

## Indicator 17: State Systemic Improvement Plan

### Instructions and Measurement

**Monitoring Priority:** General Supervision

The State's SPP/APR includes a State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) that meets the requirements set forth for this indicator.

#### Measurement

The State's SPP/APR includes an SSIP that is a comprehensive, ambitious, yet achievable multi-year plan for improving results for children with disabilities. The SSIP includes each of the components described below.

#### Instructions

**Baseline Data:** The State must provide baseline data that must be expressed as a percentage, and which is aligned with the State-identified Measurable Result(s) (SiMR) for Children with Disabilities.

**Targets:** In its FFY 2020 SPP/APR, due February 1, 2022, the State must provide measurable and rigorous targets (expressed as percentages) for each of the six years from FFY 2020 through FFY 2025. The State's FFY 2025 target must demonstrate improvement over the State's baseline data.

**Updated Data:** In its FFYs 2020 through FFY 2025 SPPs/APRs, due February 2022 through February 2027, the State must provide updated data for that specific FFY (expressed as percentages) and that data must be aligned with the State-identified Measurable Result(s) Children with Disabilities. In its FFYs 2020 through FFY 2025 SPPs/APRs, the State must report on whether it met its target.

#### Overview of the Three Phases of the SSIP

It is of the utmost importance to improve results for children with disabilities by improving educational services, including special education and related services. Stakeholders, including parents of children with disabilities, local educational agencies, the State Advisory Panel, and others, are critical participants in improving results for children with disabilities and should be included in developing, implementing, evaluating, and revising the SSIP and included in establishing the State's targets under Indicator 17. The SSIP should include information about stakeholder involvement in all three phases.

##### Phase I: Analysis:

- Data Analysis;
- Analysis of State Infrastructure to Support Improvement and Build Capacity;
- State-identified Measurable Result(s) for Children with Disabilities;
- Selection of Coherent Improvement Strategies; and
- Theory of Action.

**Phase II: Plan** (which, in addition to the Phase I content (including any updates)) outlined above):

- Infrastructure Development;
- Support for local educational agency (LEA) Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices; and
- Evaluation.

**Phase III: Implementation and Evaluation** (which, in addition to the Phase I and Phase II content (including any updates)) outlined above):

- Results of Ongoing Evaluation and Revisions to the SSIP.

#### Specific Content of Each Phase of the SSIP

Refer to FFY 2013-2015 Measurement Table for detailed requirements of Phase I and Phase II SSIP submissions.

Phase III should only include information from Phase I or Phase II if changes or revisions are being made by the State and/or if information previously required in Phase I or Phase II was not reported.

##### Phase III: Implementation and Evaluation

In Phase III, the State must, consistent with its evaluation plan described in Phase II, assess and report on its progress implementing the SSIP. This includes: (A) data and analysis on the extent to which the State has made progress toward and/or met the State-established short-term and long-term outcomes or objectives for implementation of the SSIP and its progress toward achieving the State-identified Measurable Result(s) for Children with Disabilities (SiMR); (B) the rationale for any revisions that were made, or that the State intends to make, to the SSIP as the result of implementation, analysis, and evaluation; and (C) a description of the meaningful stakeholder engagement. If the State intends to continue implementing the SSIP without modifications, the State must describe how the data from the evaluation support this decision.

###### A. Data Analysis

As required in the Instructions for the Indicator/Measurement, in its FFYs 2020 through 2025 SPPs/APRs, the State must report data for that specific FFY (expressed as actual numbers and percentages) that are aligned with the SiMR. The State must report on whether the State met its target. In addition, the State may report on any additional data (e.g., progress monitoring data) that were collected and analyzed that would suggest progress toward the SiMR. States using a subset of the population from the indicator (e.g., a sample, cohort model) should describe how data are collected and analyzed for the SiMR if that was not described in Phase I or Phase II of the SSIP.

###### B. Phase III Implementation, Analysis and Evaluation

The State must provide a narrative or graphic representation, (e.g., a logic model) of the principal activities, measures and outcomes that were implemented since the State's last SSIP submission (i.e., February 1, 2024). The evaluation should align with the theory of action described in Phase I and the evaluation plan described in Phase II. The State must describe any changes to the activities, strategies, or timelines described in Phase II and include a rationale or justification for the changes. If the State intends to continue implementing the SSIP without modifications, the State must describe how the data from the evaluation support this decision.

The State must summarize the infrastructure improvement strategies that were implemented, and the short-term outcomes achieved, including the measures or rationale used by the State and stakeholders to assess and communicate achievement. Relate short-term outcomes to one or more areas of a systems framework (e.g., governance, data, finance, accountability/monitoring, quality standards, professional development and/or technical assistance) and explain how these strategies support system change and are necessary for: (a) achievement of the SiMR; (b) sustainability of systems improvement efforts; and/or (c) scale-up. The State must describe the next steps for each infrastructure improvement strategy and the anticipated outcomes to be attained during the next fiscal year (e.g., for the FFY 2023 APR, report on anticipated outcomes to be obtained during FFY 2024, i.e., July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025).

The State must summarize the specific evidence-based practices that were implemented and the strategies or activities that supported their selection and ensured their use with fidelity. Describe how the evidence-based practices, and activities or strategies that support their use, are intended to impact the SiMR by changing program/district policies, procedures, and/or practices, teacher/provider practices (e.g., behaviors), parent/caregiver outcomes,

and/or child outcomes. Describe any additional data (e.g., progress monitoring data) that was collected to support the on-going use of the evidence-based practices and inform decision-making for the next year of SSIP implementation.

**C. Stakeholder Engagement**

The State must describe the specific strategies implemented to engage stakeholders in key improvement efforts and how the State addressed concerns, if any, raised by stakeholders through its engagement activities.

**Additional Implementation Activities**

The State should identify any activities not already described that it intends to implement in the next fiscal year (e.g., for the FFY 2023 APR, report on activities it intends to implement in FFY 2024, i.e., July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025) including a timeline, anticipated data collection and measures, and expected outcomes that are related to the SiMR. The State should describe any newly identified barriers and include steps to address these barriers.

**17 - Indicator Data**

**Section A: Data Analysis**

**What is the State-identified Measurable Result (SiMR)?**

The number and percent of American Indian students with disabilities who graduate with a regular high school diploma will increase.

**Has the SiMR changed since the last SSIP submission? (yes/no)**

NO

**Is the State using a subset of the population from the indicator (e.g., a sample, cohort model)? (yes/no)**

NO

**Is the State's theory of action new or revised since the previous submission? (yes/no)**

NO

**Please provide a link to the current theory of action.**

[https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page Files/Special Education/Annual Performance Report/MT\\_ToA\\_FINAL.pdf?ver=2021-12-02- 090633-033](https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Special%20Education/Annual%20Performance%20Report/MT_ToA_FINAL.pdf?ver=2021-12-02-090633-033)

**Progress toward the SiMR**

**Please provide the data for the specific FFY listed below (expressed as actual number and percentages).**

**Select yes if the State uses two targets for measurement. (yes/no)**

NO

**Historical Data**

Baseline Year	Baseline Data
2023	60.83%

**Targets**

FFY	Current Relationship	2023	2024	2025
Target	Data must be greater than or equal to the target	60.83%	68.90%	69.00%

**FFY 2023 SPP/APR Data**

Number of American Indian youth with IEPs (ages 14-21) who exited special education due to graduating with a regular high school diploma	Number of all American Indian youth with IEPs who exited special education (ages 14-21) in the exit categories of: a) graduated with a regular high school diploma, b) graduated with a state-defined alternate diploma, c) received a certificate, d) reached maximum age, or e) dropped out	FFY 2022 Data	FFY 2023 Target	FFY 2023 Data	Status	Slippage

132	217	89.10%	60.83%	60.83%	N/A	N/A
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**Provide the data source for the FFY 2023 data.**

The data for the FFY 2023 Data came from the Graduation/Dropout certification taken in Fall 2023. This certification is done within Montana's statewide student information system.

**Please describe how data are collected and analyzed for the SiMR.**

Data are collected within the statewide student information system and certified to the SEA through the Graduation/Dropout certification. Data is verified and analyzed by the Data Operations team of the SEA.

**Optional: Has the State collected additional data (i.e., benchmark, CQI, survey) that demonstrates progress toward the SiMR? (yes/no)**

NO

**Did the State identify any general data quality concerns, unrelated to COVID-19, which affected progress toward the SiMR during the reporting period? (yes/no)**

NO

**Did the State identify any data quality concerns directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic during the reporting period? (yes/no)**

NO

**Section B: Implementation, Analysis and Evaluation**

**Please provide a link to the State's current evaluation plan.**

<https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Special%20Education/Annual%20Performance%20Report/Evaluation%20Questions%20FINAL%20203-26-2020.pdf>

**Is the State's evaluation plan new or revised since the previous submission? (yes/no)**

NO

**Provide a summary of each infrastructure improvement strategy implemented in the reporting period:**

Redesign Internal SEA Infrastructure to Support Intra-agency Collaboration and Coordination

SEA Special Education staff regularly collaborate with all the members of the Tribal Student Achievement and Relations (TSAR) unit, inclusive of two American Indian Student Achievement (AISA) specialists, a language and culture specialist, and a tribal youth coordinator. The language and culture specialist champions indigenous language learning and integration into the schools to support language revitalization and cultural integration. The tribal youth coordinator plays a pivotal role in the impact of the SEA by engaging tribal students from across the state and providing opportunities for student voice, holistic wellness, and leadership skill development. The TSAR unit provided training and support to schools serving American Indian (AI) students using evidence-based and uniquely indigenous interventions such as wraparound and restorative practices, as well as practices centered on culture, identity, and mental wellness. Partnering with our TSAR unit has brought tribal leaders, tribal education departments, tribal colleges, youth leaders, and Knowledge Keepers of Indigenous Nations (KKIN) to the table to gain a deeper understanding of traditional Indigenous epistemology, the importance of language and culture, and in the intersection of Indigenous knowledge, culture, and the education system. The TSAR unit will continue to build relationships and understandings within the SEA and school districts to incorporate tribal voices, share resources, and build connections through consultation on educational matters affecting American Indian students.

The SSIP was moved to the CETA unit in 2024 to improve coordination of Professional Development (PD) efforts within the SPDG, SSIP, Regional CSPD, and Montana Autism Education Project.

Establish a Data Use Culture at the SEA and LEA level

One tool for effective data use is the Montana Early Warning System (EWS). The EWS uses student data to determine the chances of drop out in grades 3-12. This system is free and may be used at any time during the school year. The below-noted PD and ongoing Technical Assistance (TA) from the SEA have helped districts utilize the EWS to improve graduation rates of students, including American Indian students with disabilities.

During the Summer Institute, 2024 PD was provided to establish a data use culture at both the SEA and LEA Levels:

- Data Equipped & Data Informed: The Montana EWS (SEA)
- Using Your Local Data (SEA)
- YRBS 2023: Using Data to Inform Practice (SEA)
- The Data-Driven School (LEA)
- Practical Strategies for Organizing and Presenting MTSS Data (LEA)
- Data Literacy (Evans & Lovato, AIR: MTSS Center)
- Data-Based Individualization in Math (LEA)
- Early Writing Project: Data-Based Instruction for Students with Intensive Writing Needs (Erica LEA)
- How Do Administrators Use Data to Wrap Around the Needs of Kids? (LEA)
- Connecting Student Data & Goals to Specially Designed Instruction (LEA )

CSPD Regions offered 3 trainings on using data tailored to special educators: Data Management and Data Collection and Goal Writing (offered 2x). PD offered on the Teacher Learning Hub included two courses: Building the Foundation of Data Literacy and MTSS Tier 1: Data.

Provide Professional Development and Technical Assistance to implement EBPs

Through mentorship for one SSIP district, PD/TA was delivered through a collaborative partnership with the SSIP and special education staff (SPED teachers, paraprofessionals, and the superintendent) who engaged in collaborative opportunities over several days. TA centered on inclusion through thoughtful purpose and place with a focus on students chosen by district staff. Inclusion plans were designed to meet the needs of these students. Student plans included: introductory to advanced coding; digital games to introduce, enhance, or increase math/science skills; and Invention Literacy

provided enriching opportunities with content standards. Through this approach, students demonstrated a grasp of content standards that had previously been noted as deficiencies on their IEPs and school staff found higher rates of student engagement. Our previous two districts were not able to participate in intensive PD/TA due to internal staffing issues.

SSIP sites identified as Comprehensive Support under the ESSA received a crosswalk of their Comprehensive Needs Assessment goals and alignment with activities of the SSIP. PD/TA was provided to all SSIP school sites via informative e-mails and podcasts throughout the year. Communications shared practices to support tribal student achievement including Dr. Jo Boaler's math, number sense, and number talks; behavior; IRIS transition modules; OSEP-funded STEMIE site; OSEP-promoted STEM site; SAMSHA: Food & Mood Project; MTSS Youth Days; Science of Reading; SPED Nuts and Bolts; educator wellness; data collection/ IEP goal writing; HS Forum; restorative practices; transitional resilience; family engagement; inclusion; Living Our Values through Education (LOVE); math templates for number sense; impacts of trauma on brain development; SPED legal policies; motivating educators and students; Assessment; Conscious Discipline; Summer Institute; and offerings on the Teacher Learning Hub.

Our 5 Regional CSPDs provided PD around tribal student achievement across the state. Sessions targeted multiple aspects of tribal student achievement including data collection/usage, math strategies, reading strategies, coaching, science of reading, and behavior.

SSIP-participating educators from four LEAs attended the SEA Summer Institute. Sessions ranged across all aspects of holistic support for students and/or educators in both academic and behavior EBPs. One of the PD offerings was provided in partnership with the SEA's American Indian Student Achievement staff—Restorative Practice. Restorative Practice continues to be a focal point of the MT SSIP.

Promote American Indian Youth and Family Empowerment

Because youth are primary collaborative partners in the SSIP, SEA staff regularly seek youth input and elevate student voice through the Resilience In Something Else (RISE) youth group. RISE addresses students' need for support and connection by fostering relationships across the state and offers invaluable opportunities for leadership development. Youth-led meetings are held bi-weekly with youth-designed agendas. TSAR staff provide opportunities for RISE youth to speak at major events hosted by the SEA.

Gaining guidance from our tribal nations through their leaders and KKin is the impetus for emergent steps to have their voice front and center on educational matters. The work was intentionally designed to foster a positive self-identity in our Indigenous youth while empowering school staff to incorporate traditional teachings and approaches from the tribal communities themselves. Knowledge Keepers participated in the RISE youth meetings, delivered keynote speeches and workshops at the 2024 RISE Summit, and shared cultural teachings not found in any available text to help students foster positive connections to themselves and the world around them.

Our MTSS Youth Days partnered with Special Olympics in Great Falls in the Fall of 2023, with 2 schools from tribal areas represented. Youth Days is a statewide PBIS activity focused on building leadership skills of middle and high school students through student-led workshops and community service. At the Fall 2023 SEA Higher Education Consortium (HEC) meeting, American Indian Student Achievement (AISA) staff led a restorative circle with faculty, inclusive of many tribal colleges, with a focus on increasing collaborative partnerships and recruitment and retention of tribal educators. The Spring 2024 HEC meeting included presentations and discussions on Indian Education for All (IEFA) and the Lodge Approach.

**Describe the short-term or intermediate outcomes achieved for each infrastructure improvement strategy during the reporting period including the measures or rationale used by the State and stakeholders to assess and communicate achievement. Please relate short-term outcomes to one or more areas of a systems framework (e.g., governance, data, finance, accountability/monitoring, quality standards, professional development and/or technical assistance) and explain how these strategies support system change and are necessary for: (a) achievement of the SiMR; (b) sustainability of systems improvement efforts; and/or (c) scale-up.**

Redesign Internal SEA Infrastructure to Support Intra-agency Collaboration and Coordination

Survey results from the 2024 RISE Tribal Education Summit, which brought together KKin, students, communities, and school district staff illustrate the SEA intra-agency collaboration and coordination efforts. Student reflection surveys illustrated the following:

- 74% of students stated their self-esteem increased as a result of attending the conference; 26% reported their self-esteem was unchanged.
- 62% of students reported their confidence to speak up about things that are important to them increased as a result of attending the summit; 38% reported their confidence to speak up was unchanged.
- 86% of students reported forming a new, positive relationship while attending the Summit.
- 86% of students reported learning a new skill or information at the Summit that they would use later in life.
- Students who reported they gained a new skill or information were asked an open-ended question about what they learned:
  - Over a quarter (26%) of students indicated they would take and utilize a cultural teaching(s) or other teaching(s) from the Knowledge Keepers following the Summit.
  - One in five students (20%) of students described an increase in feelings of self-efficacy and leadership skills as something they would continue to use.
  - 18% of students described an increased ability to speak up and voice their opinions.
  - 16% of students indicated a new desire to continue to learn about culture, language, and indigenous ways of being.
  - 14% of students described a new or renewed sense of pride in being Native as something they were taking from the Summit.
  - 14% of students stated they had a new or renewed motivation to help others.

Establish a Data Use Culture at the SEA and LEA level

At the LEA level, the use of the Montana Early Warning System (EWS) enabled high school staff from three SSIP participating districts to have live data to identify students who are at risk of dropping out of school before they drop out. The use of the EWS system is directly connected to the state SiMR to increase graduation rates of American Indian students served with an IEP.

Seventy-six educators and administrators from SSIP sites (Frazer, Hays/Lodgepole, Poplar, Rocky Boy, and Wolf Point) and the following districts located on or near a Montana tribal nation (Browning, Hardin, Lame Deer, Lodge Grass, Pryor) attended the SEA's Summer Institute in June 2024 where there were many sessions on data literacy and data use.

Provide Professional Development and Technical Assistance to implement EBPs

At the SEA-sponsored Summer Institute, four SSIP participating educators attended in June 2024. Sessions ranged across all aspects of holistic support for students and/or educators in both academic and behavioral evidence-based practices.

Some SSIP project sites attended professional development opportunities provided by Montana's 5 Comprehensive System of Professional Development (CSPD) regions. Topics that garnered attendance focused on data collection for IEP writing; writing effective IEP goals; trauma and its effects on brain development with Stacy York Nation; coaching; and Dr. Jo Boaler's mathematical mindsets.

At the SEA, both the American Indian Student Achievement (AISA) and Indian Education for All (IEFA) teams sponsor monthly professional development sessions. The Tribal Language/Culture series and the ENERGIZE! IEFA sessions are popular with educators in our SSIP-participating sites. Attendees are exposed to different guest speakers/topics each month that provide direct connections to implementing IEFA within their school setting as well as strategies to help their students become more successful in their academic and/or behavioral endeavors. AISA staff also provided PD on Restorative Practice. General attendance sessions as well as requested PD/TA were part of the SEA's continued support of Restorative Practice as relationality is the key to student success in Indigenous communities.

Promote American Indian Youth and Family Empowerment

RISE meetings were held every other week and attended by youth from SSIP-participating high schools. The RISE group has an ongoing

communication thread with over 354 participants. Through the meetings and ongoing communication, American Indian Youth are encouraged and encourage each other to pursue success, in and outside of school. The TSAR unit has worked throughout the reporting period to build relationships and understandings within the SEA and Montana school districts to incorporate Tribal voices, share resources, and build connections through consultation on matters affecting American Indian students.

The TSAR unit maintains its commitment to actively seek stakeholder input and voice by hosting quarterly consultation meetings with tribal leaders from the eight federally recognized Montana tribal governments. This opportunity to engage in government-to-government consultation allows the SEA to hear from the tribes about their priorities and concerns around education and training and share how the SEA is supporting indigenous students both on and off the reservation. The top priorities continue to include mental health and wellness, infusing the education system with culture, identity, and language, as well as preparing students for continuing education and/or other post-secondary training programs.

The TSAR unit has also assisted with informational sessions for educators tasked with updating content standards for the state. TSAR has presented and assisted in bringing in youth and indigenous knowledge keeper voices to advocate for authentic Indigenous education understandings. Additionally, the unit has promoted opportunities for Class 7 (Language and Culture Specialist) endorsement and professional development, directly and virtually. Class 7 educators are keenly aware of the cultural needs of students in their community and actively promote positive identity awareness for indigenous cultures. TSAR has also actively engaged with educators to provide guidance and training in student-led talking circles that promote positive engagement and empowerment of student voice.

Two SSIP tribal schools, had student leadership groups inclusive of students with disabilities at the Fall 2023 Youth Days in Great Falls. Students participated in youth-led leadership activities and community service and created action plans for what they would do when they returned to their schools following the event.

**Did the State implement any new (newly identified) infrastructure improvement strategies during the reporting period? (yes/no)**

NO

**Provide a summary of the next steps for each infrastructure improvement strategy and the anticipated outcomes to be attained during the next reporting period.**

Redesign Internal SEA Infrastructure to Support Intra-agency Collaboration and Coordination.

Next steps for 2024-25:

- American Indian Student Achievement collaboration for Higher Education Consortium - Presentation around Indigenous Ways of Knowing
- Align the SPDG and SSIP with the support of NIRN-SISEP
- Inter-tribal Monday Meetings: internal SEA collaborative conversation designed to link all division projects focused on American Indian

Student Achievement

- Interagency stakeholders incorporating the local resources of tribal communities into educational programs for students.

Expected outcome: Continue to strengthen and build on SEA supports implemented on behalf of SPED-identified American Indian students leading to increased completion and/or graduation rates for this subpopulation.

Establish a Data Use Culture at the SEA and LEA levels.

Next Steps for 2024-25:

- Training on the EWS at the SEA High School Forum in November 2024.
- Training on data literacy, data use, and Data-Based Individualization (DBI) at SEA Summer Institute in June 2025.
- CSPD Training on data use and data literacy 2024-25.
- Increasing the capacity of Montana tribal leaders, knowledge keepers, LEA leadership, and students to understand and use data to make informed decisions for American Indian students with disabilities.

Expected outcome: Continue to strengthen and build on SEA supports implemented on behalf of SPED-identified American Indian students leading to increased completion and/or graduation rates for this subpopulation.

Provide Professional Development and Technical Assistance to implement EBPs.

Next steps for 2024-25:

- Training in Restorative Practices at HS Forum and Summer Institute
- SEA Special Education Endorsement candidates- monthly meetings on inclusionary practices through a co-teaching lens.
- Interagency stakeholders incorporating the local resources of tribal communities into educational programs for students.
- Continuing to provide training opportunities that develop cultural perspectives of historical Indigenous Restorative Practice efforts.
- Continuing to develop the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Personalized Learning Networks (PLN) that seek to build and strengthen the capacity of special education teachers to meet the needs of students.

Expected outcome: Continue to strengthen and build on SEA supports implemented on behalf of special education-identified American Indian students, along with all special education-identified students, leading to increased completion and/or graduation rates for this subpopulation

Promote American Indian Youth and Family Empowerment.

Next Steps for 2024-25:

- Indigenous Morning Greetings Project- Through this project, SEA staff will record greetings from American Indian Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and influential leaders from across Montana. These greetings will be recorded with the intent of being played at schools at the beginning and end of the week and will be paired with prompts for reflecting on the messages provided in the greeting.

- SEA strategies related to Indigenous Ways of Knowing- Traditional knowledge and indigenous ways of knowing have contributed to the success and identity of American Indians since time immemorial and can be leveraged within schools and classrooms today, to accomplish the same intent. Incorporating traditional stories and Indigenous ways of knowing into the learning process will provide opportunities for students to connect with their culture and positive self-identity development; engaging pedagogy and sense-making rooted in Indigenous worldview promotes social, emotional, and relationship skill building. Cultural engagement within the school can promote relationship building between the school and community and promote better mental health and wellness for students and staff.

- Continued regular RISE meetings and RISE Youth event is planned for Spring 2025.

- Through collaboration and communication infrastructure efforts, building awareness and the need to empower American Indian students to reconnect to their identity and build pathways to high school completion.

- Strengthen and utilize tribal consultations for district and school leaders to expand engagement efforts to ensure students, families, communities, and tribal councils are invested partners in increasing the completion rates of American Indian students with disabilities.

Expected outcome: Continue to strengthen and build on SEA supports implemented on behalf of SPED-identified American Indian students leading to increased completion and/or graduation rates for this subpopulation.

**List the selected evidence-based practices implement in the reporting period:**

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

**Provide a summary of each evidence-based practice.**

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Montana utilizes a Professional Learning Community (PLC) combined with a Professional Learning Network (PLN) to coach educators through technology within the SSIP target schools. The identified PLC/PLN was developed by the SEA based on research from Rock (2019) in her book, *The eCoaching Continuum for Educators: Using Technology to Enrich Professional Development and Improve Students Outcomes* (2019). Montana has called their PLC/PLN the Critical Friends' Network (CFN). The CFN is based on the premise that professional development offered through a Professional Learning Community (PLC) or Personalized Learning Network (PLN) provides the reciprocity for educators to share and learn strategies to support their students with special needs. Five features of effective professional development are utilized in the CFN content focus (studying subject matter); active learning (observing, reviewing, discussing); coherence (demonstrating consistency with knowledge, beliefs, policies, and reforms); duration (engaging in 20 or more hours of contact time spread over a semester); and collective participation (interacting and conversing with colleagues). (Rock, 2019)

The Critical Friends' Network (CFN) started in the NE Region of Montana in March of 2021. The NE Region is comprised of the following school districts: Wolf Point, Frazer, Poplar, Brockton (all within the Fort Peck Reservation), Hays/Lodge Pole (within the Fort Belknap Reservation), and Rocky Boy (within the Rocky Boy Reservation). In October of 2022, a district in the Western region became a Montana SSIP site, Ronan School District (Flathead Reservation).

Rock, M. (2019). *The eCoaching Continuum for Educators: Using Technology to Enrich Professional Development and Improve Student Outcomes*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

**Provide a summary of how each evidence-based practice and activities or strategies that support its use, is intended to impact the SiMR by changing program/district policies, procedures, and/or practices, teacher/provider practices (e.g., behaviors), parent/caregiver outcomes, and/or child outcomes.**

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

The CFN enhances the capacity of educators to utilize high-impact strategies, practices, and interventions which increases educator effectiveness to improve teaching and learning strategies. This includes improved intentional planning of culturally relevant curriculum, and instructional practices, use of formative and summative data to guide instruction, and building pathways to post-secondary readiness. Ultimately, these educators will have schoolwide practices, teaching, and learning that are responsive to students' needs and culture, leading to increased completion rates of American Indian students with disabilities. The CFN will also strengthen the capacity of educators to cultivate and maintain positive, inclusive, safe, and empowering school environments. It will emphasize the importance of elevating student voice, youth leadership, and advocacy, as well as promote the use of MTSS to ensure the school structure addresses the needs of American Indian students with disabilities. This will enable educators to utilize restorative approaches to build strong relationships and learning environments. The CFN will help students have improved attendance rates and participation in school activities and reduce discipline rates. Ultimately educators will have a systematic approach to identifying students at risk of dropping out of school, applying targeted interventions based on student needs, and tracking interventions over time to determine if they are working.

Due to an increase in 4-day school weeks, the CFN made a necessary shift to podcasting and informative e-mails to provide PD/TA. The chosen content of inclusion is the guiding topic for Critical Friends' Network (CFN) podcasts and informative e-mail communications. PD/TA topics are cyclical in nature and build upon the previous years' information, continually linking to current research, and ensconced in both evidence-based and promising practices to ensure respect for the subculture of LEA staff and students being served.

To encourage transformational skill building and learning for Indigenous students with disabilities, the subtopic of Invention Literacy continued to be a powerfully engaging learning opportunity offered to MT SSIP schools. Students continue to demonstrate success in STEAM when utilizing Invention Literacy through the Makey Makey. The SEA continued to focus on Math instructional strategies in alignment with the final pilot year of the Montana Aligned to Standards Through-year Assessment (MAST.). The SSIP continued to support TA/PD focused on math instructional practices, particularly in the development of Number Sense, Number Talks, and the 8 mathematical themes identified in the NAEP research (Wu, et. al., 2020). While all TA/PD offered focuses on best practices for special education-identified Indigenous youth, these practices cross over to all youth served in a school setting. PD/TA was provided to SSIP school sites via informative e-mails and podcasts. Information shared supported tribal student achievement—behavior, IRIS transition modules, OSEP-funded STEMIE site, OSEP-promoted STEM site, SAMSHA: Food and Mood Project, educator wellness, Restorative Practice, STEM/STEAM, transitional resilience, family engagement/connections, inclusion, Living Our Values through Education (L.O.V.E.) Math templates for number sense, impacts of trauma on brain development, motivating educators and students, MAST Assessment, along with sharing offerings on the Teacher Learning Hub.

The basic structure of the CFN remains the same: invitation only, regionally based, and composed of special education teachers in SSIP schools residing on or near Montana reservations with a primary student population of Indigenous youth. The delivery method was altered to podcasting and informative e-mail communication to reach educators in our SSIP target sites.

Wu, K., Chaphalkar, R., Hecker, M., & Lask, E. (2020). Hidden Strengths of American Indian and Alaska Native Students in Mathematics as Measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 59(2–3), 7–32.

**Describe the data collected to monitor fidelity of implementation and to assess practice change.**

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Survey questions aligned to rubrics are utilized to monitor the fidelity of implementation of the CFN. The rubrics are adapted from Killion's (2008) book, *Assessing Impact: Evaluating Staff Development* (2nd Ed.). Rubric selection is based on the following criteria:

- 1) it is a continuum of growth;
  - 2) doesn't require administering on a regular basis but at random check points;
  - 3) demonstrates a partnership in the process as well as an opt out;
  - 4) and it is qualitative in nature staying clear of quantifying professional relationships and growing together to better serve students.
- The rubric responses for the prior reporting year (2022-23) showed growth on the continuum with comfort level with inclusionary practices being noted at 2, 4, and 7. The current open-ended response indicates certified staff, including reading coaches and counselors, have enhanced their ability to utilize more inclusionary practices.

We had no rubric responses this reporting year. Many SSIP target sites struggled with staffing issues, leaving educators burdened with covering vacant positions as they worked to meet all students' IEP goals. The rise in 4-day school weeks has also affected educator availability to engage in PD/TA after the school day ends as educators are not willing to work beyond their union contract hours.

Reference: Killion, J. (2008). *Assessing Impact: Evaluating Staff Development* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

**Describe any additional data (e.g., progress monitoring) that was collected that supports the decision to continue the ongoing use of each evidence-based practice.**

N/A

**Provide a summary of the next steps for each evidence-based practice and the anticipated outcomes to be attained during the next reporting period.**

During the next reporting period, July 1, 2024–June 30, 2025, the SEA plans these next steps:

1. As an intensive state, our SEA will work with National Implementation Research Network (NIRN): State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices (SISEP) to align the activities of the SSIP with our State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) Montana's Tiered System of Support (MTSS). Based on the recommendations of the advisory panel and joint partnership meeting discussion, we will be exploring additional evidence-based practices we can implement with an emphasis on behavior strategies, improving attendance, reducing exclusionary discipline, and continuing to improve graduation rates of American Indian students with disabilities, as well as impact students with disabilities statewide. As we focus on behavior, our NIRN/SISEP work will also include additional internal collaboration with the Coordinated School Health Unit (CSH) and the Montana Autism Education Project (MAEP) at the SEA. Through the Regional CSPDs, High School Forum, Summer Institute, and the Montana Autism Education project the SEA is offering training in EBPs to address behavioral concerns, including training on functions of behavior and setting up behavior support plans as well as using EBPs to get ahead of behavior (antecedent intervention). Outcomes will include training data on number of staff trained in EBPs related to behavior.

The SSIP will continue to work with schools on or near tribal nations through the professional learning community Critical Friends Network (CFN) to provide professional development and technical assistance in a culturally responsive manner as well as work on expanding efforts to show educators that the PD/TA offered through the MT SSIP is applicable across all students SPED-identified, not just Indigenous youth. Expected outcomes include increasing participant engagement in the CFN.

**Does the State intend to continue implementing the SSIP without modifications? (yes/no)**

NO

**If no, describe any changes to the activities, strategies or timelines described in the previous submission and include a rationale or justification for the changes.**

The baseline year was updated to FFY 2023 to more closely align with Indicator 1 business rules and data sources, with a continued emphasis on graduation rates of American Indian students with disabilities. The state is considering whether to change the current SiMR. In consideration of feedback from the advisory panel and at the joint partnership meeting, we are focusing our work as an intensive state with NIRN-SISEP on determining the next steps regarding evidence-based practices for improving behavior with a goal of integrating the activities of the SPDG and the SSIP over the next five years. The state will continue soliciting feedback on potential revisions to the SiMR and develop revisions to activities and strategies (if changes to the SiMR are made) over the 2024-25 school year.

## **Section C: Stakeholder Engagement**

### **Description of Stakeholder Input**

The Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) in Montana has been in existence since 2013. The SEAP is made up of 17 members, nine of whom are parents of students with disabilities. The panel is fully vested and broadly representative of Montana. Many of the panel members serve in other agency or organization leadership positions or on advisory councils as the voice of students with disabilities. This enables the SEA to draw insight and advice from a diverse group of stakeholders with an understanding of Montana's unique needs and strengths.

In the 2023/2024 school year, the SEA asked for input on Indicators 8 and 14 from the SEAP, the Special Education Directors, Educational Advocates, and the Weekly Superintendent's Hour. The SEA presented information on Indicator 8 regarding moving from a paper and pencil, sample, 23 question survey to an electronic, census, 10 question survey. All four entities agreed with the SEA's proposal.

The SEA asked the SEAP and Special Education Directors to weigh in on Indicator 14. The SEA proposed changing two questions and set new targets. Based on the information provided from stakeholders, the SEA did change the two questions and set new targets for Indicator 14.

In the spring of every school year, the SEA brings together parents, Montana's Parent Training and Information center the Montana Empowerment Center (MEC), the SEAP, and other state agencies for a joint stakeholder meeting. During this meeting the SEA reviews the APR submitted in February. The SEA asks for suggestions on how to potentially improve the outcomes of the indicators along with doing a data drill down of the state data and district level data.

In addition to the above-mentioned stakeholders, the SEA worked with many other stakeholder groups that support students with disabilities. Those groups include but are not limited to:  
Montana Council for Exceptional Children (MCEC) – presented on updates at the SEA, national level, and writing compliant special education paperwork  
Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services – strengthening our secondary transition  
Education Advocates – presented Indicator 8 changes & new monitoring process  
Summer Institute  
Montana Council of Administrators of Special Education (MCASE)  
Higher Education Consortium (HEC)  
Great Divide Special Education Cooperative board meeting  
Dawson Community College – assisting in setting up the ParaPathways Program  
Weekly Superintendent's Hour – Indicator 8  
CSPD Regional Directors  
Montana Empowerment Center – IEP Boot Camps  
Disability Rights Montana  
University of Montana – Mental Health Professional Development Grant for the Rural and Indigenous School-based Mental Health and Empowerment (RAISE) initiative

At the March 2024 meeting of the Special Education Advisory Panel, the SEA Special Education director reviewed the Indicators and SiMR and had the Advisory Panel provide feedback. The Advisory Panel discussed Evidence Based Practices for addressing student behavior as strategies that could be considered under the SSIP.

In April 2024, the SEA brought together the Special Education Advisory Panel along with stakeholders from other agencies, parents, Montana Empowerment Center, Disability Rights Montana, and school district and cooperative special education directors. The State Director of Special Education presented the 17 indicators and asked for feedback on all of them. There was discussion on connections between exclusionary discipline and dropout rates as well as questions around: Why ever use suspension if it increases dropout rates? The group considered if removals from schools are counted differently than regular absences, how attendance factors in, and the correlations between attendance and reduced academic scores.

**Describe the specific strategies implemented to engage stakeholders in key improvement efforts.**

A presentation of all indicators was presented to the stakeholders during our Joint Stakeholders meeting in April of 2024. The SEA showed past indicator results and compared them to current results. Once the information was shared, the stakeholders broke into small table discussions. They were tasked with reviewing all the data again, asked to discuss the data provided, and as a group write down one to two areas of improvement the SEA could work on. As a facilitator, TAESE gathered all information and provided it back to the State Special Education Director in a summary.

**Were there any concerns expressed by stakeholders during engagement activities? (yes/no)**

YES

**Describe how the State addressed the concerns expressed by stakeholders.**

Stakeholders expressed concerns around student behavior, exclusionary discipline, and attendance. The SEA has entered a partnership with NIRN/SISEP as an Intensive state to develop and implement additional strategies to address student behavior, attendance, and exclusionary discipline policies through alignment of the SSIP and SPDG. NIRN/SISEP is helping us consider how the work of the SPDG's evidence-based MTSS framework, which includes an integrated model of RTI and PBIS, can be further scaled to tribal schools, as well as determine if there are other evidence-based strategies that could be implemented under the SSIP. Through the Regional CSPDs, High School Forum, Summer Institute, and the Montana Autism Education project the SEA is offering training in EBPs to address behavioral concerns, including training on functions of behavior and setting up behavior support plans as well as using EBPs to get ahead of behavior (antecedent intervention).

**Additional Implementation Activities**

**List any activities not already described that the State intends to implement in the next fiscal year that are related to the SiMR.**

N/A

**Provide a timeline, anticipated data collection and measures, and expected outcomes for these activities that are related to the SiMR.**

N/A

**Describe any newly identified barriers and include steps to address these barriers.**

N/A

**Provide additional information about this indicator (optional).**

The baseline for Indicator 17 has been reset due to a change in data source. To better align with Indicator 1, starting in FFY 2023 the state is using the FS009 ED Facts file as the data source for determining American Indian students with IEPs exiting with the reason of graduating with a regular high school diploma. Considering this change to the data source, the prior year's data are no longer comparable and thus this necessitates revision to the baseline.

**17 - Prior FFY Required Actions**

None

**17 - OSEP Response**

**17 - Required Actions**