

# **North Dakota Graduation Report**

## **Qualitative Analysis of PIER Reports**

### **Public Report**

**April 25, 2022**

#### **Background Information**

In an effort 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 2020-21 PIER reports submitted by the 31 special education units in North Dakota.

# Summary Statements from the State Systemic Improvement Plan PIER Reports

## 1. Theory of Action

### 1.1 Frame a Theory of Action in the format of an if-then statement. Statements should be tied to improving graduation rates.

Overall, about one-third of sped units indicated that additional training for school staff on understanding and addressing social, emotional, and behavioral health issues would improve students' overall classroom experience and graduations rates. Further, a number of sped units stated that if staff can teach students to develop the social, emotional, and self-regulation skills they need to improve their school experience, then students are more likely to graduate.

In addition to professional development and training for school staff, the strategies suggested by special ed units included in their statements were: increased interventions, and use of evidence-based practices that promote social, behavioral, and mental health practices. Examples of If-Then statements included in the PIER reports:

- *“If special ed unit staff and Special education teachers have appropriate training regarding social emotional skills, students will benefit by having the skills necessary to be successful students and life-long learners. “*
- *“If staff have appropriate training in social, emotional and behavioral health then positive school experiences will improve including the graduation rates for students with disabilities.”*
- *“If we increase our Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) technical Adequacy, our Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP) will be more effective with helping students be successful in the classroom. Therefore, our graduation rates will increase for all.”*

## 2. Infrastructure / Coherent Improvement Strategy Updates

### 2.1 Provide all SSIP related Critical Initiatives.

Listing all critical SSIP initiatives that their unit is taking, most respondents indicated that their critical initiatives were related to offering additional training and professional development for teachers, including building multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) frameworks, improving intervention plans, implementing evidence-based curriculum and programs, and increasing student/family engagement. For some units that contain multiple school districts, they mentioned that each district has included specific strand improvement plans in its district “strategy map.”

Many of the critical initiatives special ed units related to SSIP included plans or implementation of staff training detailed how they planned to use this knowledge effectively to improve instruction, interventions, and student engagement.

- *“SSIP Related Critical Initiatives: Increase technical adequacy with Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) as measured by the Technical Adequacy Tool for Evaluation (TATE). What was used to make progress during 2020-21 school year 1) Change FBA form - Provide overview of TATE baseline data from 2019-20 school year 2) Create new FBA form and provide training on how to use the new form 3) Provide mini (10-15 minute) monthly trainings by contracted Board Certified Behavior Analyst on critical components of FBAs 4) Provide “in-real time” training to staff conducting FBAs 5) Inform/train school administration on new FBA form and essential components”*
- *“The critical initiative added to the special ed unit Cognia plan is to develop and implement a multi-tiered support system (MTSS) for the implementation of social-emotional learning standards. The SEU SSIP goal is to improve 6-year graduation rates for students identified as having ED. Critical initiatives include 1. Provide ongoing training to staff in areas related to social emotional skills, mental health, and behavioral health. 2. Support staff attendance at workshops to promote social-emotional learning. 3. Provide guidance on effective social-emotional goals and progress monitoring for individuals with disabilities. 4. Provide training on writing effective behavior intervention plans.”*
- *“District Initiatives: Build capacity for writing effective functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans. Implement an MTSS program that will support student wellness and academic growth. Collect and analyze academic data and implement individualized education plans and supports. SEU Initiatives: Implement evidence based social emotional learning curricula for all students Identify targeted professional development activities. Build capacity for writing effective functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans.”*
- *“The Special Education Unit provides special education services to multiple school districts. Objective 1 To improve and develop self-regulation skills of students. Critical Objectives: Provide professional development for self-regulation skills and social skills. Provide resources and training for evidence-based social/ emotional/mental health practices. Objective 2: Provide quality education for students in the least restrictive environments. Critical Initiatives: Provide and support instructional practices and resources for engaged and personalized learning. Provide professional learning opportunities.”*

## 2.2 Provide Key Measures aligned with Critical Initiatives.

*(These Key Measures measure the Initiative outcomes)*

Special ed units mentioned using student data (e.g., graduation rates, family surveys, intervention documentation, IEP goal growth) and assessment tools (e.g., Aimsweb, TATE, ALSUPs) to measure their progress towards meeting their critical initiative goals. For those units that have related professional development opportunities for staff already in place, the indicated that in order to track their progress they would document training opportunities, attendance, and staffs' application of new skills in a classroom setting.

Comprehensively, special ed units also used family engagement attendance and surveys to measure progress on their Critical Initiatives.

- *“NWEA and/or Aimsweb are used as tools to measure progress and make intervention effectiveness decisions.”*
- *“Key measures identified include: Student performance data, graduation rate, student surveys, family surveys, student MAPS scores, percentage of participation in MAPS testing, IEP goals and progress, credits earned in credit recovery, credits earned in the alternative HS program, Math and English Intervention data, attendance at family engagement events, IEP meetings and teacher conference.”*
- *“Key Measures: 1. Documentation of training opportunities in unit and in schools. 2. Documentation of staff attendance at PD workshops. 3. Documentation of staff training provided/supported by the unit. 4. File monitoring to identify effective progress on ED goals.”*

## 2.3 Describe any additional activities addressed this year that will improve graduation rates, including graduation rates of students identified as having an Emotional Disability.

Special ed units mentioned a number of activities that are being used to help improve the experience of students with Emotional Disturbance and their graduation rates. Most commonly mentioned activities included providing staff with specialized training and resources; hiring behavioral specialists; implementing new programs, curriculum, and interventions; developing new screeners and standardized forms; and creating partnerships with community businesses for meeting students' needs outside of the classroom (ex. career internships, counseling, social services).

The units wrote in depth about the specialized social-emotional programs, curriculum, and training for staff they would be or have been using and laid out very specific plans of action. Examples:

- *“SEU and its respective school districts have collaborated and embedded the objectives, key measures, and critical initiatives into their individual plans and daily educational practices in order to reach the 6-year goal of increasing graduation rates. Schools within SEU have utilized a variety of practices dependent upon their individual district's needs. This includes, but is not limited to, partnering with SEU; credit recovery options; alternative education; dual credit opportunities through public colleges; behavioral health supports through different clinical agencies; school resource officer partnerships; after school programs and tutoring; regional education agency partnerships; purchasing and changing academic and behavioral intervention curriculum and resources; summer school or ESY options; etc...”*
- *“1) Selected teachers participated in Calm Classroom training to learn strategies to help students regulate their emotions and utilize self-calming strategies, when needed 2) As a unit, we piloted the AIM curriculum (Accept, Identify, Move) which introduces and blends together the concepts of Mindfulness, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). We prioritized training opportunities for teachers serving students in LRE setting C. In August of 2021, an additional 50 teachers will be trained and provided materials to implement this curriculum. 3) With ND Behavioral Health grant funding, we purchased teacher resources with social skills lessons and emotional regulation activities. These were provided to all special education teachers who serve in our elementary and middle school settings.”*
- *“Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) training took place at the middle school and high school levels. CPS is an evidence-based model based on neurobiological research. It allows professionals to address challenging youth behaviors through empowerment, empathy, and mutual solving of the shared problems that tend to cause behaviors. CPS is an approach to understanding and helping children with behavioral challenges who may carry a variety of psychiatric diagnoses, including oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, mood disorders, bipolar disorder, autism spectrum disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder, etc. CPS uses a structured problem solving process to help adults pursue their expectations while reducing challenging behavior and building helping relationships and thinking skills. Specifically, the CPS approach focuses on teaching the neurocognitive skills that challenging kids lack related to problem solving, flexibility, and frustration tolerance. Unlike traditional models of discipline, this approach avoids the use of power, control, and motivational procedures and instead focuses on teaching at-risk kids the skills they need to succeed. CPS provides a common philosophy, language and process with clear guideposts that can be used across settings. In addition, CPS operationalizes principles of trauma-informed care.”*

## 2.4 Describe what is happening at the local and Special Education unit levels in the area of Early Warning Systems.

*(How are you identifying when students stray off the graduation path, what interventions are you using to support students getting back onto a graduation pathway, what data are you using to determine whether the interventions are working, and what are you going to do differently if data shows the interventions are not working? (Ex., How will you utilize the information to write quality transition IEPs for students straying off the graduation path?)*

Almost all units indicated they regularly collect student data (e.g., attendance, academic performance, behavior) to recognize early warning signs and a majority of special ed units reported that they have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, a formal, standardized action plan based on those data.

Though most special ed units have a formal Early Warning Systems procedure in place with multiple data points, attendance data was the cornerstone of all PIER responses.

- *“SEU in cooperation with the member districts have begun to develop Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring Systems (EWIMS) in the schools for grades six through twelve. The EWIMS teams are collecting data on the three indicators of dropping out: attendance, course performance, and behavior. The teams have identified thresholds in a tiered model, they have identified the interventions that are available in their schools and have applied those interventions at each level.”*
- *“The Special Education Unit works with students and school districts to create individualized plans for students at risk of dropping out. Attendance incentives are put in place when students start missing days.”*
- *“During the 2020-21 school year, our district and unit, piloted the Panorama platform and will fully implement district wide in 2021-2022. The Panorama system serves as a data source for our early warning system. It ties together Social Emotional Learning (SEL) screening information, attendance, grades and test scores. We also will be logging interventions and action steps within this platform.”*
- *“Local school districts in the Special Education unit are using data to identify “at risk” students through Early Warning Systems by tracking data on attendance, behavior referrals, GPA, and credits. At the High School, the MTSS team uses an Early Warning data collection sheet that includes data on attendance, cumulative credits and detention data updated each semester and progress monitored monthly. Other districts utilize PowerSchool data, state and district data, informal feedback, universal screening tools, and progress monitoring to identify at-risk students. Additional interventions utilized unit-wide include: after school tutoring, credit recovery courses, and promotion of summer school programs. Progress is monitored by school districts in a variety of ways including analysis of benchmark testing data, biweekly PowerSchool data collection, anecdotal records, and teacher made checklists.”*

## 2.5 Describe how Critical Initiative, Key Measure, and Strategy Map discussions are occurring with local districts and schools.

*Provide updates on progress made in aligning Continuous Improvement Initiatives.*

For most special ed units, the districts and local schools have the same initiatives and goals, but have the autonomy on how to implement and accomplish the critical initiative goals, with discussions typically centered at the local level (some as small as building-level).

In terms of the reporting structure, some of special ed units indicated that they communicate progress to state and district leaders, but most responses included their local collaboration efforts.

- *“The special ed unit continues to work on the aligning of SSIP with our district strategy map. Thus far, we have aligned our SSIP goal to “Goal 3” of the special ed unit strategy map, which targets safe learning environments. Activities specifically related to our special education department goal have been embedded into the “Activities” section of the strategy map, and buildings were directed to choose at least one special education activity to include in their building-level strategy map. Our goal was to bring the department goals to the building-level and bring awareness to buildings that their work is directly related to the work being done at the district-level. Our SSIP data-collection methods were also included on the strategy map under “Key Measures”. Conversations regarding the alignment happen most frequently during our Knowledge Works convenings, during which our district goals are discussed and analyzed. District leadership and building administrators have been supportive of special education department activities being included in district- and building-level goals. Building administrators are continuing to grow in their knowledge and understanding of special education initiatives, and we look forward to further refining this process, as well as expanding to Goals 1 and 2 of the special ed unit strategy map in the future.”*
- *“The Special Education Unit collaborates with the individual school districts comprising SEU. Each respective district embeds this into their own Continuous Improvement Initiatives. SEU provides guidance, monitoring, technical assistance, and funding to help each district implement supportive initiatives to meet the overall goal of increasing the engagement and graduation rates of students with Emotional Disturbances. Local school districts have leadership teams that meet on a regular basis to discuss school improvement and Cognia process to ensure they are making progress toward the goals. “Collective Responsibility” by all is part of the approach in most districts. School districts have developed academic and behavioral pathways for their school to utilize when making decisions regarding students. School districts have various structures to their Data/MTSS team approaches.”*
- *“The Critical Initiatives (2.1), Key Measure (2.2) and Additional Activities (2.3) for the unit is embedded in each of the individual school districts and buildings. Each individual district, and buildings within the districts, conduct local building team meetings in order to review the Critical Initiatives to ensure they are meeting individual student needs. Each have their own perception on how the initiatives are completed in their districts/buildings. Progress is based and measured using determined data selected within each district/building.”*

## 2.6 Describe the status of discretionary grants and/or other targeted funding/local efforts directed at improving graduation rates for students with disabilities.

Nearly all of the units reported using IDEA-B, state, and local funds for their efforts to improve graduation rates. Several units mentioned they utilized ESSR or Behavioral Health grants, as well as discretionary grants for specific programs and activities.

- *“For AIM, Special Education Unit used ESSER 1 funding. North Dakota Behavioral Health Grant was used to pay for training and subscription to Calm Classroom. Skill Streaming was purchased for the elementary and middle school grades with the North Dakota Behavioral Health Grant. I Can Problem Solve was purchased for Kindergarten, Elementary and Intermediate grades with the North Dakota Behavioral Health Grant.”*
- *“The special education unit has utilized behavioral health grant funds to purchase sensory items to develop sensory rooms at several school districts. Behavioral health grant money was also utilized to create a cadre of trainers in the area on Safety Care. Access to Behavioral Advantage was purchased with behavioral health grants. State and local dollars are used to support special education staff attendance at workshops and professional development opportunities. Discretionary grant money has been used to purchase tools and curriculum from the Connover Company in the area of secondary programming.”*
- *The special ed unit has utilized IDEA B Funds, Behavioral Grants (Discretionary Grant) as well as State and Local funds to support continuous improvement initiatives. Our discretionary grants have developed resources and trainings in the areas of Functional Behavioral assessments, Positive Behavioral Supports, and Collaboration with outside agencies to support students with social/emotional needs.”*
- *The Special Education Unit and their respective school districts have utilized State funds, Local funds, IDEA funds, and other locally available funding sources to support continuous improvement initiatives. They have and will continue to fund these and previous initiatives as well. The Special Education Unit received a 2020 Special Education Discretionary Grant. The monies requested were to address the state-wide educational goal and SEU's goals and objective pertaining to improving the engagement and graduation rates of students with behavioral, social/emotional, social communication, and/or mental health challenges. Focused training opportunities, guidance, and support for trainers and stakeholders was provided. In order to meet the needs of all stakeholders, Nonviolent Crisis Intervention (NCI) trainer certification and materials to train stakeholders in the evidence-based program was completed to give staff and other individuals working with students the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the goal. WhyTry? Program Curricula, a resilience education curriculum that provides simple, hands-on solutions for dropout prevention, violence prevention truancy reduction, and increased academic success was completed to give students the necessary skills to meet the goal.”*



### 3. Implementation Status for Evidence-based Practices and Fidelity data

#### 3.1 Describe the special education unit's efforts to improve graduation rates.

- *Include which middle and high school evidence-based practices are being implemented and provide an update on the progress of implementing these practices*
- *Specify how you know you are implementing evidence-based practices*
- *Specify how you know these practices are evidence-based*
- *Specify how you know what you are doing will improve graduation rates*
- *Describe how you are using the key measures*
- *Include your fidelity of implementation data in your response*

Special ed units utilized many sources of evidence-based practices and fidelity data. Several units mentioned Second Step, AIM, Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs), Technical Adequacy Tool of Evaluation (TATE), early warning signs, trauma and resiliency practices, Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and work experiences as practices and tools. Other curriculums that were implemented were READ 180, Nurtured Heart, Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI), Zones of Regulation, Collaborative and Proactive Solutions, Why Try, TEACCH, 7 Mindsets, Absenteeism and Truancy, Check and Connect, and Corrective Reading/Math.

For example, Second Step, AIM, MTSS, TATE, Zones of Regulation, Check and Connect, Why Try, and Early Warning Signs were among those most frequently mentioned.

- *“Throughout 2020-21 school year staff worked with districts to help better identify early warning data elements and assist in setting up plans to help support student learning. School psychologists received additional training at the NASP virtual conference. Expertise from this training was shared with districts as needed per student data review. When school psychologists recognized the early warning data elements, they would engage with district administration and special education teams to work toward identifying interventions that would remediate the risk of a student dropping out. Several of our local school districts have participated in MTSS training to help better use data to make social emotional and academic decisions for additional supports based on student data. School psychologist also received training on Behavioral Advantage to assist in better development of FBA and BIPs. This has led to better documentation on our student behavior goals. Better documentation leads to better implementation and better services. When student's social emotional and behavior needs are met then the student is more likely to have improved attendance and improved academics which typically lead to higher graduation rates.”*
- *“The middle schools use the SEL curriculum resource Second Step. One lesson per week is taught during Home Room. A pacing guide has been developed and the district is working on adopting SEL scales. At both the middle and high schools' buildings, leadership teams meet at least one time a month to review ODR data and other anecdotal data, as well as PLC meeting notes. Teams are using the IBRST to collect data on student behavior. The IBRST is part of the PTR process. All staff have been trained to use the IBRST. At both the middle and high school levels, Read 180 and Transitional Math are available to some students, both interventions are evidence based. Buildings have implemented PBIS and Trauma Sensitive Practices, based on school need. Teams review their data and make adjustments for the*

*students who are below 40 percent. The principals monitor for fidelity from teachers and assistant superintendents monitor fidelity from principals. Attached is the district's MTSS vision and framework.”*

- *“Behavior: For the 20-21 school year the special ed unit increased efforts to build capacity in its district members through professional development and implementation of current programming. All special education staff received training prior to the school year in areas of transition, behavior management, and social emotional support for students. Continued trainings throughout the year involved social emotional curriculum for early intervention, 504 training, School site intervention training for both academics and behavior. The Unit implements and uses DPI trainings for FBA's and corresponding BIP's. Also, the Unit has put great efforts into developing Behavior Support Plans (BSP's) and counselor interventions for those students needing more tiered supports. The unit follows the lead of DPI in developing FBA's and BIP's using templates that have had positive effects on outcomes for students. All BIP's that have been written use the mindset of preventative, educative with consequential reinforcers as interventions. The Unit in conjunction with the member districts feel the Positive Behavioral Support programs and BSP's written during early intervention through our building level support teams (BLST) has significantly reduced the number of suspensions and the need for more intensive FBA's. The use of outside agencies to assist with counseling for students in need has reduced the number of students missing instruction throughout the year. The implementation of the Conscious Discipline curriculum in our PreK - 2 grades has been introduced Unit wide and we hope to see great gains from this effort. Academics; The unit was involved with the dyslexia grant and because of the correlation between academic success, specifically reading and dropout rates, SEU and its member districts have targeted early intervention at the k-2 level to identify those students who maybe struggling with learning. Using identified curriculum assessments with STARS, DIBELS, and Pathways to Reading. The districts have identified and provided additional support to those students with low performance within the reading curriculum. Along with this the Unit uses a fidelity of implementation that corresponds with individual BIP's when written, BSP's, and academic intervention through ongoing assessment.”*

## 4. Stakeholder Engagement Activities

### 4.1 Discuss stakeholder engagement efforts across the special education unit.

*This includes, but is not limited to:*

- *Meaningful family engagement*
- *Community wraparound supports and*
- *Other stakeholder engagement efforts taking place*

Overall, most special ed units indicated they take a collaborative approach to engagement efforts, including the school, students and their parents, as well as the community. Units with wrap-around approaches frequently mentioned connecting families with community services and programs, such as counseling, Head Start, mentors, after-school programming, and career-training; however, wrap-around programs are difficult in rural areas where supports and services are more limited. Several units also engaged with families through family-focused activities and events, newsletters, and social media groups.

Though stakeholder engagement via the wrap-around approach was mentioned frequently, some of the special ed units indicated their efforts were focused on including the students' families and increasing resources in the community.

- *“When stakeholders work together, programs and plans are created to help students succeed. In order for these plans and programs to be successful, communication among stakeholders should be a priority at all times. Parents play an integral role in assisting their children's learning and when families, communities and schools work together, outcomes to support and improve the learning for students increase. Many of the most effective parent-school partnership programs include the community in their supports. The High School has several community partners: Behavioral Health has created a partnership with the school and they provide small groups that focus on addiction issues and how to overcome addiction. Mental Health Services, Law enforcement, and Human Services are additional agencies that are utilized to provide supports to our students. Our school has an established advisor/advisee mentor program in place. Each new student is assigned to an advisor (teacher) who tracks their progress and is a liaison between home and school. Personal relationships are important in encouraging families to participate. A variety of techniques including letters, phone calls, and visits by the school are used to engage parents and students. Our school holds evening meetings and conferences to accommodate families' work schedules. The COVID-19 pandemic created a number of new technologies to communicate with families and students and to link them to the classroom via virtual learning. When the SEU switched to remote learning in Spring 2020, school staff and leadership worked hard to communicate with students and families using any medium possible, including phone, email, social media, and home visits. These frequent attempts at communication continued through the 2020-21 school year, as the school shifted between remote, in-person, and hybrid instruction. While these efforts have been successful for some students and families, many more students than usual have failed courses this school year due to distance learning, problems with technology and devices, and little or no access to internet. School staff continue to work to improve engagement.”*

- *“The Special Education Leadership Team helps lead the following committees: District Administrative ISF Team (meets monthly), the District Advisory and Community ISF Team (will meet 2 a year: Nov and April), District ISF/ MTSS Taskforce (meets 3 times a year), and each building has MTSS A&B meetings (monthly). Please see attachment of the organizational structure and membership. In addition, the SEU hosts a Collaboration Wrap Around meeting occurring monthly and membership includes: SEU staff, Police Youth Bureau, Human Service Center, Family First Representative, Police Department, Safety Coordinator, Elementary Assistant Superintendent, and Juvenile Justice Representative. The purpose of the Collaboration meetings is to discuss current community trends, assess how the systems are working together, and what support is needed. One outcome from the 2020-21 school year was to move our Teen Tour (program for at risk youth) to July in order to help provide programming from June until August.”*
- *“We have provided family newsletters and a book study. Our school social workers work with Human Social Services to provide wrap-around supports, we have in-house therapy for students through an outside agency, and we hold back-to-school and school transition meetings with families. During COVID, our community opened a mentor center to provide social and emotional learning opportunities for students. We partnered with the mentor center for training and student programming. Our assistant director of special education provided some training and intervention techniques as well.”*
- *“Meaningful family engagement continues to be an area of need, and the outreach from the district staff to parents has been particularly prolific during this pandemic year. District staff have email addresses, cell phone numbers and work phone numbers to maintain that contact. Wrap-around services are hard to find in this area, but the Human Service Zone staff members are always willing to assist the districts with needs. The county has an ACT team that parents can engage to help support students with behavior issues. Meetings are usually held at the school with district staff and have proven effective.”*

## 5. Progress toward the SiMR

### 5.1 Describe your graduation rates for students with and without disabilities, including students in the SiMR group, for your schools and your special education unit.

*Please include discussion about:*

*a) The graduation trend(s)*

*b) Future Graduation Targets*

*c) Consideration for future SSIP efforts and activities. If your trend line does not indicate improving graduation rates, what adjustments do you plan to make to get things on track?*

A majority of special ed units recalled that their graduation rates have been traditionally high or were consistently growing before the covid pandemic. Due to this interruption, many units have seen fluctuations in their rates from 2018-19 to 2020-21, but they hope to gain ground once the health crisis normalizes and once they understand which initiatives and activities have had an impact on improving graduation rates among those students with ED.

Overall, special ed units stated that their general graduation rates tended to be higher than the state graduation average, but a few units discussed their lower-than-average rates and what they were planning to do to address the shortfalls.

- *“Statewide, there has been an increase in graduation rates for students with ED. As a unit, the number of students with disabilities have increased, our graduation rate for students with disabilities has increased, as had the graduation rate for students with ED. However, our unit students with disabilities and our students with ED are below the state graduation rate. Some schools are above the state graduation rate. Overall, the high school graduation rates have been above the state rate, except for in 2020, when they were at about the same as the state rate. Another High School is well below the state graduation rates. Their lowest year was 2020, when COVID-19 emerged as a global pandemic. Our hypothesis is that students who have barriers to learning fall behind quickly. Younger students with similar barriers to their learning may be impacted by similar issues. The SEU high schools have created a portrait of a graduate. The skills that are identified can be taught to our students with disabilities, including students with an emotional disturbance, as an intervention targeted toward increasing graduation rates. The future graduation targets of the SEU are to exceed the state rate for both students with disabilities and students with an emotional disturbance.”*
- *“Given that all of the 12th grade students on IEPs who were identified with social/ emotional difficulties graduated, it does appear that these efforts are having a positive impact on student achievement. Graduation trends for the unit decreased during the 2020 school year; however, prior to that had been on a steady upward trend. It is reasonable to assume that the current COVID-19 Pandemic may have had a negative impact on the progress for last year's seniors. Of the 38 students identified as ED in the unit, 5 dropped out during the 2020-2021 school year, which is 13%. Our largest school district has had steady graduation rates that have consistently been above the state average for students with disabilities. However,*

- there are still a number of rural schools in our unit whose information on ND Insights does indicate that graduation rate for all students continues to be a needed area of focus. Efforts to expand current evidence-based practices (Early Warning Systems, ND MTSS Behavior pathways, Restorative Practices) to our rural settings will be a focus for future SSIP activities. In addition, additional training and guidance will be provided to special education teachers on effectively writing and monitoring ED goals in order to improve the effectiveness of implementation of evidence-based practices for students with social-emotional difficulties.”*
- *“The graduation trends for students with ED is trending down. In 2018 the district had a large jump and increased the rate of graduation for students with ED by more than 10 points. The following year the district's graduation rate for students with ED dropped by more than 14 points and another seven points the following year. Our future graduation targets would be to increase graduation rates overall; our district graduation rate has also dropped by a couple of points this last year. Up until 2020 our district's graduation rate for students with ED was still above the state average. We are continually considering how to provide additional supports to students through community involvement and getting families hooked up with community supports. We continue to grow capacity with the PTR process and recently have begun focusing on providing additional supports to students in relation to job related activities, in order to prepare students for post-secondary life. During the upcoming school year, the district has formed a Data-Informed District Team, which will be meeting at least quarterly to analyze all data the district collects and focus on all students, grades K-12, who fall below 40%. The district will be asking schools to report how they are meeting the needs of the students who are struggling, and provide explanation of interventions that schools are providing to students. The district has also purchased a subscription to Panorama which will allow school buildings to document and keep records of what interventions have been tried with students and what was successful. The district has also purchased a subscription to Flyer Connect which is a new tool that will allow the district to communicate and engage with families and the community. We are also continuing work with a consultant to engage all families in the education of students.”*

## 6. Scale-Up Planning

### 6.1 What kinds of plans are taking place, including next steps, to scale up SSIP efforts to improve graduation outcomes across schools and the special education unit.

Many of the special ed units reported they are taking steps toward developing and implementing more formal procedures and using a number of evidence-based tools and practices, including FBAs, BIPs, TATE, Early Warning Signs, Second Step, Check and Connect, to improve graduation outcomes. The most commonly cited plans included FBAs/BIPs; hiring behavioral specialists/mentors/teachers; providing a wide-variety of behavior-related professional development, trainings, and workshops; and teaching self-regulation and life skills to students with disabilities, specifically ED. About half of units stated that increased student and family engagement would be used to create strong programs. Sensory rooms for students, the Panorama data collection tool, and working to collaborate with the community on employment.

While a majority of special ed units indicated they were going to be implementing and providing more structured training or specific evidence-based practices, there were several units who stated that their efforts would be more focused on providing on-demand resources for staff.

- *“For the upcoming school year, the district has invested in subscriptions to Panorama, Behavior Advantage, and Flyer Connect. Panorama is a data collection tool which tracks student data and compiles student information from many databases to assist teams in identifying students who are struggling, analyzing data at the district level, building level, classroom level, and individual student level. It groups students and assists teams in identifying evidence-based interventions and strategies to use with students to allow them to make progress and be successful. Behavior Advantage will pair with the Prevent-Teach-Reinforce Process work the district has invested in to assist teams in creating quality FBAs and BIPs that are easy for staff to follow and targeted to create student success. Flyer Connect, along with Family Engagement work buildings are doing with a consultant will improve the district's engagement with families and the community. In June each school building brought their MTSS team to a reboot session. Each team submitted an Action Plan to the superintendent outlining measurable goals for quality MTSS plans by buildings. In August, each building is bringing a team to a PLC Institute where administrators and lead teams in buildings will create a plan to reboot PLCs in buildings. All of these practices should increase graduation outcomes across the district for all students, including students with emotional/behavioral disabilities”*
- *“It is imperative that the SEU continue to gather and analyze data to address areas of concern and need. More formalized procedures are needed. The Special Education Unit will continue to assist both general and special educators with professional development opportunities on strategies for building social-emotional skills in all students. We will continue to partner with NDDPI to participate in professional developmental targeting FBA/BIP effectiveness. Grant funds will be used to create break boxes with materials designed to promote self-regulation in school and similar kits will be provided to families for students to engage in positive social-emotional activities outside of school. With the recent development of the SEU SEL Committee, the school plans to implement a schoolwide social-emotional screener and intervention program. Zones of Regulation materials have been ordered and distributed to staff, along with the scheduling of a schoolwide professional*

*development on Zones prior to students beginning school in the fall. Teachers will be required to designated two home-base periods each week to Zones material. The SEL Committee is also looking into implementing student and family surveys through the Panorama platform throughout the upcoming school year. These surveys will guide school counselor sessions with individual students and groups of students. The SEU has representation on the SEL Committee and will continue to work collaboratively with school teams to plan programs and interventions for all students with both academic and social emotional, behavioral needs. The SEU has designated time for professional development on restorative practices, specifically focused on circles. Teachers will be required to designate one home-base period each week to a circle. The restorative justice coach will meet with teachers regularly and guide the circle process.”*

- *“We are collaborating with high school administration on creating a profile of a graduate, and specifically what characteristics help students succeed at school. Those characteristics will be targets on transition IEPs. The SEU will use the Panorama data platform to identify students who are at risk socially, behaviorally, academically, and with their attendance.”*
- *“The special education unit will be utilizing the additional access to the digital library of assessments to better identify areas of need and better target support/ interventions to those identified areas. The broader access of staff to utilize behavior advantage will improve our FBA/BIP process along with improved data tracking to identify progress on those BIPs. Included in those strategies will be broader access to sensory tools and sensory breaks utilizing the equipment purchased with behavioral health grants. The creation of the online video training in conjunction with community providers will help give families, paraeducators, and regular education teacher better strategies to help support students with social emotional challenges. All of these new initiatives in conjunction with better recognition of early warning signs for drop out will hopefully improve our graduation rate for students with emotional disturbances.”*



## 7. Sustainability Planning or Considerations

### 7.1 Describe plans for the SSIP gains to be supported and sustained going forward.

Most plans for supporting and sustaining SSIP gains included implementing new initiatives and expanding staffs' social-emotional skills (e.g., Train the Trainer, Behavior Advantage, Check and Connect), while also emphasizing the need to collaborate with other districts in their special ed units. However, funding was frequently mentioned as a challenge. Several special ed units also mentioned that they were building partnerships within their communities to ensure that students have resources outside of school to sustain support and meet their needs (treatment options, career training, life skills programs).

Overall, staff trainings, new initiatives, and collaborating with other districts were included in the plans of nearly all special ed units to support and maintain their graduation rates. However, funding for additional programs, training, and even teachers' salaries are mentioned as barriers to support SSIP gains.

- *“SSIP gains will be supported and sustained through additional initiatives that began in 2021. The District 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.”*
- *“The district has a plan for continuing to train all new ED teachers and special education strategists in Foundations of PTR. We have successfully completed this plan over the last three years. We are planning to add the next tier of training which would be training the same group of people in Advanced PTR. We have contracted with a consultant for the upcoming school year to continue individual coaching sessions with a consultant for the school psychologists. Teachers who have had PTR training will continue to attend the booster sessions provided by the consultant to ensure continued use of the PTR process. School teams will continue to have the option of participating in PTR modeling sessions. This continues to help us build capacity and sustainability. Other onboarding of staff for PBIS, TSS, TIPS, Love and Logic, Sources of Strength, Second Step and other programs are included in back-to-school training for new staff. We will continue to try new strategies to engage families and the community. We will continue to focus on providing unique opportunities for students with behavioral and emotional challenges by taking advantage of the discretionary grant opportunities.”*
- *“The SEU has invested significant resources in the last year to ensure that all students and teachers have the technology and instructional materials needed to be successful. Unfortunately, human resources continue to be a challenge simply because of the SEU location and low salaries. Teachers receive professional development and coaching support through the consultant as well as a partnership with Ed Direction; unfortunately, that support has been entirely virtual in SY20-21 due to COVID-19. Plans for the next school include hiring an MTSS coordinator, creating academic schedules based on data and progress monitoring, and a stronger partnership with middle school to align programs.”*

## 8. Other

### 8.1 Offer any other relevant SSIP information or thoughts that have not already been shared.

Special ed units often mentioned their commitment to improving graduation rates. Some units specifically discussed the positive impacts of their efforts to engage students and their families, as well as the community. However, covid had an impact on teachers' abilities to adjust modalities, programming, and relationships with students and their parents. Several special ed units stated that in-school clinicians would be beneficial for students with social-emotional needs.

- *“These two Special Education Units were recognized for their efforts to close the achievement gap for students with disabilities. Any general education student within the Unit who is considering dropping out of high school is offered special education assessment by the SEU.”*
- *“The SEU was recognized last year for their efforts to close the achievement gap for students with disabilities. This honor was given to 10 districts in the state of North Dakota to school districts showing greater than expected outcomes for students with disabilities. Findings from surveys and interviews conducting Fall 2020 with the top school districts were shared with the National Dropout Prevention Center to highlight the best practices from each of the 10 selected districts along with suggestions for all districts across North Dakota to apply the lessons learned and to continue to best serve students with disabilities.”*
- *“A majority of school districts within the unit support a clinical counselor to provide clinical counseling and support to the students in the school. This support is available during school hours and paid through private insurance, grants or district funds. This is a great way to lower the negative connotation associated with mental health and provide immediate access for students to the mental health supports they need.”*
- *“Graduation rates for ED students is challenging for a multitude of reasons. One of the biggest barriers to overcome is priorities. Academic focus by the teacher is the main priority in a school. Priorities for ED students may be the need to control their environment so they can predict what the outcome will be, and administrators priorities focus on structure and safety as well as education. Each group needs to acknowledge that each student has value and can benefit the school, whether they are "good kids" or not. Often, kids with ED are challenging for general education staff and administration. There is a misconception that these kids are "bad" or "trouble makers". In reality they may be struggling to make it through the day due to circumstances no one knows anything about. The Safe and Civil Absenteeism & Truancy program will offer staff the ability to learn what will help the student become successful. A focus on the purpose of absenteeism and truancy will be what brings about success for all.”*
- *“The Covid pandemic changed the world of educational programming for students and the engagement of students. The SEU and its respective school districts made significant attempts to engage and education all students, special education and general education students, through a variety of methods. Staff and students had to adapt to new educational delivery methods. When methods did not work, school districts looked at data and other evidence to change up their programming to meet the individual needs of students. Although it is known that education everywhere was impacted by Covid and that all students may not have received the same education as they did prior to Covid, the SEU and its respective school districts did what they knew was best for students and met numerous needs.”*

## 9. Technical Assistance Needs for the Next Year

### 9.1 Add any SSIP technical assistance supports that might be helpful in the upcoming school year.

A majority of special ed units expressed a desire to know how other districts and units are improving their graduation rates and if their peers have resources to share. Units also indicated that additional training and support on the SSIP process, data progress, and data utilization would be helpful.

- *“Further information on the SSIP process, progress, and how the data is utilized would be appreciated.”*
- *“I know a number of school districts have or are entering into partnerships with behavioral health units to provide in-school counseling services by licensed clinicians. As we are in the beginning stages of this process, it would be nice to have a toolkit with a document containing the appropriate steps including contacts to make and what kinds of information will be needed in the process. I appreciate outlines and procedure documents for implementing new things, as re-inventing the wheel is not an efficient use of my time as a director.”*
- *“Continuing to review data during leadership sessions will be helpful, as well as hearing what other districts are doing to improve graduation outcomes is always helpful.”*
- *“Continued support from DPI on how to complete the Cognia processes and how that blends with the overall state goal. Continuing to hear from other units on how/ what they are doing to improve graduation rate.”*



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