

Qualitative Analysis of the PIER Tool Reports

2021-22

Public



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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 2021-22 PIER Tool reports submitted by the 31 special education units in North Dakota.

Summary Statements from the State Systemic Improvement Plan PIER Tool 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 graduation 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 the use of evidence-based practices that increase student engagement and promote social, behavioral, and mental health practices. Examples of If-Then statements included in the PIER Tool reports:

- *“If all learners are supported through a continuum of evidence-based practices that promote academic, behavioral, and mental health then graduation rates for students with disabilities will improve.”*
- *“If we increase the amount of proactive behavioral interventions and social emotional learning strategies in elementary, middle, and high school, then graduation rates for students with disabilities, including students with Emotional Disabilities will improve.”*
- *“If special education and key regular education staff receive appropriate training and have the tools and curriculum to provide high quality instructions, then our graduation rate for students with disabilities will improve.”*

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.” Units also mentioned the importance of academic supports related to standards-based learning, credit recovery, and choice ready, as well as the importance of behavior supports. Community and family partnerships, along with PD in areas of social/emotional wellbeing and self-regulation were also common among schools.

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

- *“Our local strategic school improvement plan includes the following critical initiatives: Identify high-needs students in each grade level and design individual academic supports to ensure they can be successful, administer benchmark assessments and analyze data to inform instructional interventions, implement trauma-informed practices schoolwide, behavioral and mental health supports will be provided to students, provide students in need with high quality credit recovery or alternative high school programming, provide services for eligible students who meet McKinney-Vento requirements, continued implementation of MTSS, communicate with families to increase community participation and involvement of the school.”*
- *“District Strategic Plan. Strategic Initiative one states, “Develop and implement equitable district-wide processes to support academic and social emotional growth and mastery of essential learning outcomes so all students graduate on time, Choice Ready.”*
- *“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.”*
- *“An objective in the school improvement plan is to implement a robust MTSS structure that supports 100% of student success academically, socially, and emotionally with a critical initiative being to incorporate trauma-informed practices into interventions. The unit SSIP goal is to improve six-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.”*

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, they indicated that in order to track their progress they 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.

- *"1. Professional Development- provides Emotional/Behavior Training for all unit districts on how to recognize and implement strategies to help students improve their time at school. 2. All schools within the unit have implemented some sort of MTSS framework in order to catch students who may be struggling and provide support and help to keep them on the path to graduation. 3. Schools within the unit hold parent/family engagement opportunity evenings at least 3 times per year. 4. The unit has hired a BCBA specialist for two days a month to help our students with Emotional Disabilities. 5. The School districts within the unit have recognized the need for Mental Health concerns as well as Social/emotional Behavior disorders and have contracted or hired social workers or more counselors to fill this need.*
- *"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; using an early warning system, offering credit recovery and career exploration activities, 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.

- *“Calls and/or home visits were conducted for students who dropped out during the previous school year. High School staff also participated in “graduation round-up” to reach out to students who dropped out and see how we can get the students back to the school. Transportation work group also address transportation barriers for programming at the school. During the 22-23, school transportation options will be made available for students funded through the IDEA-B grant.”*
- *“Selected teachers participated in Calm Classroom training to learn strategies to help students regulate their emotions and utilize self-calming strategies, when needed. As a unit, we implemented the AIM curriculum (Accept, Identify, Move) to incorporate the concepts of Mindfulness, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). As a unit, we prioritized training opportunities for teachers serving students in LRE setting C. In August of 2022, new special education teachers will be trained and provided materials to implement this curriculum. We implemented our Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring System (EWIMS) in schools throughout the district.”*
- *“The following are activities that help improve graduation rates including students with emotional disabilities. Structured Learning Time (SLT); Alternative Diploma; Summer Credit Recovery; Center for Distance Education; Hiring a BCBA to consult with districts each month; PLC time for teachers to go over data and assessments of students to discuss what is going well and what things need improvement; Home room time for students to touch base and talk through struggles with an adult 2 times per week.”*

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 and monitor student data (e.g., attendance, academic performance, behavior) to recognize early warning signs and to “catch” those students who are struggling early in their high school career. 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.

- *“Local school districts are using data to identify “at risk” students through Universal Screeners such as the FastBridge SAEBRS) and Early Warning Systems by tracking data on attendance, behavior referrals, GPA, and credits. At the 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.”*
- *“Case managers check attendance, behavior, and grades/work completion on a weekly basis for all students with an IEP to ensure proper supports are in place for each student. If a student demonstrates a pattern of absences, inappropriate behavior, and/or concerns with grades/work completion, the student’s IEP team meets to plan for additional interventions. With assistance from our unit Social Worker, additional interventions, referrals to, and/or collaboration with outside agencies are implemented when necessary.”*
- *“Counselors, teachers, and principals work together in PLC, MTSS, and IEP teams to identify students who may be straying off the path of graduation. The teams review student grades, missing assignments, attendance, and progress on IEP goals. When students are struggling in one or more areas, teams begin working with students to identify barriers and potential solutions. Besides individual behavior intervention plans, schools use check-in check-out, fix-it plans, restorative practices, tutoring, Sources of Strength, and other relationship-building activities to assist students.”*

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.

Critical initiatives within each school district are embedded and tied to the districts Improvement Plan. Each district has its own vision for how these initiatives are carried out within their respective school buildings. These include PD opportunities, administrative involvement, district meetings, and the aligning of goals. 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.

- *“As a unit and school district, Social Emotional Learning is one of the three elements on the district Strategic Plan. Teachers have had ongoing training this past school year on student SEL specific to CASEL's SEL components of Self Awareness, Self-management, Social Awareness, Social Skills and Responsible Decision Making. The special education department has input to the district's continuous improvement initiatives.*
- *“Over the last several years, the school leadership and staff have worked hard to build collective efficacy and ensure that all team members are working toward shared goals. Actions include: Engaging in professional learning to improve collaboration and collective efficacy, regularly creating and sharing short term implementation plans for school improvement, implementing a MTSS process schoolwide. Family, community, and student engagement in schoolwide goals continue to be an area for growth, as challenges were exacerbated during the 2020-21 school year due to COVID-19.”*
- *“The school districts within the unit have a good, collaborative working relationship when it comes to performance of students they serve. This year the Special Education Unit and the school districts have teamed up to bring professional development services for all staff as well as BCBA work 2 days per month to help teachers and staff with the emotional/behavioral needs of our students.”*

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.

- *“The unit has applied IDEA B funds, Behavioral Health Grant School funds along with local and state funds to support continuous improvement initiatives. These funds have provided training in Early Warning System data collection, Positive Classroom Behavior Supports, Trauma Informed Care, Functional Behavior Assessments, Check and Connect training, efficient data collection and goal writing, classroom management strategies along with outside agency collaboration to better support student needs.”*
- *“The unit uses IDEA funds, as well as State and Local funds, and grants to support continuous improvement initiatives. Our professional development has focused on self-regulation, restorative practices, student engagement, trauma sensitivity, crisis prevention and intervention, and the FBA/BIP process. Grant funds were used to target self-care and wellness at the middle school level by providing Calm Kits to families with a middle school student on an IEP to increase awareness of anxious feelings and tools for coping with those feelings.”*
- *“The school utilizes IDEA Part B funds, as well as, State and Local funds to support continuous improvement initiatives. Our professional development focus has provided training in conscious discipline, transition training, classroom management, positive behavioral supports, zones of regulation, and continued focus on FBA development. Also, WRSS works collaboratively with local agencies to support students with social / emotional needs.”*

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. *The use of programs such as, NWEA, Aims Web, TATE, Stars, or other programs are often used to identify if students need additional instruction or interventions. MTSS was a common support used to give students the level of support they need.*

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

- *“The Special Education Department, alongside schools provides evidence-based practices for MTSS-B utilizing the Second Step curriculum at the elementary level and Resiliency and Youth at the secondary level along with the Why Try curriculum. For MTSS-A evidence-based practices are utilized for math and reading instruction. Student data is reviewed at the building level on a monthly basis by grade level teachers and specialists. This data is used to provide increasing and decreasing supports to students on an individual level. It is this individualization that promotes improved graduation rates. Fidelity to these practices/curriculums is documented through the “One Stop Shop” a model-based data collection tool. The “One Stop Shop” tracks 1) what activities/practices/curriculums a school engages in, 2) what the fidelity to those activities is, and 3) what are the student outcomes to the activities. Outcome data for the “One Stop Shop” is collected from students engaging in electronic pre and post testing for each lesson. Overarching system data is also collected by monitoring the number of students receiving supports at each tier for both MTSS-B and MTSS-A.*
- *“Literacy teams are using actual student performance as measured by NWEA or Aimsweb to determine what students are in need of additional literacy instruction. When identified students in need of more intensive supports are screened by the reading specialist. If a student is identified as needing additional instruction, the reading specialist will provide interventions such as Read Naturally, Barton Phonics, etc.”*
- *“For middle school and high school, we have a continuum of supports. Our middle school teachers have been trained to implement AIM. Our elementary, middle, and high school teachers have been training in Collaborative and Proactive Solutions. Skills Streaming for*

Adolescence curriculum has been purchased, and specific classes on how to better utilize the curriculum are scheduled throughout this school year which will increase implementation rates. An interventions program is in place at both high schools, with a teacher hired to provide skills coaching to students. A "school within a school" concept has been created and will be implemented for the 2022-2023 school year. For students who need more than the support at their neighborhood school, we have the SAIL program. This program operates at 2 locations and supports students individually. All of these supports help keep students in school, reducing drop out numbers. At one middle and one high school, an "alternate to suspension" program will be piloted. Data surrounding in-school and out-of-school suspensions for students with disabilities will be monitored as evidence."

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. Several units also engaged with families through family-focused activities and events, newsletters, and social media groups. All of these stakeholder engagement activities help promote self-regulation and choice-ready skills and are all important in helping students with disabilities be successful.

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.

- *“We provide family newsletters throughout the school year. The schools provide 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. The mentor center continues to be open and well supported. Our special education unit partnered with the mentor center for training and student programming.”*
- *“The unit works with each member school district as well as outside agencies to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. All schools engage in their own targeted family engagement activities which are tailored to the culture and needs of their community. Several schools hold parent nights in which they provide food, activities, training and opportunities for relationship building. The school has secured a Behavioral Health Grant which has provided mental health services and medication management one day per week for students with emotional/behavioral/social needs. Sensory tools and activities have also been provided as part of this grant as well as strategic planning for MTSS for behavior implementation. The unit collaborates with Independence Inc. to provide pre-employment, advocacy and social skills training to students in several schools. This collaboration provides students and their families with supports which will assist with post-secondary life such as exploration of disability support in college, referrals to Vocational Rehabilitation, career exploration as well as numerous other supports. The unit supports a yearly Parent in which families of students with disabilities spend a day and a night participating in activities, learning and collaboration. All family members are included in the retreat with student and adult mentors provided for support and organization. Parent report improved satisfaction with school services because of their ability to network with other parents and learn about their students' disability.”*
- *“Behavioral health staff have participated with community supports in an effort to determine community needs as well as identify specific supports that will benefit families.*

Families have benefited from individual counseling, assistance in accessing mental health, medical, and financial supports. Families are provided lists of community resources, are provided assistance in determining which supports may benefit them and partner with staff to cooperate with the juvenile court, human and social service agencies to provide support, understanding, and advocacy when needed. Families needing assistance obtaining outside services are provided mentorship and supports from school teachers and social workers as well as behavioral health staff. A Behavioral Health team member will be available to parents to assist in developing a plan for positive attendance at their convenience if needed outside of the school day.”

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 have been consistently growing. While unit directors mentioned the impact of covid in last year's report, not as many mentioned it this year.

Overall, special ed units stated that their general graduation rates tended to be higher than the state graduation average, but due to the small numbers of students in some of the districts, the data can be skewed, making it hard to generalize. 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, in our unit students with disabilities and students with ED are below the state graduation rate. As schools, some schools are above the state graduation rate. Overall, a school’s graduation rates have been above the state rate, except for in 2020, when they were at about the same as the state rate. A School is well below the state graduation rates. Their lowest year was 2020, when COVID-19 emerged as a global pandemic. Their graduation rate rose in the 2020-2021 school year; however, they did not reach pre pandemic levels. 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 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 schools are to exceed the state rate for both students with disabilities and students with an emotional disturbance.*
- *“The graduation trend for the units and the districts have been generally increasing and is higher than the state rates. The rate for students with disabilities is 100%. The population of students with ED for the 2018-19 cohort was zero in the unit. Historically, the unit has had one student with ED and has not graduated a student with ED over the last three years. Future graduation target is to improve graduation in the next year for students with disabilities and to increase the graduation rate of students with ED to 100% to equal the students with disabilities rate. The unit will continue to implement the Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring Systems and work to make those systems sustainable as effective systemic processes. The unit will also assist schools in delivering social emotional*

learning and writing effective FBAs and BIPs for all students who require this level of intervention.”

- *“The unit along with the districts that make up our unit, have had a pretty good trend of graduation rate of students with Disabilities including those with Emotional Disabilities. We will continue to strive to have all of our students with disabilities and Emotional Disabilities graduate from High School with a successful transition process after high school. Our unit and districts will continue to collaborate, evaluate, and implement new SSIP activities in order to make sure our students graduation path is successful.”*

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, Student Voice and Choice, Second Step, Check and Connect, to improve graduation outcomes. The most commonly cited plans included FBAs/BIPs; hiring behavioral specialists/mentors/teachers/guidance counselors/psychologists; 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. Units plan on continuing to offer programs that will help students with ED such as dual credit, online schooling, summer school, and credit recovery. About half of the units stated that increased student and family engagement would be used to create strong programs. Several mentioned forming community partnerships for mental health supports.

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.

- *“Many staff and the director will attend the MTSS-ND conference and will have the usual back-to-school training with the unit where transition IEPs and activities will be shared. Efforts to engage students in the education process will be targeted for 2022-2023. School guidance counselors will continue to work with special education staff, students and families to plan and tweak arrangements for students to attend career fairs, job shadows, tours of factories, businesses and postsecondary educational institutions. Training for the upcoming year focuses on Zones of Regulation, executive functioning skills, Love and Logic, CPI and TEACCH. The BCBA will continue training in discrete trial instruction methods for our youngest ASD students and assist with setting up the sensory areas. Student engagement has become the target for every transition plan, to entice students to take an active interest in post-secondary options and to begin the process of preparation. The districts have begun to allow younger students to attend the vocational classes in the area so that they are motivated to remain in school, while they learn a trade such as welding. Technology is another area of student interest where education can make the difference. Classes in programming, coding and repair are very popular with the special education students, as are some art and design classes. The SSIP plan will continue to focus on teaching students’ self-regulation, social-emotional skills, working cooperatively with others, setting goals and understanding their own needs. The unit also continues to develop community ties to help students find the best job shadowing and career exploration opportunities.”*
- *“In the spring of 2021, the behavior group discussed the results of the recent FBA and BIP monitoring as well as known behavioral concerns that occurred during the 2021-2022 school year. The following activities will either begin or ramp up during the 2022-2023 school year: follow-up observations after trainings to ensure proper use of activities and strategies, increasing parent education and participation. Activities will also include reviewing and training in behavioral interventions directed toward decreasing the annual suspension and expulsion data and observing the general ed classrooms using behavior intervention processes as a guide. Results of these observations will guide the direction of our trainings as well as brining in trainers for at-risk students as well as students with disabilities.”*

- *“The 22/23 school year will include a boot camp to reengage staff into the Absenteeism & Truancy program. The focus will be to follow the program with fidelity to ensure we are working toward a positive outcome for students with ED and graduation rate improvements. Program Coordinators and behavioral health staff will meet with school administration individually to discuss the process and how SPED can collaborate with them to attain a higher graduation rate for students with ED. The high school talks about a freshman academy and this is an opportunity for engagement with students as they enter the last few years of compulsory attendance. School administration will talk about attendance and the benefits of regular attendance and school participation.”*

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 initiatives and expanding staffs' social-emotional skills through various PD of evidence-based practices determined by data reviews, district collaborations, and community collaborations. Several mentioned that district data helps to develop a common direction and to align programs. Some units mentioned that they are giving tuition support to teachers to obtain licensure.

Overall, staff trainings 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.

- *“The special education department intends to continue making gains in responding appropriately to student social/emotional needs in order to create safe learning environments and improve graduation rates. We intend to continue with training on evidence-based strategies in completing Functional Behavior Assessments, creating Positive Behavior Support Plans, and designing appropriate interventions for students. Our district collects data each year on the quality of our Functional Behavioral Assessments and Positive Behavior Support Plans, and responds to this data via PD and updates to our templates. AIM training and implementation will continue throughout the 2022-2023 school year. The Behavioral Health Grant will continue to support many of our districts' initiatives aligned to the area of Wellness.”*
- *“The unit will continue to provide evidence based, high quality professional development which targets the emotional, behavioral and social needs of students with disabilities. This includes training on Self-Regulation, Trauma Informed Practices, Functional Behavioral Assessments, Behavior Intervention Plans and Learning Procedures. An emphasis on Transition 16-21 resources and services was implemented through the virtual cafeteria menu model last year. This model for training has been successful for the unit in that it reaches staff without travel and allows for discussion and feedback. All training is designed to improve outcomes for students including graduation rates. The unit will continue collaborating with local mental health providers, Vocational Rehabilitation and Independence Inc. and will seek opportunities to add more community-based collaborations. The unit will continue to engage in MTSS work with member schools, providing resources and consultation based on their individual engagement in that process.”*
- *“In order for current SSIP gains to be supported and sustained going forward, the unit is committed to providing high quality professional development in evidence-based practices aimed at increasing success of students with disabilities and emotional social needs. This includes additional training on effective Behavior Intervention Plans, Trauma Informed and Restorative Practices. Community based-partnerships with mental health providers, Vocational Rehabilitation, Human Services, and Human Service Zones have been establish and continue to grow. The units staff continue to engage in MTSS work at the school district level to provide resources and consultation for providing effective interventions and progress monitoring. The unit will continue to utilize Behavioral Health Grants, Neglected and Delinquent Grants, and funding from Division of Juveniles Services to support critical initiatives in our unit schools.”*

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. Several units mentioned that in order for kids to feel successful, they need to form strong relationships and have a balance between academics and behavior. A more personalized approach for each student, an expansion of health partnerships with the community, and hiring more school psychologists will also help in student success. Several units mentioned the importance of offering a variety of electives, which include non-academic opportunities, and a variety of extracurricular activities (not just sports) to students. Summer enrichment programs were also mentioned.

A few units mentioned that those students who made great gains and whom were staffed out of special ed are not counted in the graduation rate but should be.

- *“Two district were 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.”*
- *“Educational systems and programming have evolved over time. Complexities such as students’ diverse strengths and areas of educational and personal need, staffing issues, school funding, access to resources, instructional materials have impacted educating all students to graduate Choice Ready. The Covid pandemic significantly impacted how educational programming for students and the engagement of students has changed the world of education today. The unit and its districts continue to make cognizant attempts to engage and educate all students, both special education and general education, through a variety of avenues, methods and resources. The unit and school districts look at data, programming, methodology, and other evidence to support or change up their programming to meet the individual needs of students. The unit and its respective school districts have done and will continue to do what they know and what they believe is best to meet the numerous needs of all students and staff.”*
- *“There are instances when students with disabilities make such great gains in their social-emotional and self-regulation needs they no longer need or qualify for special education services. These students are exited to regular education. These students are not included in our special education graduation rates, yet are incredible successes. Implementation of Check & Connect intervention, addition of a school psychologist, expansion of our area Career and Technical Education Center, and access to behavioral health school grant funds this upcoming year will provide wonderful opportunities to increase engagement and graduation rates for our students with social, emotional, and behavioral concerns.”*
- *“The district will continue to engage in personalization and authentic experiences to help students reach graduation. Additional work will continue to find the balance of academic and behavior in order for students to feel successful and want to continue with school. Programming, more than ever, is being personalized so that students are able to see their goals come true and achieve graduation.”*

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.

Several 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. They also mentioned that collaboration with other units to discuss what they are doing to improve graduation rates would also be helpful. Units also indicated that additional coaching support, data analysis support, and continued support from DPI is helpful. Additional funding is also appreciated.

- *“My unit could benefit from additional support in data analysis and monitoring early warning signs. Some have basic knowledge, but all could benefit from support targeting moving from data-rich, analysis-poor to data & analysis-rich and assigning interventions based on analysis.”*
- *“Ongoing professional development regarding updates to data, and updated graduation rates by disability category would be helpful.”*
- *“The unit as a whole could benefit from in person or virtual technical assistance from ND DPI and other State provided trainings in areas that need to be focused on or improved on statewide level. The unit will collaborate with Individual school districts who indicated they could use technical assistance for [several] initiatives.*
- *“Staff continue to need support in the area of behavioral health for students. The school staff are spread very thin and may not have the resources that students and families need.”*
- *“It would be great to hear what other units are doing and whether specific programs are available through state incentives or programs.”*
- *“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.”*