ncsi
national center for systemic improvement

A State Guide to Establishing a Statewide System of Accountability and Support to Improve Results and Functional Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

February 2021

The primary purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is to improve educational results and functional outcomes for all children with disabilities. State educational agencies (SEAs) are tasked with ensuring local educational agencies (LEAs) and meet IDEA requirements, with a particular emphasis on those requirements that are most closely related to improving educational results for children with disabilities (34 CFR §§300.604(b)).

Ensuring that LEAs meet IDEA requirements and improve student outcomes requires a strong, results-driven state accountability system aligned with a robust statewide system of support. These principles can assist SEAs to develop and implement a results-driven system to provide differentiated supports that complement the SEA's monitoring and accountability systems.

Identify Priorities

1. **Identify the compliance and results data for which LEAs are currently held accountable including:**

   - Components of LEA determinations

   - Risk assessments to identify LEAs for monitoring

   - Data collected through SEA monitoring activities

   - Data collected through other accountability systems including other federal programs (e.g., ESSA accountability framework, school and district improvement plans)

2. **Analyze data to identify statewide needs for improvement, patterns and trends related to both compliance and outcomes for students with disabilities.**

   - Consider available quantitative data from APR and other indicators.

   - Consider qualitative data describing challenges and needs of LEAs.

   - Solicit input from LEAs – what do local programs identify as the primary barriers to ensuring compliance and improving outcomes for students with disabilities?

3. **Prioritize an area or multiple areas of need for improvement, based on the state's capacity.**

Identify Current Supports

1. **Assess available SEA-level supports that aim to address the selected priority(ies).**

   - State-sponsored support

   - State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)

   - State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)

   - Division-sponsored professional development and technical assistance

   - Regional technical assistance and professional development organizations or networks

   - SEA organizational structure and staff assignments

   - Current contractors and vendors

   - Other SEA investments

2. **Assess available agency-wide and other supports that also aim to address the selected priority(ies) and identify areas for collaboration.**

- State initiatives around early learning or school improvement
- Supports provided under other federally-funded programs including ESSA, etc.

Consider Effectiveness of Supports

1. **Consider the effectiveness of current supports aligned with priorities.**

- What support has proven to be effective in driving improved outcomes?
- What data documents this success?

2. **Explore promising LEAs where student outcomes are positive, improving, or exceeding expectations**

- What can be learned from the experiences of these LEAs that can inform state support as a whole?
- How might these LEAs provide support, directly or indirectly, to other LEAs that are struggling?

Conduct a Gap Analysis

1. **Identify gaps between prioritized needs and currently available support.**

2. **Consider ways to strengthen support in gap areas – what new support may be needed?**

3. **Consider eliminating initiatives that do not currently support priority needs**

4. **Consider ways to scale up aligned support that has been shown to be effective**

Create an Implementation Plan

1. **Establish a theory of action and strategic plan with tasks and timelines for how best to improve outcomes in the identified priority areas.**

- Include measures for evaluating progress

2. **Allocate resources as needed to implement system of support.**

Ensure the System of Support is Aligned with the State Accountability System and other General Supervision Components

1. **Consider results orientation of current state accountability system. To what extent is a focus on improving outcomes reflected in:**

- LEA determinations
- Risk assessments to identify LEAs for monitoring
- Nature of monitoring
- ESSA accountability framework
- State review of school/district improvement plans

2. **Assess alignment between the factors LEAs are held accountable for through the state's accountability system and current statewide system of support.**

3. **Establish mechanisms to share data between accountability and support systems**