locally trained Prevent-Teach-Reinforce (PTR) coaches have not been able to train beyond their local special education units. However, the train-the-trainer model has been used and is working at the local level.

Offices within the NDDPI, and partners in the field, continue to align and increase their work together to support students with behavioral, social/emotional, social communication and mental health needs. NDDPI continues to support local efforts with

financial resources, training, and technical assistance. With a change in the state's local school accreditation process, the NDDPI SSIP efforts once again leveraged the authority of the State Superintendent to require the contents of local special education unit SSIP efforts to be included in every local, public school building's continuous improvement efforts.

As they have done throughout the SSIP process, the thirty-one local special education units, each directed by a local improvement leadership team, continued to implement local SSIP efforts in their local member school districts. Local teams continued to implement goals, implement professional development, and evaluate progress and effectiveness of their efforts in improving the SiMR.

Currently, significant strides are being made in aligning each local special education unit's SSIP activities with their member schools' state accreditation and school improvement strategies to further increase engagement of students.

During Phase III, Year 4 local special education units developed continuous improvement plans intended to be implemented and scaled up in Phase III, Year 4. Upon completion of the 2018-19 school year, local special education units were continuing to build relationships with community partners to support students with ED. As NDDPI received further guidance from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) about the future direction of the SSIP, this has been shared with local special education units and they are planning and implementing accordingly.

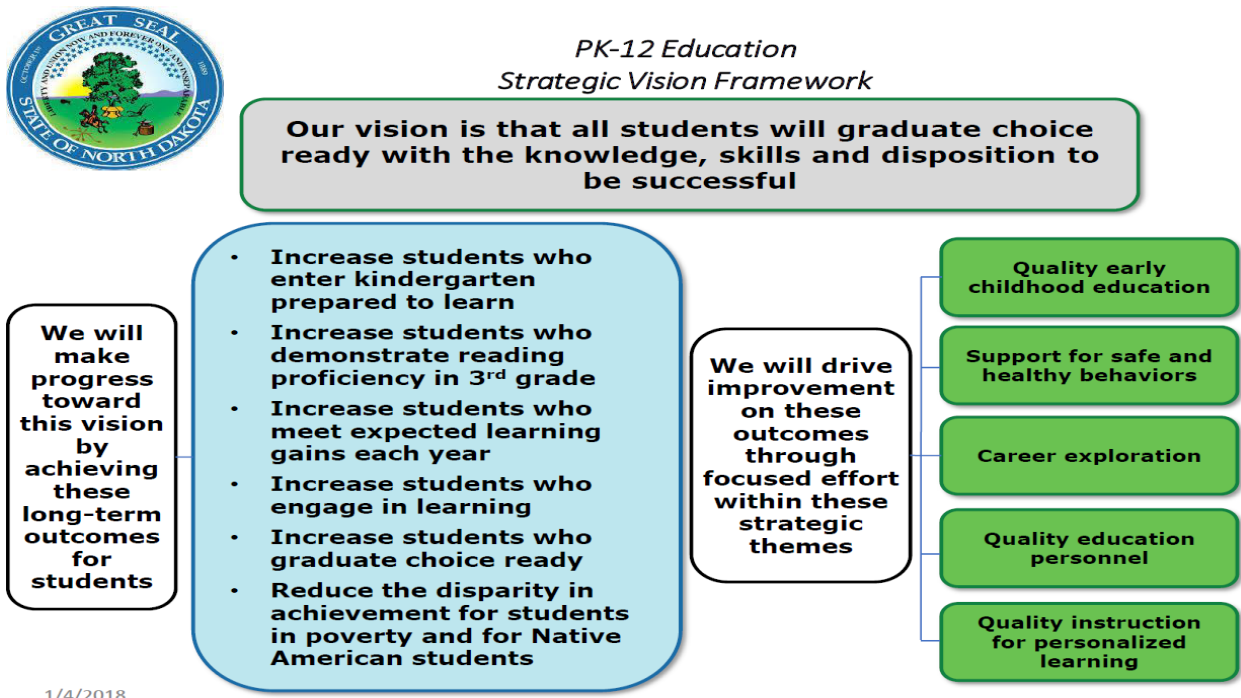
On December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 OSEP provided further guidance via a National TA Call led by Dr. Gregg Corr and Dr. Leslie Fox titled 'Let's Talk SSIPs!'. Technical assistance provided on this call indicated states are required to provide a substantive SSIP (State



Systemic Improvement Plan) report, but there is not a required reporting format for the SSIP report. For ND’s Phase III, Year 4, SSIP reporting, ND is using the ‘7 elements – straight from the measurement language’ OSEP overviewed in this national technical assistance call to states. This national TA call provided the structure for this report, and the primary components of this call provided much of the outline that can be found in this report’s Table of Contents.

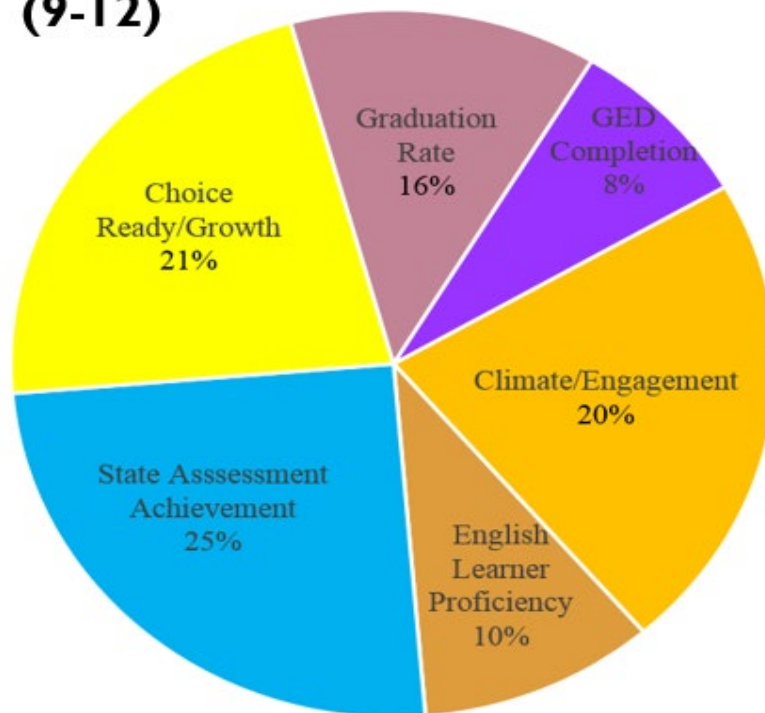
### Current Theory of Action

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction’s (NDDPI) PK-12 Education Strategic Vision Framework states: ‘...all students will graduate choice ready with the knowledge, skills and disposition to be successful’. In this statement, choice ready means students will graduate from high school ready for post-secondary education, ready for the workforce, and/or ready for military service.



Furthermore, ND's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) high school accountability plan measures high school graduation rates, GED completion rates, school climate/engagement, English language learner proficiency, state assessment achievement, and choice ready/growth. (Please see <https://www.nd.gov/dpi/accountability> for more information about this accountability chart).

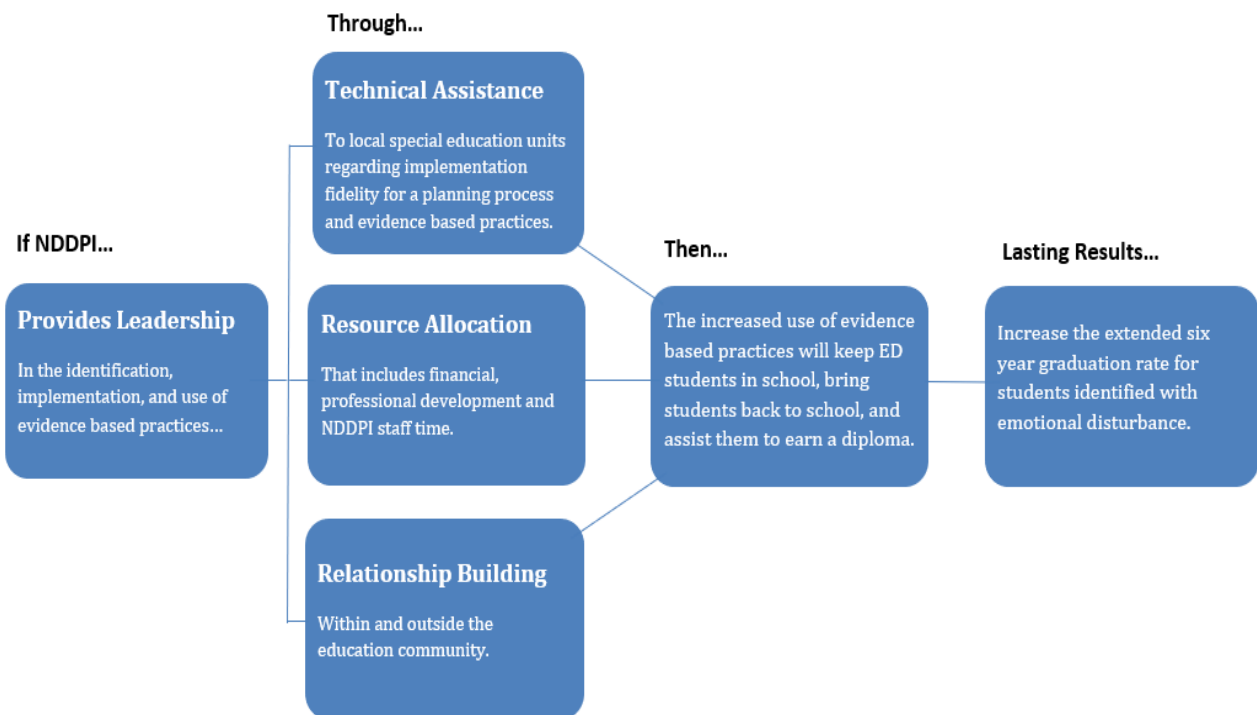
### High School (9-12)



Improving results in these measures correlate with improved outcomes for students, including improved graduation rates for students with disabilities. During this Phase III, Year 4 reporting cycle in North Dakota (ND), stakeholders from across the state intentionally considered SSIP data, and made a decision to continue ND's SSIP State identified Measurable Result (SiMR) of improving graduation rates for students with

behavioral, social/emotional, social communication, and mental health needs. While stakeholders discussed the possibility of changing from a six year graduation rate to a four year graduation rate, ND stakeholders decided to continue with ND’s SiMR as the six year graduation rate for students identified as having an emotional disturbance (ED). As a result, ND provides multiple points of data regarding graduation and transition outcomes. While this SSIP work is supporting students in need of a variety of behavioral, social/emotional, social communication, and mental health needs, ND’s SiMR specifically focuses on students identified by the multidisciplinary team as having an emotional disturbance (ED) as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

In ND, the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) work ultimately supports all students with (and without) disabilities as systemic change is promoted to improve achievement and graduation rates. ND’s SSIP Theory of Action is driving this work.



## **North Dakota's approved Theory of Action**

During the period between April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 and March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, NDDPI provided leadership through: continued work with stakeholders, ongoing technical assistance, allocation of resources, and building and strengthening of relationships. These efforts furthered the discussion about choosing, implementing, adjusting and evaluating evidenced-based practices that build momentum toward improving graduation rates for students with ED across ND.

ND's Theory of action guides ND SSIP work.

### NDDPI Providing Leadership

#### **Examples of NDDPI Providing Leadership:**

- Worked with stakeholder groups - The NDDPI special education office took the lead working with stakeholder groups from across the state to monitor and direct SSIP work across the state.
- IDEA Advisory Council - NDDPI dialogued with the ND IDEA Advisory Council about SSIP implementation and progress at quarterly advisory meetings.
- ND Special Education Leadership - NDDPI dialogued with local special education unit directors and numerous stakeholders about increasing implementation effectiveness.
- NDDPI special education supported and provided leadership in partnering with other divisions across NDDPI to support alignment of efforts that led to improved outcomes for students.

- 2019 SSIP end of the year reporting template – Each year, NDDPI provides a reporting framework for the local special education units across the state to gather, evaluate, and report their SSIP progress. Using this template, every special education unit in ND reported their SSIP work during the 2018-19 school year. In September, 2019, NDDPI Special Education provided an updated framework to local special education units to help them prepare for Phase III, Year 5. This template will be used to gather end of the school year (2019-20) SSIP information from the local special education units across the state.

#### NDDPI Providing Technical Assistance

##### Examples of **NDDPI Providing Technical Assistance**:

- Technical Assistance Centers – ND worked with technical assistance centers from across the nation to facilitate NDDPI's ability to continue to improve its leadership and technical assistance to the field. During this reporting cycle, ND engaged with the following technical assistance centers to help support SSIP work: the IDEA Data Center (IDC), the National Center on Systemic Improvement (NCSI), the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT), the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC), and the State Implementation and the Scaling-Up of Evidence-based Practices (SISEP).
- The NDDPI did, and will continue to participate in workshops, conferences, webinars, and conference calls provided by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

- NDDPI partnered with ND's Regional Education Associations (REA) to align technical assistance efforts to support schools in improving outcomes for students.
- NDDPI supported SSIP implementation through individual and small group 'problem solving' conversations. For example, when a local special education unit discovered an adjustment may be warranted to their SSIP work, technical assistance was provided to help work through, and move forward, in ways that promote If-Then thinking. If-Then thinking discussions aligned with OSEP discussions about tying SSIP outcomes to the SSIP efforts taking place. If-Then thinking was also used in ND's school accreditation process. During this SSIP reporting period, ND spent substantial effort in special education/general education alignment efforts using ND's accreditation process. (This will be discussed further in the Infrastructure section).

If-Then thinking can be described as follows: **IF** these practices are implemented or adjustments are made, **THEN** student outcomes will improve because the practices or new adjustment(s) align with improving outcomes for students.

- NDDPI continued to provide summer, fall, winter, and spring large group (40-80 people) technical assistance and guidance for gatherings of stakeholders involved with implementing the SSIP.
- NDDPI provided intentional, systematic alignment work to build partnerships across the NDDPI to improve results for students.

- NDDPI partnered with ND's accreditation partner (Cognia) to improve infrastructure technical assistance. Together with Cognia, NDDPI made significant progress aligning special education unit SSIP work with the continuous improvement work happening in school buildings across ND. During this phase of the SSIP, the process has required intensified technical assistance to develop this process in a way that can be implemented statewide. (This will be discussed more in the Infrastructure section of this document).
- NDDPI continued to provide leadership, technical assistance, and resources as it sponsored and participated in workshops, conferences, webinars, and conference calls to build relationships and capacity that promote SSIP implementation and effectiveness.

#### NDDPI Providing Resource Allocation

##### **Examples of NDDPI Providing Resource Allocation:**

- NDDPI provided competitive, targeted monetary awards to stakeholders with plans designed to improve graduation rates for students identified as having ED. During Phase III, Year 4 of the SSIP, NDDPI received \$193,677 in requests for this type of funding. \$163,677 was funded. Another \$69,833 was requested, and eventually approved, to support activities that align with positive transition outcomes across ND.
- NDDPI provided funding to help support high quality professional development aligned with evidence-based practices across the state. For example, NDDPI provided financial resources to assist the REAs in

providing professional development to school personnel to improve the quality of functional behavior analyses (FBAs) and behavior intervention plans (BIPs). As FBA and BIP quality improves across ND, ND projects that graduation rates for students with ED will also improve.

### NDDPI Providing Relationship Building

#### Examples of **NDDPI Providing Relationship Building**:

- NDDPI worked with stakeholders at the state education agency (SEA) and local education agency (LEA) levels to build relationships and improve outcomes for students with disabilities. For example:
  - The NDDPI Office of Special Education is working with the following offices within NDDPI: School Approval, Office of Academic Support, Office of Early Learning, Educational Equity and Support, and the NDDPI fiscal offices to align efforts and improve outcomes for students in the SiMR group.
  - NDDPI Office of Special Education partnered with ND Career Technical Education and the ND Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to align efforts toward improving outcomes for students across systems.
  - NDDPI partnered with the North Dakota University System to improve outcomes, including graduation rates, for students.
- NDDPI worked with the National Center on Systemic Improvement (NCSI) to further improve relationships, align efforts, and improve outcomes for students with disabilities, especially as it relates to Targeted Support and



Improvement (TSI) schools under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

- The NDDPI continued to communicate that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is about more than procedural compliance. While technical compliance is necessary, the SEA is partnering with the field to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. As SSIP work across the state continued to scale up and out, local special education units and school districts worked more closely together to improve results for students in ND's SiMR group and beyond.

During 2018-19, ND's SSIP Theory of Action continued to guide and direct the SSIP work in the state. With OSEP guidance for the future of the SSIP under the IDEA, ND is looking forward. Using the Theory of Action as the guide, ND will continue to scale up ND's SSIP work while intentionally reflecting on areas in need of SSIP revitalization.

### **Infrastructure/Coherent Improvement Strategy Updates**

ND's SSIP work touches every public school in the state. During Phase III, Year 4, this impact took another step forward. In May, 2019, ND's Superintendent of Public Instruction approved moving forward with aligning and embedding local special education unit SSIP continuous improvement efforts with the school continuous improvement efforts taking place through the school building continuous improvement process that is used for school accreditation in ND. During Phase III, Year 4, a process and timeline was developed to create a structure that will make the alignment of SSIP work with local school continuous improvement efforts possible. Each local special

education unit worked with the school buildings in their special education unit to ensure that SSIP activities are aligned and publicly reported in each school building's Strategy Map. (A Strategy Map is a publicly reported, visual representation of a school building's continuous improvement objectives, initiatives, and key measures).

During Phase III, Year 4, preparation started for this new process. By May 1, 2020, the first major milestone is anticipated in these efforts. By May 1, 2020 local special education unit SSIP work will be embedded into local school building continuous improvement plans (Strategy Maps) for the first time in ways that align efforts, and coincide with public reporting of continuous improvement efforts. Communication is taking place between NDDPI, Cognia, local special education units, and local school districts to make this happen. These efforts will be publicly available and reported on the NDDPI's website used for public reporting ([Insightsnd.gov](https://insightsnd.gov)). [Insightsnd.gov](https://insightsnd.gov) includes information aggregated and reported for the SEA, and it includes data for every public school building in the state.

The Phase III, Year 4 timeline to make this happen is on track as follows:

- May, 2019: State School Superintendent approved moving forward with this partnership.
- June, 2019: Information shared with special education leadership and stakeholders from across the state. Stakeholder support was given to continue with this process.
- June, 2019 – Present: NDDPI working with Cognia and local special education partners to develop a concept that will:

- Align SSIP Continuous Improvement efforts with local school Continuous Improvement and Accreditation Efforts
- November, 2019: Webinar with local special education unit directors working to develop a structure and a process for this work.
- January, 2020: NDDPI and Cognia worked with local special education unit directors at a director's meeting. During this time, local directors started the process of taking their own SSIP information and incorporating this information into their member district information.
- February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020: Webinar explaining the new template being used to facilitate the embedding of SSIP language into local school improvement language.
- February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020: Local special education units have a plan for aligning and integrating their SSIP work into publicly reported, local school district plans.
- End of February and End of March, 2020 meetings: Local special education units and schools districts are encouraged to attend a continuous improvement process training (by Cognia) together.
- May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020: Local special education 2018-19 SSIP outcomes or 2019-20 SSIP goals will be integrated in school district publicly reported plans and uploaded to the Cognia/NDDPI system to prepare for public reporting by fall, 2020.

This developing system gives local special education units:

- A structure within which to work on their SSIP activities

- A structure to coordinate SSIP communication and efforts with local districts and building personnel
- A public reporting method used by every school across ND
- A way to tie in and align SSIP evidence-based practice work with the work being done through local schools

During this SSIP reporting cycle in ND, significant time and energy was invested by the NDDPI, local special education units, and school districts to develop and begin the initial implementation processes for this infrastructure / continuous improvement process scale up. The intent of this infrastructure work is to create an aligned, sustainable continuous improvement process that supports the SSIP work (improving graduation rates for students with ED) in ND now, and into the future.

### **Implementation Status for Evidence-based Practices and Fidelity data**

In the beginning years of the SSIP continuous improvement process, each local special education unit identified evidence-based practice(s) to implement and scale up to improve outcomes as measured through ND's SiMR. Special education units across ND worked with local stakeholders to identify evidence-based practices that would improve self-regulation skills, thereby increasing available opportunities to improve graduation results for students with ED.

For context purposes, ND has 175 public school districts, 373 public schools, and 31 special education units. Special education units vary in the number of school districts they serve. Local special education units serve between 1 to 17 school districts.

All local special education units report annually on their progress implementing evidenced-based practices (EBP) chosen to improve local SSIP outcomes. Phase III, Year 4 (2018-19 school year) reporting summaries were received at the NDDPI Office of Special Education in August, 2019. While all local special education units reported progress scaling up evidence-based practices, 86% of local special education units reported fidelity of implementation information. Special education units reported using fidelity rubrics provided by the NDDPI, standardized implementation checklists, file reviews, and/or other tools to aggregate and assess fidelity of implementation information. While the fidelity instruments used varied, these fidelity tools were structured on a Likert scale ranging in scores from one to four or one to five. Of the 86% of special education units reporting implementation fidelity, all reporting special education units maintained or improved implementation fidelity. (This does not account for the local situations where implementation fidelity was not reported, or where the previously determined evidence-based practices were discontinued).

Systemic improvement continues across ND. During Phase III, Year 4, professional development that supported EBP implementation continued to be provided to school districts through efforts coordinated by local special education units. During this reporting period, twenty-four different practices/strategies were being scaled up and implemented across local special education units in ND. A listing of these practices, ranked from evidence-based practices most frequently being implemented to lesser reported practices may be found below.

- Most special education units did training in a team approach to conducting FBAs and writing positive BIPs. The most common FBA/BIP strategy used

the Prevent-Teach-Reinforce model (Dr. Rose Iovannone Prevent-Teach-Reinforce approach).

- As part of their file reviews, 65% of local special education units reported reviewing IEP documents to ensure social, emotional, behavior concepts were being addressed through the IEP team process.
- 45% of local special education units reported on local efforts using Zones of Regulation.

While every local special education unit did not specifically report on FBA/BIP efforts and file reviews, the special education units that did report on these efforts included the largest local special education units by pupil population. Examining the data further, the evidence-based practices (beyond FBA/BIP work, file reviews, and Zones of Regulation) being used across the state were more locally based. For example, the Nurtured Heart Approach was reported on by four local special education units. De-escalation training techniques through the Crisis Prevention Institute were being trained up by three local special education units. The following evidenced based practices were reported by one or two local special education units.

- Social Thinking
- Office Referral Monitoring
- Collaborative and Proactive Solutions
- Social Skills Improvement System
- Training in principles of behavior management
- I Do, You Do, We Do
- Graphic Organizers
- Strategy Instruction
- Social Stories
- Check-In/Check-Out
- Why Try
- Universal Design for Learning
- TEACCH
- Second Step

- Safe and Civil Schools/CHAMPS/Tough Kids
- Stoic Training
- Yoga Calm
- ALSUP – Lives in Balance

Early in the SSIP process, local special education units aligned their efforts with the social emotional efforts taking place through the ND Regional Education Associations (REA). While each local special education unit identified evidence-based practices locally, the chosen practices tended to align regionally as special education units and REAs pooled and aligned resources for maximum impact.

In addition to specific practices, local special education units and REAs pooled professional development efforts. Earlier in Phase III, over 75% of local special education units reported bringing together cohorts of teachers for training. During Phase III, Year 4, large group professional development was reported by 39% of the local special education units.

As Phase III professional development continues, personnel development efforts have shifted from large group professional development to increasing efforts in coaching / mentoring (48% of local special education units in Phase III, Year 4). As new staff joined school teams, and as areas were identified as in need of further training, more coaching and mentoring took place.

Implementation fidelity continued to be evaluated during Phase III, Year 4. Seventy-four percent of local special education units reported fidelity of implementation in Phase III, Year 4. These file reviews were used to help determine implementation fidelity, and to identify areas for future training. While large group SSIP trainings were less frequent, coaching and targeted training took place more frequently. In addition, some local special education units created work groups who developed 'toolkits' that

helped support staff in preventing, deescalating, and responding when students needed additional support in the school setting.

During Phase III, Year 4, the SSIP improvement strategies referenced most frequently related to improving Functional Behavior Analysis (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs). While Prevent-Teach-Reinforce (PTR) was the most common structure being scaled up for FBAs and BIPs, some local special education units implemented other locally determined FBA/BIP frameworks to structure their FBA/BIP efforts. In this reporting cycle, 60% of special education units reported on scaling up FBA capacity. These efforts are being worked on locally to better understand student needs, and to better guide developing BIPs that improve student outcomes.

While another 15% of special education units did not report directly on FBA work, they did reference using BIPs to improve outcomes for students. 25% of special education units did not refer to FBAs or BIPs in their annual report to the SEA. Units that did not report FBA or BIP data can be grouped into like categories. These two categories are: 1) local special education units in geographic proximity to one another who did not report on FBAs and BIPs, and 2) local special education units spread across the state with very small student numbers. It can be hypothesized that these smaller special education units did not experience a need to consider completing a FBA or BIP during the current reporting cycle.

At the beginning of the SSIP implementation process (Phase III, Year 1) ND special education unit's reported that, when educationally appropriate, functional behavior analyses and behavioral intervention plans were appropriately developed and implemented for students 10%-20% of the time. Since then, the NDDPI Office of



Special Education has been working with Dr. Rose Iovannone (University of South Florida), ND's Central Regional Education Association (CREA), and special education units across the state.

Between Phase III, Year I and Phase III, Year 4 local special education units increased how often social, emotional, and/or behavioral information was stated in Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and used for program planning for students with ED. Based on files reviewed at the local special education unit level, and reported to the SEA in August, 2019, FBAs and BIPs are now being used 90%-100% of the time in local special education units that reported on educationally relevant FBAs and BIPs.

As Phase III, Year 4 concluded, planning in this area is underway for the upcoming three years. CREA and Dr. Iovannone, working with NDDPI, are developing a three year plan to continue to build upon the FBA and BIP work that has been done to further the scale-up across the state.

As FBA and BIP quality improves across the state, it is projected that school teams will be better able to work with, and support, students moving forward on the path toward graduation.

After completing the first three phases of SSIP work in ND, local special education units across ND continued their SSIP efforts as they looked forward to the next steps for implementing the SSIP. Upon receiving this guidance, the SEA has, and continues to, provide technical assistance to local special education units to support the implementation of evidenced-based practices that improve ND's SiMR. This has also been a time for the state to reflect, refocus, and consider ways to revitalize SSIP work across ND. Leaders and teams across the state are reviewing various data points to

make intentional decisions about what to keep, what to adjust, what to stop, and what to add in their efforts to improve their local SiMR results. As local special education units transition from the first cycle of SSIP implementation to continued scaleup, SSIP work in ND is forward looking. Evidence-based practice technical assistance continues to be refined to improve outcomes for students included in ND's SiMR.

After interacting with the IDEA Data Center, ND is developing a three to five year plan to implement and scale up practices implemented at the high school level that improve graduation rates. As part of these efforts, intentional progress monitoring systems will be further developed (example: Early Warning Systems). ND is currently in discussion with the Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education (TAESE) to facilitate this work with stakeholders. Through this process, it is anticipated that the details will be defined and implementation/scale up plans will be formalized.

Local special education units continue to develop their previously determined evidence-based practices. As ND's SSIP work continues, discussion is taking place to ensure practices are aligned with improving SiMR results. Further planning and evaluation are underway to ensure ND is progress monitoring in ways that positively impact ND's SiMR. Further work has begun to refocus the evidence-based practices being implemented so they directly align with improving graduation rates.

As ND continues to scale up SSIP implementation across the state, technical assistance will be provided to support local special education units as they focus their chosen evidence-based practices. Additionally, local special education units will receive support to effectively progress monitor in ways tied to increasing graduation rates. (This

is addressed further in the discussion addressing the next steps and technical assistance needs with the SSIP in ND).

### **Stakeholder Engagement Activities**

During the 2018-19 school year, local special education units continued to scale up and implement evidence-based practices identified by local stakeholders in earlier phases of the SSIP. Implementation progress, along with SiMR related data trends, are continually shared and discussed with stakeholders. At the SEA level, the ND IDEA Advisory Council is the primary stakeholder group reviewing and making recommendations pertaining to the SSIP work in ND. During Phase III, Year 4, the ND IDEA Advisory Council met quarterly and continued to provide feedback about the direction of the SSIP in ND. The IDEA Advisory Council is comprised of representatives from:

- ND Parents
- ND Advocacy Groups
- Consumers
- ND Parent Training Center
- Non-Public Schools
- ND Universities
- The Bureau of Indian Affairs
- State and Local Education Officials
- State Agencies
- Local Special Education Administrators
- Local Special Education Educators or Related Service Personnel
- State Child Welfare/Foster Care Agency
- State or LEA Homeless Assistance
- State Juvenile and Adult Corrections

These stakeholders ask questions, provide feedback, and make suggestions. For example, during Phase III, Year 4, the IDEA Advisory Council recommended ND continue to work with the same SiMR (6-year graduation rate for students with

behavioral, social/emotional, social communication, and mental health needs) as the SSIP work continues across the state. While keeping this SiMR, the IDEA Advisory Council also indicated they would like more detailed information about 4-year graduation rates in ND. Stakeholder input from the IDEA Advisory Committee continues to be valued in reviewing progress and providing direction to ND's SSIP work.

Other statewide stakeholder groups in ND (ex: Secondary Transition Community of Practices and local special education leadership from across the state) also receive regular updates and provide ongoing dialogue into the process and direction of the SSIP work in ND. The ND Secondary Transition Community of Practice is a broad cross section of stakeholders who meet quarterly to review, promote, and discuss improving outcomes related to transition age practices across ND. Special education leadership includes local special education directors, assistant directors, and program coordinators responsible for ensuring SSIP efforts are implemented in locally relevant, meaningful ways.

Special education directors and leaders in ND met with NDDPI three times during this reporting cycle. During these meetings SSIP implementation was discussed. Most recently, discussion was centered around:

- 1) The SiMR setback during Phase III, Year 4.
- 2) Infrastructure alignment efforts (Cognia continuous improvement practices),  
and
- 3) Revitalization of SSIP work in ND.

To continue to improve stakeholder engagement through public reporting, the NDDPI underwent a major website update during this reporting cycle. This update

provides more information to stakeholders across ND in an accessible way. Through ND's State Accountability Dashboard (<https://insights.nd.gov/Education/State/Dashboards>) specific information, including graduation rates for students in ND's SiMR, is made available. Data is disaggregated into subgroups, including graduation rates for ND's SSIP SiMR cohort (students identified with emotional disturbance). The ND State Accountability Dashboard reports data for each public school building and school district in ND.

Every public school building in ND is represented on the Dashboard. However, not all data points are publicly reported. In situations where a group or subgroup has 10 or less students, the data is redacted, and therefore not publicly available. Because most schools in ND do not have 10 or more students with ED in a single class (cohort), most individual schools do not have SiMR data publicly reported. This information is available to local school buildings, school districts, and local special education units, regardless of size. The SEA provides this information to districts and local special education units to help them plan and evaluate their efforts.

Stakeholders continued to provide input and guidance into the SSIP process as planning was taking place for Phase III, Year 5. Currently, NDDPI continues to move forward with SSIP implementation efforts based on stakeholder input. Based on this dialogue with stakeholders, further focus was put on increased collaboration with parents, communities and other agencies to overcome barriers and aid local units in the successful implementation of practices to reach the State's SiMR targets.

Based on stakeholder input, competitive discretionary funding was made available to further emphasize this work. Likewise, the Phase III, Year 5 reporting

template provided at the beginning of the 2019-20 school year included reporting language related to stakeholder collaboration. NDDPI believes that the more collaborative partnerships are created and the more 'wraparound' supports for students with social emotional learning needs are developed, the more likely students will experience positive outcomes that show up in increasing graduation rates that can be measured through an improving SiMR.

### **Progress toward the State Identified Measurable Result (SiMR)**

Local special education units across ND reported progress in their SSIP work during Phase III, Year 4. Special education units continued to align professional development, coaching, and support with the needs of students in the cohort groups. Having said that, there were a few special education units who needed to adjust the practices they had previously identified locally. In these situations, SSIP practices were adjusted because of local stakeholder input. Where needed, part of ND's SSIP revitalization efforts include working with OSEP funded TA Centers to explore additional data sources used to progress monitor and improve outcomes as measured through ND's SiMR. For example:

- ND works regularly with the National Center on Systemic Improvement (NCSI) to align state level efforts. NCSI is supporting the SEA in supporting LEAs identified through ESSA as Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) schools. Over 80% of the TSI schools in ND received this designation as TSI, at least in part, because of students with disabilities educational outcomes as measured by achievement, engagement, and transitioning to post school outcomes.

- ND started conversations with the IDEA Data Center (IDC) more intentionally to more intentionally evaluate ND's implementation and progress monitoring efforts. As part of this work a team from ND recently attending the IDC Summit. Based, in part, on attending this summit, ND has developed a preliminary framework intended to advance SSIP progress monitoring across the state.
- ND meets quarterly with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) to improve graduation rates and outcomes for students, ages 6-21, who are working toward "Choice Ready" graduation.
- North Dakota also worked with the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) to continue to expand evidence-based practices that lead to improved graduation outcomes. Fifteen quality indicators have been discussed.

In Phase III, Year 5, ND anticipates working with the Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education (TAESE) to bring together stakeholders. It is anticipated that these discussions will further improve ND's SSIP progress monitoring efforts and evidence-based practice implementation across the state.

These efforts, in coordination with efforts currently being scaled up, will keep students with ED in school, bring students back to school, and assist them to earn their high school diploma. Part of the discussion with TAESE is to bring stakeholders together to discuss scale up across ND of intentionally using data including student attendance, behavior, discipline, and credits earned at the high school level to monitor student

progress toward graduation. Then, if a student falls off the pathway toward graduation, prompt action planning can be taken.

**FFY 2018 SiMR Data**

| FFY      | 2013   | 2014   | 2015   | 2016   | 2017   | 2018   | 2019   |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Target ≥ |        | 60.22% | 60.22% | 61.22% | 63.22% | 66.72% | 66.72% |
| Data     | 60.22% | 60.42% | 57.01% | 70.10% | 66.10% | 53.10% |        |

**Additional Data to support progress toward the SiMR**

Specific to the SiMR, this reporting cycle shows a substantial drop in the SiMR data during this reporting period (2016-17 cohort of students). The 6-year graduation rate for students in the SiMR group dropped from 66.4% (15-16 cohort) to 53.1% (16-17). This is significantly lower than the projected target (66.72%), significantly lower than last year’s cohort (63.22%), and it shows a setback to the positive graduation trend building for students comprising North Dakota’s SiMR.

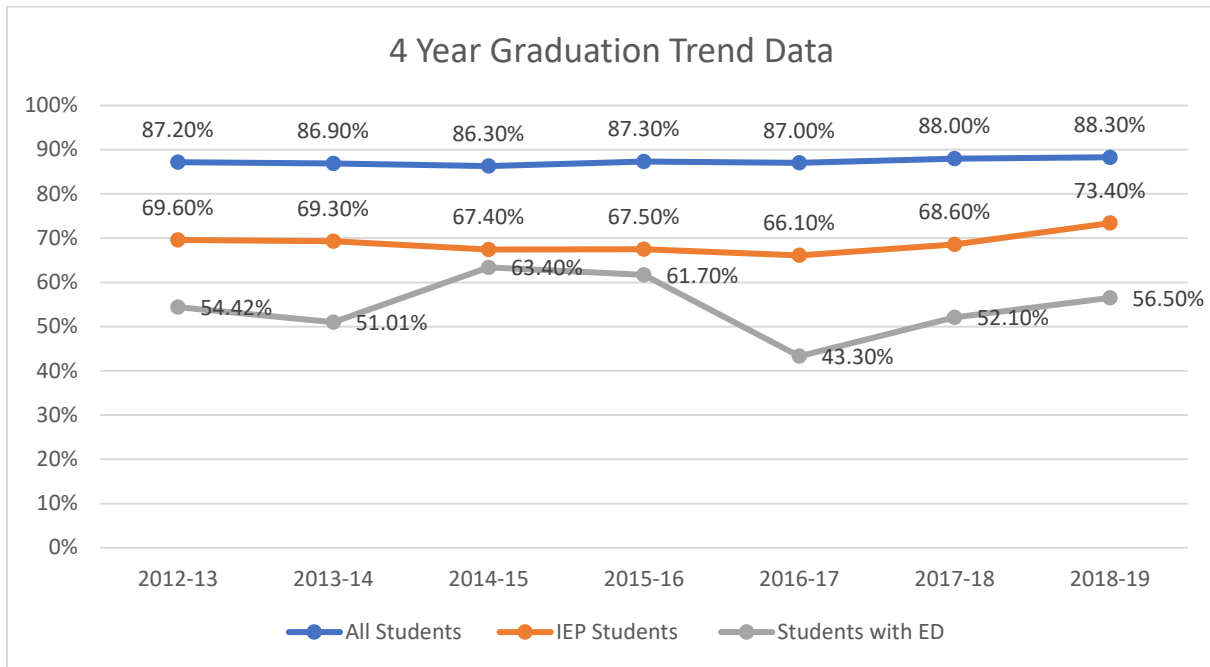
While this data was surprising, especially compared to the high of 70.1% from the 6-year cohort two years ago, NDDPI dug deeper into the data to better understand what might be happening. Although no primary reason was established, the IDC recommended disaggregating data by subgroups. This has been implemented. Further data analysis showed good news reemerging. The data set from the 2017-18 cohort of students suggests the beginning of a new positive trend in ND. The upcoming cohort graduation rate trends are near, or already surpassing this reporting year’s 6-year SiMR data. For example:



- The 4-year graduation rate for this reporting cycle (16-17 cohort) was 43.3%. While the 4 year graduation rate was lower than anticipated, the 6 year graduation outcomes of students increased by nearly 10% to 53.1%. In contrast, previous graduation rates for students without disabilities in ND do not typically change more than 1% when comparing the 4 year and 6 year cohorts. ND schools had significant success supporting students in the SiMR group beyond the 4-year rate.
- Further data analysis showed the 4-year graduation rate (17-18 cohort) is 52.1%, already near the 6-year graduation rate for the 2016-17 cohort (53.1%).
- Continuing the positive trend line, the 18-19 cohort 4-year graduation rate (56.5%) has already surpassed this year's (2016-17 cohort) SiMR data in the 6-year graduation rate for the 16-17 cohort (53.1%).
- Following the point of the apparent data correction, current trends imply positive, steady progress at the 4-year and 5-year graduation rates, and these 4-year rates are once again higher than the SSIP baseline 4-year graduation rate.
- Because of the SiMR setback during this reporting period, along with the positive signs of growth evidenced in upcoming cohort 4 and 5 year graduation rates, ND set the SiMR target for the 2017-18 cohort equal to the SiMR target for the 2016-17 school year (66.72%).

**Indicator 17 of the State's SPP/APR**  
**6 year extended graduation rate for students with ED**

| Cohort Size | 93<br>(Baseline Year)           | 96                              | 107                             | 98                                | 107                              | 97±   |
|-------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
|             | 2011-12 Cohort                  | 2012-13 Cohort                  | 2013-14 Cohort                  | 2014-15 Cohort                    | 2015-16 Cohort                   | 2016-17 Cohort  |
| Target      | 60.22%                          | 60.22%                          | 60.22%                          | 61.22%                            | 63.22%                           | 66.72%  |
| Results     | 60.22%<br>(+5% from 4 yr. rate) | 60.42%<br>(+6% from 4 yr. rate) | 57.01%<br>(+6% from 4 yr. rate) | 70.01%<br>(+7.6% from 4 yr. rate) | 66.4%<br>(+6.9% from 4 yr. rate) | 53.10%<br>(+9.8% from 4 yr. rate)<br><br>(-13.62% below Target) |



During the 2019-20 school year, ND started working to revitalize technical assistance in response to the current SiMR backslide. Moving forward, as ND local special education units build capacity in progress monitoring data collection that is

predictive of improving graduation rates, local special education directors, administrators, and special educators will be better able to determine when graduation intervention and action planning are necessary. The NDDPI will continue to individually tailor, and scale up, technical assistance to support local special education units in these efforts.

Beginning in Phase III, Year 5 (2019-20), special education units are receiving a minimum of two SSIP technical assistance contacts from the NDDPI Special Education Office during the school year. During the 2020-21 school year, special education units will receive at least 3 targeted technical assistance contacts throughout the school year. These contacts will be guided using an empathetic coaching model referenced by NCSI. These contacts will include questions such as:

1) Late Summer/Fall: How are you feeling about your SSIP work plan for the year and what kind of technical assistance will be helpful? Talk through this year's SSIP implementation efforts. Are there any adjustments needed or that you are planning to make this year?

2) Midyear: How is it going/ What needs might you have? This will include facilitating discussions that encourage local special education units to intentionally use their data to make instructional decisions.

3) Late spring/early summer: How are you feeling about the SSIP work this year? Do we need to visit about pulling information together to be ready to report to the SEA? Where are things going next year? Is what you are doing making a difference? Are implemented efforts improving SIMR results? What kind of help do you need in this process?

As previously referenced, ND continues to explore ways to revitalize SSIP work in the state. This is necessary, in large part, because of the 2016-17 drop in SiMR in ND. The infrastructure improvements through the general education/special education continuous improvement alignment partnership is one strategy currently leading to SSIP revitalization. Presently, local special education units are intentionally reevaluating and adjusting their SSIP efforts to improve outcomes for students in the SiMR cohorts.

ND continues to develop and revitalize partnerships with stakeholders, technical assistance centers, the OSEP, and all stakeholders interested in improving results for students making up ND's SiMR.

### **Scale-Up Planning**

During the 2018-19 school year, continuing into the first quarter of the 2019-2020 school year, local special education units across ND focused on scaling up practices and developing the infrastructure that leads to improved 6-year graduation rates for students identified as having an emotional disturbance. Specific activities included:

- Continued implementation and scale up of locally chosen evidenced-based practices and making necessary adjustments to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for students of all ages.
- Continued implementation and improvement of Functional Behavior Analyses (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs). As scale up continues, expansion efforts continue to intentionally improve the quality of FBAs and BIPs across ND through ongoing professional development.
- Developed the technical assistance and tools to assist and provide support to special education units as they embed their SSIP work into their member school

continuous improvement (school accreditation) plans. This process is bringing together a number of partners including, but not limited to, local general education and special education leadership, Cognia (state accreditation process) and numerous Offices from NDDPI.

- Created and disseminated a statewide special education SSIP template to help school leadership take the first steps in aligning special education and general education continuous improvement efforts.
- A consistent framework supporting this process will be refined and rolled out so local special education units and member schools can effectively communicate using common continuous improvement process language.
- Beginning May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, special education units and schools will have achieved improvement efforts alignment. In the fall, 2020, it is anticipated that this work will be accessible on the [Insights.nd](#) dashboard used for public reporting.
- ND continues to offer discretionary funding opportunities to support SSIP implementation and scale up efforts regionally, locally, and across the state. Funded initiatives provide progress updates at the end of the funding cycle. The current discretionary funding cycle invited proposals focused on strengthening wraparound supports. The discretionary funding was released to enhance local efforts in engaging community partners and stakeholders to actively support students, families, and schools, leading to improved graduation rates.

NDDPI brought together schools identified for the second year in a row (through ESSA) as ‘targeted support and improvement’ (TSI). All but one of the TSI schools was identified, at least in part, because of the low performance of students with disabilities

on the North Dakota State Assessment (NDSA). Bringing together NDDPI staff, TSI school leaders, and special education unit leadership facilitates intentional conversation about scaling up school building evidence-based work and improving outcomes for students. In many cases, outcomes for students with disabilities are fully integrated into this conversation. These discussions create opportunities to further the work of the SSIP as measured through the ND SiMR.

As reporting on Phase III, Year 4 is underway for the SSIP, special education units continue to scale up their locally determined evidence-based practices. Likewise, many continue to transition from identifying the need to implement FBAs and BIPs to improving the quality and effectiveness of the FBAs and BIPs developed and implemented.

### **Sustainability Planning or Considerations**

ND is planning for sustainable SSIP work that positively impacts students now, and into the future. This, in part, is why the NDDPI is working across divisions within the agency, with local special education units, school districts, and community stakeholders with ND's accreditation partner, Cognia.

During Phase III, Year 4, this process significantly moved forward. As this process continues to be more deeply aligned and embedded across the state, the work taking place through SSIP efforts will become embedded into the fabric of the continuous improvement process taking place in schools across ND.

During the current reporting cycle, ND intentionally engaged with local special education units to discuss progress and sustainability of their local SSIP efforts and potential adjustments that needed to be considered. This is part of encouraging

continuous reflection on data and effective practices that lead to improving, sustainable continuous improvement processes at the SEA and LEA levels.

Through dedicated work with the schools identified for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year as TSI in ND were identified because of the subgroup of students with disabilities. This has provided an opportunity for divisions across NDDPI to partner with local schools and corresponding special education units to align supports and efforts to improve outcomes for students, including students with disabilities. This has direct positive implications for ND's SSIP work in building systems, implementing evidence-based practices, and improving sustainable outcomes for students in ND's SiMR group.

At the state level, NDDPI is aligning professional development efforts with the Regional Education Associations across the state to ensure alignment and long term sustainability of efforts aligned with improving SiMR results in ND. Examples of these partnerships include:

- SEA staff are part of the NDMTSS (ND Multi Tiered System of Supports) scale up and implementation groups. In ND, NDMTSS is being scaled up through the REAs. The NDMTSS process is expanding across districts in ND, and through this work, participating districts develop their academic and behavioral strands. Aligning and integrating NDMTSS and SSIP efforts increases the likelihood that ND's SiMR will continue to grow over the short and long term.
- FBA and BIP technical assistance is taking place in coordination with the REAs in ND. ND is working with the REAs and with Dr. Rose Iovannone, to improve the quality and effectiveness of FBAs and BIPs being implemented across ND. During the next reporting cycle, in consultation with Central Regional Education

Association (CREA), a three year plan will be developed to further the scale up of developing quality FBAs and BIPs in a meaningful, sustainable way.

- In addition, NDDPI staff and REA staff are working with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) at both the federal and state levels to improve social emotional learning outcomes for students in ND. This work directly aligns with the work of the SSIP in ND.
- The NDDPI has, and continues to, develop partnerships with the ND Department of Human Services (Divisions of Behavioral Health, Children and Family Services, Medicaid, and Field Services), ND Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and ND Career and Technical Education. These partnerships support scale up and sustainability of SSIP efforts across ND. Part of this work has happened through engagement with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT). Teams from NDDPI, ND Career and Technical Education, and ND Division of Vocational Rehabilitation continue to align efforts to improve outcomes, including graduation rates, for students with disabilities.
- The number of schools across ND participating in personalized learning waivers is rapidly expanding. This process intends to increase student engagement and improve outcomes for students. This also has the potential to positively impact students included in ND's SiMR.

### **Technical Assistance Needs for the Next Year**

In the upcoming SSIP phase, ND will continue to work with all stakeholders, families, and the national technical assistance centers referenced throughout this document. ND



anticipates receiving technical assistance and providing technical assistance in Phase III, Year 5.

- At present, ND is working closely with the NCSI to continue to develop sustainable, aligned interdepartmental efforts to improve results for students across ND. This includes students who make up ND's SiMR. ND will continue to seek technical assistance from NCSI while accessing supports from the SISEP as well.
- ND is working with the REA's in the state, and with Dr. Rose Iovannhoe from the University of South Florida, to further the progress improving the quality of how and when FBA's and BIP's are used across ND to increase the likelihood that all students, and especially students identified as having an emotional disturbance, will experience improved outcomes including improved graduation rates.
- ND regularly participates in trainings and discussions with the IDEA Data Center. During this next reporting cycle, ND will explore additional data inventory, data aggregation and disaggregation, and data reporting options to help further ND's SSIP evaluation process.
- As the NDMTSS continues to scale up across ND, NDDPI divisions have, and are continuing, to braid funding to support the regional education agencies in building local NDMTSS capacity. Local school districts continue to need technical assistance. The state continues to build capacity in working with students with disabilities within the NDMTSS process.

- ND continues to engage with Cognia to develop and strengthen the continuous improvement process, especially as it relates to students included in ND's SiMR. In return, ND will continue to partner with Cognia to ensure the processes and tools being used in the Cognia platform are relevant and meaningful for improving outcomes for students in ND's SiMR.
- During Phase III, Year 5, ND will continue to seek out, and provide, technical assistance to support capacity building and the scale up of the ND SSIP progress monitoring infrastructure development initiative. (Please find a beginning framework in the attachment).
- During Phase III, Year 5 ND will continue to interact with OSEP for ongoing guidance and technical assistance to improve student outcomes through targeting best practices.