

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Special Education Improvement Planning

1. **What is the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)?** The requirement to develop a State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) that focuses on one student performance measure is a new part of the State's and LEA's general supervision responsibilities of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). General supervision includes the responsibilities to ensure a high degree of procedural compliance, as well as a high quality service delivery program that results in the improvement of positive outcomes for students with disabilities. Those responsibilities are outlined in a State Performance Plan (SPP) and accountability is reported in an annual summary of progress/success, the Annual Performance Report (APR). This SSIP is Indicator 17 of a new SPP/APR. A student performance measure, as well as the strategies to improve it are the result of recommendations developed from stakeholder input and approved by the State Superintendent.
2. **What process did NDDPI use to identify the area of focus and the strategies?** Beginning in 2013, stakeholder input was gathered through meetings, surveys and presentations to various stakeholder groups. Recommendations were developed from that input by a project leadership team, vetted by the IDEA Advisory Committee and then approved by the State Superintendent.

Stakeholders at meetings were informed that participation was representational and advisory. They were responsible for communication to and from the stakeholder groups they represented. Their role was not to make decisions, but rather to advise NDDPI in order to develop recommendations that the State Superintendent would approve for North Dakota SSIP implementation. They analyzed data, state and local infrastructures, and statewide educational initiatives. The following recommendations were approved: 1) Student Performance Measurement and Focus Population- Six year extended Graduation Rates for students identified with Emotional Disturbance. The focus population was expanded after stakeholder input to include students with behavioral, social/emotional, social communication and mental health needs so as to have a larger effect size; 2) Primary Evidence-based Strategy- Each school will include a special education specific goal in their required continuous improvement plan. (Reference to Century Code- 15.1-06-06, **Approval of Public Schools**). Included in this strategy was the development of a special education improvement planning model that aligned with a current model used by North Dakota schools. Additional strategies approved:

- NDDPI will provide technical assistance and financial resources for special education units to conduct the planning process.
- NDDPI will assist and support special education units to design and deliver quality professional development.
- NDDPI will assist special education units to monitor progress and evaluate success.
- NDDPI will advocate for an increase in mental health services, especially for this targeted population of students.

3. **What stakeholder groups have been involved?** The following groups have been involved in providing input: Special Education Directors' Study Council, North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders, Parent groups- Family Voices, Designer Genes, and Pathfinders (North Dakota Parent/Training Center), North Dakota United, Regional Education Associations, the IDEA Advisory Committee, the Interagency Coordinating Committee, an Educator from reservation schools, a Consumer of services (past student), Special Education Coordinators, Special Education Teachers, Related Service Providers, North Dakota Vision Services, North Dakota School for the Deaf, Youth Correctional Center, North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities, Minot State University, University of North Dakota, University of Mary, Bismarck State College, NDDPI Units, NDDPI Administration, Transition Communities of Practice, Part C of the Developmental Disabilities Division of the Department of Human Services, AdvancED, the Technical Assistance Center for Excellence in Special Education and the Office of Special Education Programs.
  
4. **How is this aligned to the AdvancED school accreditation process?** Schools are required to conduct comprehensive, continuous improvement planning for school approval, AdvancED accreditation, and Schoolwide Title 1 eligibility. A systemic improvement plan outlining priority goals and activities and the means to evaluate progress and success results from that planning. In North Dakota one plan can be used to fulfill the requirement for any of the above listed purposes. A goal, strategy, or set of activities specific to the improvement of educational services and supports for students with behavioral, social/emotional, social communication and mental health needs must now be included in that plan. Most schools currently use the AdvancED model and its internal review process to develop their required plan. The special education improvement planning model extends three indicators of AdvancED that focus on student engagement and system supports. It assists schools in understanding the engagement and support practices that are proven effective for the SSIP focus population. It uses a similar framework of performance standards, indicators and rubrics to rate current performance and identify areas for improvement. Plans must be uploaded into the AdvancED system using ASSIST. The timeline to upload and document the inclusion of the special education goal is the end of January, 2016. NDDPI partners on AdvancED external review teams occurring after the end of January will look for a goal, a strategy added to a current goal, or a set of activities added to a current strategy that is specific to this effort. For those schools not participating in an external review this year, the information will be sent by the special education unit to the NDDPI, Special Education office to demonstrate compliance with the requirement. Based on continued stakeholder input, beginning in October, 2016, the documentation will be an assurance added to the AdvancED, ASSIST system. It must be checked indicating that the goal, strategy or set of activities is included in the school improvement plan to receive approval status.

Schools should be involved in the development of the plan (leadership team representation, needs assessment, etc.), but may not be directly involved in all activities to reach the goal (a decision of the planning leadership team as they identify where these students are and whether

schools should adjust, change or add to their implementation of evidence based practices). By entering the goal in its plan, each school is aware of the activities of the unit and will keep track of the unit's progress and success. They will also be responsible for reporting out that progress and success to staff and constituents. They may be responsible to participate in future activities as the unit conducts continuous improvement planning in subsequent years.

5. **Explain the written summary requirement.** A written summary similar to the executive summary of the AdvancED model must be completed as part of the needs assessment component. A template can be found on the DPI website at the address listed in #8. This must also be disseminated to each school and uploaded into ASSIST. At this time, however, schools who are not conducting the internal review process prior to the external review visit will likely be unable to complete the upload. Units should send the summary to the NDDPI, Special Education office to document compliance with the requirement.
6. **Does the unit have to use the same goal for all schools?** Each school may not be involved in the activities planned for any given year, but each school's plan must have a goal, strategy or set of activities specific to this effort. The decision as to what goals, how many goals and which schools will be involved in the initial year's activities is the responsibility of the unit's leadership team. It was suggested by NDDPI that units start this new planning effort by developing one goal for all of its schools. With the identification of an indicator to be evaluated at elementary and middle schools and another indicator evaluated at high schools, that suggestion was expanded to two different goals. Some unit leadership teams have decided to evaluate the indicator identified for each level of school, but develop a goal, strategy and set of activities that are specific to each school. These units have been asked to consider the number and type of efforts that they can support before finalizing with each school. Other leadership teams have decided to build upon current efforts and enter goals that adjust or add-in additional strategies and activities to particular school's current plans.
7. **Does the unit have to evaluate all five of the indicators?** Stakeholders identified two indicators to begin the process- Indicator 1.1 for elementary and middle schools, dealing with engaging these students through the explicit teaching of self-regulation skills and the planning and use of multiple means of engagement by teachers; and, Indicator 2.2 for high schools, dealing with quality behavior supports, particularly using functional behavior assessments to drive behavioral planning, and the inclusion of behavior or social/emotional measures in early warning systems. NDDPI is building professional development structures that will assist units to design and conduct quality professional development in these areas. Those professional development activities will increase the knowledge and skills of educators regarding the implementation of evidence based practices. Units may evaluate and set targets for improvement for other indicators, but NDDPI will not have structures built to support them in the initial years of implementation.
8. **Where can we get more information about the planning model and the process?** Information regarding the planning model and process can be found on the NDDPI website at

[www.nd.gov/dpi/Administrators/SpecialEd/SpecialEducationImprovementPlanning](http://www.nd.gov/dpi/Administrators/SpecialEd/SpecialEducationImprovementPlanning). You may also call the NDDPI, Special Education office at 701-328-2277.

9. **What technical assistance and financial resources will NDDPI provide to special education units?** Technical assistance is focused on fidelity of implementation of the six components of the continuous improvement planning process. It can be provided through phone calls, Email, or face-to-face meetings. The technical assistance team can be accessed by calling the NDDPI, Special Education office at 701-328-2277, or by sending an Email message to [gteevens@nd.gov](mailto:gteevens@nd.gov), [kcmcdonough@nd.gov](mailto:kcmcdonough@nd.gov), [tmmayer@nd.gov](mailto:tmmayer@nd.gov), or [rtschider@nd.gov](mailto:rtschider@nd.gov).

Financial resources to assist the special education unit in conducting the planning process are available. The unit must complete a funding application and submit it to the NDDPI, Special Education office. The application can be found on the NDDPI website at the same web address as listed in question #8. It can be submitted via Email- [kcmcdonough@nd.gov](mailto:kcmcdonough@nd.gov), or traditional mail- North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, Special Education Unit, 600 E. Boulevard Ave, Dept. 201, Bismarck, ND 58505-0440.

Financial resources will also be available for professional development activities identified within the planning process. Common statewide and regional activities will be planned and paid for by the NDDPI, Special Education office. Funding for local specific activities can be applied for through a competitive grant process beginning in the spring of the 2015-16 school year.

10. **Which components of the planning process should be completed before the end of January?**

Units need to identify a process facilitator. This individual will assist the unit with each of the components of the planning process. The following components should be conducted before the end of January:

- Leadership Team
- Needs Assessment
- Goals
- Dissemination

With these components completed, the unit should prepare for the implementation of strategies and activities for summer, 2016, and/or the 2016-17 school year.