

NCSI Evaluation Brief

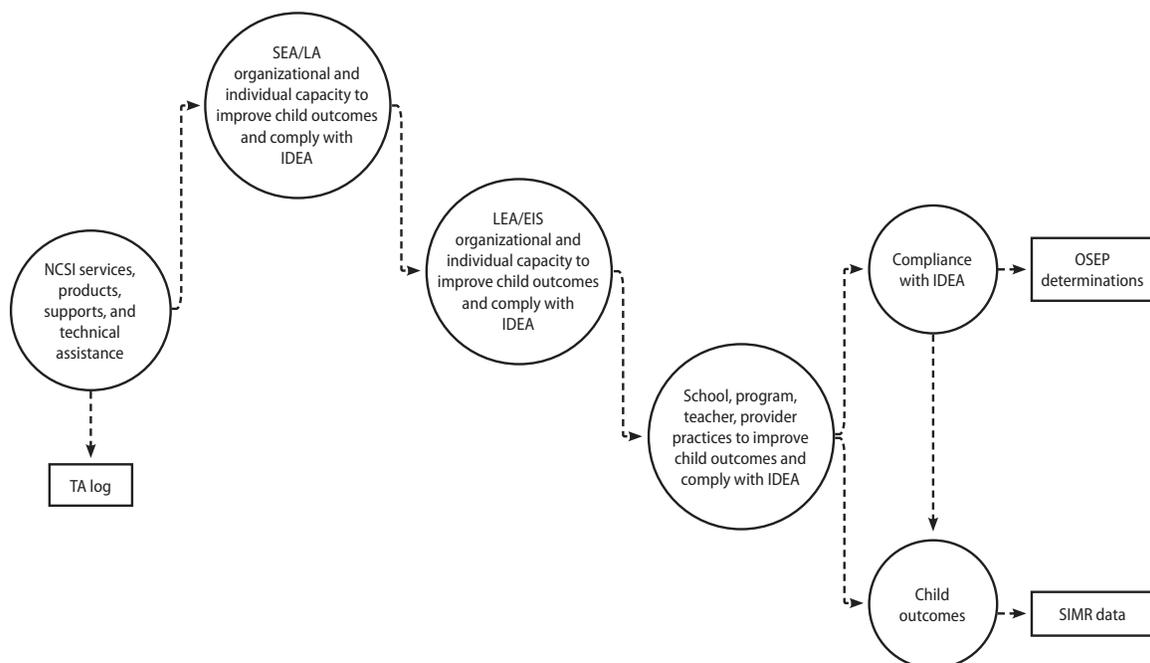
Launched in October 2014, the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) is a multiyear cooperative agreement funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). NCSI plays a major role in helping states achieve a national vision of results-driven accountability for special education and early intervention programs. The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk at The University of Texas at Austin provides the external evaluation for NCSI. This brief summarizes the evaluation plans for NCSI.

THEORY OF CHANGE

NCSI supports state departments of education and state lead agencies for early intervention programs as they transition to the results-based accountability system that OSEP recently endorsed. NCSI provides service, support, and technical assistance (TA) in four service areas: (1) data use, (2) evidence-based practice, (3) collaboration and communication, and (4) systems change. NCSI support improves states' capacity to assist local education agencies and local early intervention programs as they work to improve outcomes for children with disabilities. The NCSI theory of change (shown below) assumes that improvement will be most directly demonstrated at the local level. However, we believe that teachers and providers are most effective when they have access to the best information, the most effective tools, and the highest-quality guidance and feedback.

PROJECT PARTNERS

- WestEd
- American Institutes for Research
- National Association of State Directors of Special Education
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- SRI International
- National Parent Technical Assistance Centers Network
- The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk



EVALUATION PLAN

The evaluation comprises formative and summative activities (see the table on the following page). In general, the purpose of formative evaluation is to supply TA providers with timely information on which to base decision-making and ongoing practice. The summative evaluation provides OSEP and other stakeholders with information about the added value that NCSI represents for states working to improve child and student outcomes. We describe the formative and summative plans separately.

Formative Evaluation

Formative Evaluation Questions

The formative evaluation addresses questions about ongoing NCSI practice and its support of the capacity necessary for state education agencies and lead agencies to assist local education agencies and early intervention service programs with complying with the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and with improving outcomes for children with disabilities.

Key questions for the formative evaluation include the following:

- To what extent are the TA and dissemination (TA&D) activities across the service areas—data use, knowledge utilization, systems change, and communication and collaboration—developed, delivered, and disseminated as proposed?
- To what extent are the TA&D activities across the service areas relevant, useful, and of high quality?
- In what ways can TA&D activities across the service areas be more relevant, useful, or of higher quality?

Formative Evaluation Data-Collection Strategies

Formative data collection is ongoing, and results are reported quarterly. An array of data-collection tools is used, including targeted surveys, focus groups, interviews of key informants, and review of databases. Evaluation activities are designed to minimize the data-collection burden on state and local officials and other stakeholders. However, we are fortunate to work with stakeholders at all levels of the educational infrastructure (policymakers, agency officials, local administrators, teachers, and parents) in learning about NCSI's success in addressing their capacity-related needs.

The table below summarizes a sample of the formative evaluation activities. The table is organized by level of TA support—universal, targeted, and intensive—and by primary data source—TA clients, TA collaborators, and panels of experts that will assess the relevance, quality, and usefulness of NCSI's products and services. Formative evaluation will also use the TA Logs that providers complete as a primary data source for tracking TA-related outputs. Key outputs include the number and type of TA contacts and the alignment of provided TA with planned TA.

Sample of NCSI Formative Evaluation Data Collection

Data Source	Universal Support	Targeted Support	Intensive Support
Clients	<p>Surveys about satisfaction with resources downloaded from the NCSI website and with the “Ask the NCSI” service—these surveys will be presented to users after downloading a resource or using “Ask the NCSI”</p> <p>Evaluation of states’ current capacity for results-based accountability—data will be collected from a sample of states by using the Capacity for State Improvement (CaSI) Rubric</p>	<p>Surveys before and after participating in cross-state learning collaboratives</p> <p>Focus group interviews after cross-state learning collaboratives</p> <p>Sampling survey of cross-state learning collaborative participants based on virtual meetings and activities</p> <p>Sampling survey of individual states where TA activities have been completed by quarter (does not include intensive states)</p> <p>Interviews with willing state participants receiving targeted TA according to TA plan</p> <p>Postevent surveys of Thought Leader Forum participants</p>	<p>Survey about satisfaction with all TA activities as they are completed</p> <p>One-on-one interviews with state participants receiving intensive TA—a sample of clients will be interviewed quarterly</p> <p>NCSI client satisfaction survey—this survey will be administered in the summer/fall of 2016</p>
TA collaborators	<p>Coordinated TA centers’ satisfaction measure (TBD) across Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems, IDEA Data Center, Early Childhood Personnel Center, and National Technical Assistance Center on Transition</p>		<p>TA center satisfaction and perception survey of partners involved in providing intensive TA</p>
Smartsheet/ Salesforce TA Logs	<p>Review of number and nature of contact with each state per year</p> <p>Review of State Engagement Record/Spreadsheet (updated twice per year)</p>	<p>Review of targeted TA plans (using a sampling of existing plans)</p>	<p>Review of all existing intensive TA plans</p>
Expert panel review of products	<p>Panel review of products available to all clients</p>	<p>Panel review of products made available to targeted clients</p>	

Summative Evaluation

Summative Evaluation Questions

The summative evaluation addresses questions about the extent to which NCSI-sponsored TA&D improves state-level outputs and the extent to which improved outputs lead to increased capacity for state education agencies and lead agencies to assist local education agencies and early intervention service programs in complying with IDEA and with improving outcomes for children with disabilities.

Key questions for the summative evaluation include measuring the extent to which NCSI-supported TA&D activities support state-level capacity to do the following:

- Develop, implement, and evaluate state systemic improvement plans
- Select and use evidence-based practices
- Improve state agency infrastructure and coordination
- Use effective dissemination strategies
- Engage state and local stakeholders
- Use TA resources funded by the U.S. Department of Education
- Develop effective systems of general supervision

Summative Evaluation Data-Collection Strategies

Summative data collection is ongoing, and results are reported annually. An array of data collection tools is used, including targeted surveys, focus groups, interviews of key informants, and the CaSI Rubric, which the NCSI evaluation team developed in collaboration with five states to document capacity-related knowledge, skills, and policies necessary for supporting local agencies and programs. Data from the TA Log also will inform the summative evaluation.

PROJECT AND PERFORMANCE DATA

Project and performance data focus on three domains—quality, relevance, and usefulness of TA&D. Quality data will be collected from substantive experts or knowledgeable users. Relevance and usefulness data will be collected from a sample of intended users. These data will be reported to OSEP as part of the Annual Performance Report for NCSI.