

Phase II Recap

In the 2015–16 school year, the department finalized Phase II of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). In this phase, strategies were developed to help achieve **the State-identified Measurable Result (SiMR) of increasing the percent of students with a specific learning disability scoring at or above basic on the English and language arts assessment in grades 3–8 by 3 percent annually**. These strategies include:

- *Using RTI² initiative as a continuum of service in which special education is the most intensive intervention.*
- *Increasing the access to core instruction for students with disabilities.*
- *Developing and implementing instructionally appropriate individualized education plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities that address areas of deficit to help support them in core instruction.*

A statewide competitive application process was conducted in the winter of 2016 to identify a cohort of districts to begin initial implementation of these strategies. Thirty districts were identified to participate at the SSIP initial cohort, and through the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG), the department was able to hire three regional SPDG interventionists to support these 30 districts in their implementation of SSIP strategies. Based on internal evaluation and analyses, each of these districts selected schools for participation in the activities.

Phase III

In June 2016, the SSIP initial cohort participated in the first strand of training, which focused on increasing access to core instruction for students with disabilities. Each district sent at least one team from each school participating in SSIP strategies to the week-long training session. Teams were comprised of a school administrator, a special education teacher, and a general education teacher. These teams received guidance on how to implement the work in their schools and train others on the strategies. In addition, the special education supervisors attended the training to learn about their role in supporting the school teams.

In the fall of 2016, these school teams provided the same trainings they received in June to their school staff. Across the state, 80 school administrators, 227 general education teachers, 110 special education teachers, and 11 other district staff attended the trainings. Surveys were given to attendees after the trainings to elicit information about the impact of the trainings and ensure fidelity of implementation. Questions were completed by respondents using a Likert scale of 1–4, with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 4 being “strongly agree.” The impact responses were very positive, with a mean score of 3.12 reported for the question “my knowledge of how to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom has increased.”

These participating schools also arranged monthly community of practice (CoP) meetings to discuss findings and address questions or concerns throughout the implementation of this first strategy. Staff from CORE offices, the department of education, and members of the SSIP/SPDG evaluation team attended these CoPs to support participants. The survey results gathered from the CoPs for each district have also been positive overall. Utilizing the same Likert scale from the fall training surveys, it was found that in the 22 responding districts a mean score of 3.79 was reported for the question “student learning is a core focus of our CoP” and a mean score of 3.12 was reported for the question “my CoP has improved my skills to provide differentiated instruction.”

A winter training will be held within districts by their designated school teams in the winter to assist in providing further support and refinement with the implementation of SSIP strategies. During this time, the department staff will begin developing the second strand of training, which will be focused on ensuring special education is the most intensive intervention in a continuum of service model. Training on this area will take place in the summer of 2017 and implementation will begin in participating schools in the 2017–18 school year.

Between now and February, department staff will begin analyzing baseline data on referrals of students with disabilities (particularly referral for specific learning disabilities) and educational environment data from the 2015-16 school year. More updated data will be pulled in January 2017 to compare to this baseline information ascertain whether the interventions are yielding the desired results. In addition, the department will be showcasing the success of the initial implementation of the SSIP at the Partners in Education (PIE) conference taking place in Nashville from Jan. 30, 2017 through Feb. 2, 2017. An information session with an update on the SSIP Phase III implementation process will also be held, with opportunities for questions and feedback from attendees and stakeholders.

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