

Indicator 17: State Systemic Improvement Plan

Instructions and Measurement

Monitoring Priority: General Supervision

Results indicator: 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, 2025). 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 2024 APR, report on anticipated outcomes to be obtained during FFY 2025, i.e., July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026).

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 2024 APR, report on activities it intends to implement in FFY 2025, i.e., July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026) 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%20Files/Special%20Education/Annual%20Performance%20Report/MT_ToA_%20FINAL.pdf

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	2024	2025
Target	Data must be greater than or equal to the target	68.90%	69.00%

FFY 2024 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 alternative diploma, c) received a certificate, d) reached maximum age, or e) dropped out.	FFY 2023 Data	FFY 2024 Target	FFY 2024 Data	Status	Slippage
110	212	60.83%	68.90%	51.89%	Did not meet target	Slippage

Provide reasons for slippage, if applicable

In the FFY 2024 SPP/APR, the rate of American Indian students with disabilities exiting special education due to graduating with a regular high school diploma decreased by 8.94 percentage points. The SEA conducted analyses of the data to determine the potential reasons for the slippage. In this review, the SEA identified five LEAs with notable decreases in the number of American Indian students with disabilities graduating with a regular high school diploma in the FFY 2024 reporting period (2023-24 school year). These LEAs are inclusive of large LEAs in terms of student population, as well as LEAs that predominantly serve American Indian students. These five LEAs comprised nearly 24% of the American Indian graduates in FFY 2024 while they comprised 44% of the American Indian graduates in FFY 2023. This demonstrates the decrease in overall American Indian graduates in LEAs that have historically made up a large percentage of data and contributed positively to the graduation rate of American Indian students with disabilities. This year, these five LEAs demonstrated a 55% decrease in the number of American Indian students with disabilities graduating with a regular high school diploma. This significant decrease in these five LEAs likely contributed to the observed slippage for Indicator 17.

Provide the data source for the FFY 2024 data.

The data for the FFY 2024 Data came from the Graduation/Dropout certification taken in Fall 2024. 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%203-26-2020.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.

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

Special Education collaborates with the Tribal Student Achievement and Relations (TSAR) and Indian Education for All (IEFA) units. The TSAR unit builds relationships and shared understandings within the OPI, school districts, and communities to holistically support Montana's American Indian (AI) students. OPI incorporates tribal voices, sharing resources, and building connections through tribal consultation and sovereign government-to-government relationships. TSAR works alongside system partners to create the conditions necessary for AI students to meet their educational and lifelong goals. TSAR strives to engage all school agencies and the OPI to create shared understandings of the importance of language, culture, and healthy identities in the learning process by promoting welcoming environments that serve the whole child with sustained access to Indigenous learning resources and opportunities. The TSAR/IEFA Unit Manager represents OPI on the MT Advisory Council on Indian Education (MACIE).

TSAR, IEFA, SPED staff, and ESSA School Improvement team members meet weekly to discuss and coordinate agency-wide projects, communications with tribal schools, and efforts to support AI students. Many schools on or near reservations are identified for Comprehensive School Improvement under ESSA, and these weekly calls strengthen our internal coordination and understanding amongst OPI staff who work on initiatives for tribal students.

Our Fall 2024 Higher Education Consortium (HEC) Meeting included a presentation on Indigenous Ways of Knowing, and our Spring 2025 meeting included the National Native Children's Trauma Center (NNCTC) and featured a presentation from a tribal college on their 2+2 grow your own teacher program.

The SSIP is part of the CETA unit which improves coordination of PD efforts within the SPDG, SSIP, Regional CSPD, and Montana Autism Education Project (MAEP). In early 2025, our CETA unit and our Coordinated School Health (CSH) unit established our relationship with State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices (SISEP) as an intensive state to support our Integrated Multi-Tiered System of Support (I-MTSS) Implementation to support the SSIP.

Establish a Data Use Culture at the SEA and LEA level

Our SPDG provided training and coaching in MTSS to 25 districts in 2024-25 to promote system-level problem solving using data-based decision making. Twenty-one MTSS modules are available online for district (DIT) and building implementation teams (BIT). DIT 6: Comprehensive Assessment System and DIT 7: Data Analysis & System Level Problem Solving provide self-paced training for district teams. The BIT Modules emphasize a data use culture at the school level, including BIT 4: Measuring Implementation of MTSS; BIT 5: Comprehensive Screening & Assessment; BIT 6: Systematic Problem Solving; BIT 7: Data Teaming & Pathways for Academics; BIT 8: Data Teaming & Pathways for Behavior; BIT 9: Tier 2 Systems; BIT 10 Tier 3

Systems; and BIT 11: MTSS/RTI Approach to Evaluating SLD. The modules include data forms and tools to build a strong I-MTSS framework and emphasize EBPs.

LEAs on or near Montana's Tribal Reservations sent 65 educators to the 2025 OPI Summer Institute (SI). During 2025 SI, PD was provided to establish a data use culture through 11 sessions covering Data Literacy, Data-Based Individualization (DBI), DBI in math, progress monitoring, using data for Specially Designed Instruction (SDI), MTSS, intervention pathways, school climate data, Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) Data, and ABC Data for Behavior.

CSPD Regions offered 8 trainings in 2024-25 on data literacy, using math data, MTSS, assessment, diagnostic and progress monitoring data, assessing instructional effectiveness, and behavior data.

Provide Professional Development and Technical Assistance to implement EBPs

Over 400 educators from schools serving AI students attended the 2025 SI. Sessions ranged across all aspects of holistic support for students and/or educators in both academic and behavior EBPs. Multiple sessions on Restorative Practice (RP) were provided as RP continues to be a focal point of the MT SSIP. HS Forum also included full-day RP training in November 2024.

Both HS Forum and SI had multiple sessions on EBPs including science of reading (SOR) targeted to secondary implementation of EB literacy practices. OPI SI included a full-day training on explicit reading and writing instruction, and sessions on I-MTSS, high leverage practices, CTE, secondary transition, EBPs to increase attendance, Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP), Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), inclusionary practices, and EBPs in mathematics instruction.

Our CSPD offered 25 sessions on EBPs including sessions on Science of Reading strategies, explicit instruction, MTSS, EB behavior strategies or programs, engagement, and literacy.

Some participants in the agency sponsored SPED Endorsement Project engaged in individualized TA this year on the following topics:

1. Effective inclusion design through defining purpose/place/utilizing a planning pyramid
2. Well-being strategies designed to address the why (missing skills) behind the behavior to address the root cause; purposeful fidget reducers and purposeful individual/group techniques to calm anxiety
3. Utilizing coding and Invention Literacy to connect reluctant mathematicians to math, science, and reading; leading to an interconnection across all content areas; seamlessly addressing required MT Technology Content Standards while guiding meaningful interaction with a student's IEP goals around math.

Promote American Indian Youth and Family Empowerment

Within the TSAR unit, American Indian Student Achievement (AISA) Specialists support the implementation of EB and distinct indigenous, whole child strategies within K-12. AISA Specialists focus on the conditions necessary for Indigenous youth, and all MT students, to meet their educational lifelong goals. TSAR facilitates the RISE Native Youth Leadership group. RISE brings AI students from across the state together to foster positive peer connections, celebrate indigenous identities, share cultures, and prepare students to be leaders in their schools and communities. The students meet bi-monthly and organize a yearly, in-person summit where they can connect with Knowledge Keepers and other Indigenous leaders. RISE strengthens students' self-esteem, builds leadership skills, creates positive connections to school and peers, and provides opportunities for connection to cultures and holistic supportive experiences rooted in Indigenous worldview. Through RISE, we foster relationships with AI students, educators, and community members. All students are welcome to participate in RISE and currently about 2-3% of the RISE membership consists of non-Native students. The 2025 RISE Tribal Education Summit was held in East Helena in April 2025. The Summit had 230 students and staff from 16 schools. More than half of the students (53%) attend schools on or near a reservation while 39% attend school in an urban area and around 8% attend school in a small, rural town. Of the 16 schools, 13 are Title I eligible, of which 11 receive school-wide Title I support.

TSAR provides support to school districts in fulfilling ESSA mandated tribal consultation. In March 2025, TSAR provided training to educators on tribal consultation best practices and maintains guidance documents and tools for schools to utilize in conducting tribal consultation.

With MT Special Olympics, our MTSS Youth Days in the Fall of 2024 had 3 schools from tribal areas represented. Youth Days is a statewide PBIS activity focused on building leadership skills of MS/HS students through student-led workshops and community service.

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.

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

The report from the 2025 RISE Summit illustrates the SEA intra-agency collaboration and coordination efforts. The Summit included 230 students and staff from 16 schools and 7 Knowledge Keepers. The student surveys illustrated the following positive responses:

- 83% indicated they are motivated to graduate HS
- 79% have confidence they will be successful in life after HS
- 78% are motivated to fulfill their life's purpose.
- 74% felt hopeful or optimistic about their future
- 69% have an idea or what they would like to do with their lives after graduating HS.

Establish a Data Use Culture at the SEA and LEA level

Sixty-five educators from on or near Tribal areas and many schools serving AI students attended the 2025 OPI SI. There were 11 sessions on data use and data-based decision making, and sessions on utilizing Montana Aligned to Standards Through-Year Assessments (MAST) data for instructional planning. OPI Summer Institute feedback showed strong session ratings and active learning was evident in these sessions.

In 2024-25, one larger SPDG district located near a tribal reservation serves a high population of AI students. This district worked on systems for data-based decision making and continued to strengthen their MTSS framework through participation in the training and coaching provided by the SPDG.

Districts continued the use of the MT Early Warning System (EWS) to use data to identify students who are at risk of dropping out of school. In 2025-26 we will be piloting the MTSS PowerSchool Portal and a new statewide EWS for widespread implementation in 2026-27.

Biennially, OPI provides a data report to the Montana State Legislature on American Indian Student Achievement. The Fall 2024 AISA Data Report is located here: https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Indian%20Education/Indian%20Student%20Achievement/Docs/Data_Report_2024.pdf

While a gap in the achievement levels of AI students exists when compared to non-AI students, there are many areas of improvement within the academic data. Reading proficiency for HS students grew by 5% points between 2022 and 2023 and has surpassed pre-pandemic levels reaching 21% in 2023 as compared to 18% in 2019. Advanced reading proficiency in AI HS students doubled in the last year rising from 3% in 2022 to 6% in 2023. All students in grades 3-8, AI and non-AI, experienced an increase in reading proficiency between 2022 and 2023. HS math proficiency for AI students increased between 2022 and 2023 and has reached pre-pandemic levels of proficiency. In 2018, non-AI HS students had a proficiency rate in math that was 26 percentage points higher than AI high school students. In 2023, that difference is now 20 percentage points, showing a 6% decrease in the gap in math proficiency between AI and non-AI HS students. ACT science proficiency for AI HS students increased from 8% in 2021 to 18% in 2023. The average four-year cohort graduation rate for AI students in 2023 was 67.5% which is higher than the national graduation threshold minimum goal of 67%. Overall, dropout rates fell for AI students between 2022 and 2023. AI students on reservations are the only population showing a decrease in dropout rate over the last six years. The number of AI students receiving dual enrollment credit increased from 240 students in 2018/2019 to 364 students in 2023/2024. The number of students attending community colleges, two-year colleges, and four-year colleges increased between 2018 and 2023. AI students continue to have lower rates of attendance compared to non-AI students. Data indicates a disparity of American Indian students being disciplined in school for all discipline categories.

Provide Professional Development and Technical Assistance to implement EBPs

Of the over 400 educators attending OPI SI, 65 educators were from LEAs on or near Tribal Reservations. Sessions emphasize the use of academic and behavior EBPs. Both HS Forum in November 2024 and OPI SI had multiple sessions on the science of reading specifically targeted to secondary implementation of evidence-based literacy practices. Additionally, OPI SI included a full-day training on explicit reading and writing instruction, multiple sessions on MTSS systems and implementation, and sessions on the following: high leverage practices, MS/HS Career and Technical Education, secondary transitions, EBPs to increase attendance, Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP), Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Inclusionary Practices, and EBPs in mathematics instruction.

Restorative Practice at HS Forum trained over 20 educators and over 35 were trained at OPI SI.

Promote American Indian Youth and Family Empowerment

Seventy-nine percent of students who attended the 2025 RISE Summit and completed the post-Summit survey reported their self-esteem increased after attending the 2025 RISE Summit and 65% of students reported a higher feeling of confidence to speak up about things that are important to them. Ninety-one percent of students reported having an opportunity to celebrate Indigenous culture and/or Native identity while at the Summit. Eighty-five percent of students reported forming new, positive relationships as a result of the RISE Summit while 75% reported learning skills or information that they will use later in life.

One of the greatest outcomes of the Summit, which is reflected in the responses of students is the growth in student's self-esteem and confidence to speak up about things that are important to them. Self-esteem positively predicts academic engagement (Zhao et al. 2021). As Zhao et al. (2021) state, Students with high self-esteem have higher self-cognition and academic self-efficacy (p.5); students can better regulate all aspects of available resources and thus achieve their academic expectations and ultimately increase their engagement in learning (Ouweneel et al., 2011; Zhang et al, 2021, p. 5). In Native adolescents specifically, a positive self-image has been correlated with an increase in academic achievement (Reyhner & Carjuzza, 2017; Whitbeck et al., 2001; Whitesell, Mitchell, & Spicer, 2009). In addition, positive self-image in Native adolescents has been linked to better emotional health (Cummins et al., 1999) and a decrease in risky behaviors such as substance use (Allen et al., 2006; Mackin et al., 2012), which impact a student's ability to attend and participate in school.

The number of students (50%) reporting gaining a new personal relationship is also worth noting. Positive peer and non-familial adult relationships have been found to reduce substance use (Whitesell et al., 2001) and risky behaviors (Mmari et al, 2010; Pu et al., 2013) while fostering better mental health (Barney, 2001; Borowsky et al., 1999; Pharris et al., 1997), and resilience (LaFromboise et al, 2006), all of which impact a student's ability to attend school and learn. Anecdotally, we know many of the friendships formed at the RISE Summit continue long after the Summit ends with students remaining in contact with each other and meeting in-person at other events.

Many students reported finding the opportunity to connect with Indigenous cultures and interact with Knowledge Keepers at the RISE Summit as a meaningful experience and gained information and/or skills they would use later in life. Cultural connectedness in Native adolescents has been shown to increase academic success (Whitbeck et al., 2001), foster resilience (LaFromboise et al., 2006), and protect against suicide (Pharris et al., 2013). Similarly, cultural congruence within academic systems has been shown to increase academic achievement in Native students across multiple subject areas (Apthorp, D'Amato, & Richardson, 2002; Keith et al., 2017; Kisker et al., 2012; Stowe, 2017).

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.

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

Next steps for 2025-26:

Align the SPDG and SSIP with the support of NIRN-SISEP. Continue to develop statewide systems and consistent implementation of MTSS across state agency projects including DPHHS and improve inter-agency coordination of MTSS efforts with specific emphasis on supporting behavior and improving attendance. This will include working with Coordinated School Health Unit and coordination with ESEA/ESSA Title I School Support team because of the high number of American Indian students served in schools identified for Comprehensive Schools support.

OPI/DPHHS/SISEP Partnership Purpose:

- Articulate the vision of Montana's Integrated System of Support (MTSS) of state initiatives and utilize implementation science to create cohesion and alignment to improve graduation and attendance outcomes for Montana youth.

Long Term Goals of the OPI State Management Team working with SISEP:

1. Define an Integrated System of Support framework (MTSS) for Montana, and scale knowledge and resources across the SEA
2. Develop internal SEA Infrastructure that supports intra-agency collaboration and coordination of professional development and coaching for integrated MTSS
3. Establish a data use culture (data literacy) at the SEA and LEA level
4. Braid funding that supports a sustainable, integrated MTSS framework

Goals 2 and 3 are strongly aligned with the activities of the SSIP and goals 1 and 4 support the use of MTSS as an evidence-based framework to support AI students with disabilities.

Collaborate with TSAR and IEFA units, specifically at Indian Education for All Best Practices Conference through a session from OPI Special Education staff planned around English Language Learners and IDEA Identification. This session will also be repeated at OPI Summer Institute.

Continue Special Education staff participation in weekly collaborative meetings: internal SEA collaborative conversation designed to link all division projects focused on American Indian student achievement

Expected outcome: Stronger SEA coordination and supports for districts serving AI students with disabilities to increase district implementation of MTSS and the use of EBPs for improved behavior and academic outcomes including graduation with a regular diploma.

Establish a Data Use Culture at the SEA and LEA levels

Next Steps for 2025-26:

- Training on data literacy, data use, and Data-Based Individualization (DBI) at SEA Summer Institute in June 2026 and CSPD training on data use and data literacy 2025-26.
- Establishing a Data-use culture is connected with the 2025 SPDG emphasis on I-MTSS and DBI which will provide coaching and continued training in data literacy and data-based decision making.
- PowerSchool MTSS discussions at SISEP State Management Team.
- 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: Increase use of data-based decision making to improve outcomes for American Indian students served under IDEA and increased completion and/or graduation rates for this population.

Provide Professional Development and Technical Assistance to implement EBPs

Next steps for 2025-26:

- Continuing to provide training opportunities that develop cultural perspectives of historical Indigenous Restorative Practice efforts at Summer Institute, CSPDs, or other training events hosted by OPI.
- Support districts on or around Montana reservations and those serving high AI populations with MTSS implementation through the SPDG, ESEA/ESSA Title I Comprehensive School Support, and the Comprehensive Literacy Grant.
- Connect AI student serving districts with the DPHHS/University of Montana Early Intervention System (EIS) to screen students for behavioral supports and help match students with EBPs. This work is also part of our SISEP Partnership.
- Supporting SEA Special Education Endorsement candidates through regular meetings on inclusionary practices through a co-teaching lens.
- 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. These can be both through the CSPD, SPDG, MAEP, and Special Education Endorsement Project candidates support systems.

Expected outcome: Continue to strengthen and build on SEA supports for EBP implemented on behalf of special education-identified American Indian students, along with all special education-identified students, leading to increased behavioral and academic outcomes including graduation for this population.

Promote American Indian Youth and Family Empowerment

Next Steps for 2025-26:

- 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 2026.

- Continued tribal consultation support at both the SEA and LEA level to fulfill state and federal requirements
 - 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 population.

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

Cultural Congruence and Cultural Integration into Teaching and Learning Practices

Restorative Practices

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Provide a summary of each evidence-based practice.

Cultural Congruence and Cultural Integration into Teaching and Learning Practices

Cultural worldview significantly impacts learning by acting as a lens through which a learner interprets information and makes meaning. Creating more congruence with Indigenous worldviews within academic systems has been shown to increase academic achievement in American Indian (AI) students across multiple subject areas (Apthorp, D'Amato, & Richardson, 2002; Keith et al., 2017; Kisker et al., 2012; Stowe, 2017). When teaching materials and practices incorporate students' cultural knowledge and worldview the time it takes for students to process and recall information is greatly reduced. This reduces the cognitive load necessary for interpretation and creates more time for learning.

Restorative Practices

Restorative Practices are a relational framework for building community, fostering healthy relationships, and proactively managing conflict by repairing harm rather than relying solely on punishment. Originating from indigenous traditions, these strategies emphasize empathy, accountability, and dialogue to restore trust and maintain positive environments in schools and workplaces. Restorative practices (RP) are evidence-based, proactive, and responsive strategies that build community and repair harm, resulting in improved school climate, reduced suspensions, decreased disciplinary disparities, and enhanced social-emotional skills. Studies show significant positive impacts on behavior, including up to 75% reductions in discipline referrals, increased empathy, and better academic outcomes when implemented fully.

Integrated MTSS (I-MTSS)

Integrated Multi-Tiered System of Supports (I-MTSS) is a comprehensive, holistic framework that merges academic, social, emotional, and behavioral supports into one cohesive system to improve outcomes for all students. It aligns data-driven, evidence-based practices with a tiered continuum of supports, ensuring equitable access to personalized, preventative instruction rather than relying solely on traditional academic-only models.

Core Components of Integrated MTSS:

- Comprehensive Support: Integrates academic (reading/math) and Social-Emotional-Behavioral (SEB) supports to address the whole child.
- Tiered Continuum: Implements a three-tiered model: Tier 1 (universal for all), Tier 2 (targeted for some), and Tier 3 (intensive for few).
- Data-Driven Decision Making: Uses universal screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostic data to identify student needs early and match them with appropriate interventions.
- Shared Leadership & Collaboration: Involves teaming, shared responsibility, and consistent professional development to build staff capacity.
- Prevention-Focused: Proactively identifies needs to prevent learning or behavior issues, rather than waiting for failure.

PBIS

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based three-tiered framework to improve and integrate all of the data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes every day. PBIS Tier 1 practices and systems establish a foundation of regular, proactive support while preventing unwanted behaviors. Schools provide these universal supports to all students, school-wide. PBIS Tier 2 practices and systems support students who are at risk for developing more serious problem behaviors before those behaviors start. These supports help students develop the skills they need to benefit from core programs at the school. At PBIS Tier 3, students receive more intensive, individualized support to improve their behavioral and academic outcomes. At this level, schools rely on formal assessments to determine a student's need.

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.

Cultural Congruence and Cultural Integration into Teaching and Learning Practices

Cultural worldview significantly impacts learning by acting as a lens through which a learner interprets information and makes meaning. Creating more congruence with Indigenous worldviews within academic systems has been shown to increase academic achievement in American Indian (AI) students across multiple subject areas (Apthorp, D'Amato, & Richardson, 2002; Keith et al., 2017; Kisker et al., 2012; Stowe, 2017). When teaching materials and practices incorporate students' cultural knowledge and worldview the time it takes for students to process and recall information is greatly reduced. This reduces the cognitive load necessary for interpretation and creates more time for learning. Both the TSAR and IEFA units work with educators to create more cultural congruence within teaching and learning practices and facilitate embedding indigenous knowledge within existing educational systems.

Restorative Practices

Restorative practices (RP) are evidence-based, proactive, and responsive strategies that build community and repair harm, resulting in improved school climate, reduced suspensions, decreased disciplinary disparities, and enhanced social-emotional skills. Studies show significant positive impacts on behavior, including up to 75% reductions in discipline referrals, increased empathy, and better academic outcomes when implemented fully.

Evidence-Based Impacts of Restorative Practices in Schools

- Behavioral Improvement: Schools with high-quality implementation experience significantly less fighting, bullying, and chronic misbehavior.
- Reduced Disciplinary Action: Studies have found substantial drops in suspensions and expulsions, sometimes by over 44% in one year.
- Disparity Reduction: Data indicates that well-implemented RP reduces racial disparities in discipline.
- School Climate & Relationships: Research from the Center for Disease Control and International Institute for Restorative Practices shows increased student-staff trust and higher student engagement.

Studies that have looked at the adoption of RP in whole schools, such as those by Bonell et al. (2015), suggest that RP is most effective when it is part of the school culture. Schools must include RP in their coexistence policies to achieve this integration and provide ongoing training for teachers and support staff. Blending restorative practices with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) strengthens the overall framework.

I-MTSS

I-MTSS evidence-based practices (EBPs) are research-validated strategies, programs, and interventions implemented with fidelity across a tiered framework to improve academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes. Key components include universal screening, data-based decision-making, progress monitoring, and evidence-backed interventions (e.g., What Works Clearinghouse, PBIS) matched to student needs. Key Evidence-Based Practices by Tier in I-MTSS are outlined below.

- Tier 1 (Universal - All Students): High-quality, evidence-based core instruction; positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS); universal screenings.
- Tier 2 (Targeted - Some Students): Small-group instruction, targeted academic interventions (e.g., explicit literacy instruction), and behavioral supports (e.g., Check-In/Check-Out).
- Tier 3 (Intensive - Few Students): Individualized, intensive, and frequent interventions often based on functional behavior assessments (FBA).

PBIS

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), the Center on PBIS supports schools, districts, and states to build systems capacity for implementing a multi-tiered approach to social, emotional and behavior support. The broad purpose of PBIS is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of schools and other agencies. PBIS improves social, emotional, and academic outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities and students from underrepresented groups.

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

Cultural Congruence and Cultural Integration into Teaching and Learning Practices

The data we will collect to monitor fidelity of implementation is the percentage of schools meeting accreditation requirements for implementing Indian Education For All (IEFA). Montana's state constitution and state law requires all public schools to implement IEFA to recognize the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and be committed in its educational goals to preserve Montana Indian cultural heritages. Every Montanan, whether Indian or non-Indian, should learn about the distinct and unique heritage of American Indians in a culturally responsive manner. During school accreditation cycles, schools must report on their work to implement IEFA. We will track the percentage of schools who are properly meeting their IEFA accreditation requirements.

Restorative Practices

American Indian students are over-represented across all categories of school discipline, especially OSS and expulsion. Tracking yearly discipline rates across the state will assist in assessing success in implementing restorative practices to reduce incidents of exclusionary discipline in American Indian students.

I-MTSS- Our SPDG uses the SISEP District Capacity Assessment to measure implementation of MTSS District systems and a MTSS Implementation Stages Checklist to measure building level implementation. OPI Summer Institute 2025 included training on the Integrated MTSS Fidelity Rubric, (IMFR) created by AIR, but we have not yet begun measuring implementation using this fidelity tool as it is still new.

PBIS- PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory is implemented as a fidelity measure in 15 SPDG Districts, including one that serves a high percentage of American Indian students.

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.

Within our SPDG I-MTSS framework, our districts utilize benchmark testing three times a year and regular progress monitoring for reading and math instruction. We also receive regular feedback on the implementation of the framework from grant sites and annual data around implementation growth.

We collect evaluation feedback following all professional development and use this data to select future training session topics and presenters.

Data is regularly collected on American Indian Achievement and survey data from the RISE group and summit supports the continued use of cultural congruence and cultural integration strategies.

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, 2025 - June 30, 2026, in addition to the items reported above related to the infrastructure activities, the SEA plans these next steps:

1. I-MTSS and PBIS: As an intensive state, our SEA will continue to 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 new 2025 State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) Montana's Integrated Tiered System of Support (I-MTSS) and Para Pathways Project. 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 ESEA/ESSA Title I School Support. Through the Regional CSPDs, 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.

2. Cultural Congruence and Cultural Integration into Teaching and Learning Practices

During the next reporting period, TSAR will create tools and guidance documents to assist schools with embedding cultural knowledge and practices within their teaching and learning practices. More specifically, TSAR will release a series of one-pagers dedicated to assisting schools with implementing Indigenous whole learning approaches. TSAR will also release a walk-through checklist, designed to provide opportunities for schools to identify current strengths in integrating culture into schools and classrooms, and areas for exploration. The goal of this work is to provide actionable steps and guidance for schools to put ideas into action. We predict this will increase American Indian student attendance and academic engagement.

3. Restorative Practices Guide

In 2025-26, the OPI will publish the Restorative Practices: Creating a Culture of Connection guide which serves as both an informational manual and planning workbook for implementing restorative practices in schools. As educators work through each section of the guide, they also take steps to begin to outline high priority needs and potential strategies for implementing restorative practices. Through this work, more schools will begin implementing restorative practices across the MTSS framework which will increase connectedness to school, reduce disciplinary issues, including reducing incidences of exclusionary discipline.

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.

Our current SSIP was developed in 2020, so we will be reviewing it in 2025-26 to update the Theory of Action, to continue to improve alignment with the SPDG who will be targeting efforts to recruit more tribal connected schools, and to update the evaluation plan.

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 16 members, seven 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 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years, the SEA asked for input on Indicators 3, 4, 9, and 10 from the SEAP. The SEA presented information on the SPP/APR as a whole and then dug into the specific indicators for feedback on targets and proposed methodological changes. The SEAP agreed with the SEA's proposal. Meeting minutes from discussions with SEAP as well as presentation materials have been posted publicly for all stakeholder review and input on the state website for SEAP: <https://opi.mt.gov/Educators/School-Climate-Student-Wellness/Special-Education/Regulations-and-Guidance#10965413037-federal-requirements>.

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 partnership 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:

Monthly Special Education Director's calls

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

Summer Institute

Montana Council of Administrators of Special Education (MCASE)

Higher Education Consortium (HEC)

Dawson Community College – assisted in setting up level 2 of the ParaPathways Program

CSPD Regional Directors

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

American Indian Student Achievement data was presented to the Legislative Interim Committee in September 2024. That Report https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Indian%20Education/Indian%20Student%20Achievement/Docs/Data_Report_2024.pdf

The Montana Advisory Council on Indian Education was established by the Board of Public Education and the Office of Public Instruction to function in an advisory capacity for the education of American Indian students in Montana. MACIE meets quarterly to discuss AI student achievement and the OPI representative on the MACIE reports back to OPI team during tribal check-ins noted above. The Montana Advisory Council on Indian Education shall be a strong voice for collaborative efforts among tribal, state, and federal organizations, institutions, groups, and agencies for the express purpose of promoting high quality and equitable educational opportunities for all American Indian students in Montana. This includes, but is not limited to, culture, language, and Indian Education for All. <https://opi.mt.gov/Educators/Teaching-Learning/Indian-Education-for-All/MACIE#10967112882-meetings>

Our RISE group is made up of educators and youth representatives who meet monthly to discuss issues pertinent to AI students.

A presentation of all indicators, including Indicator 17 SSIP 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.

Indicator 17 was reviewed by Special Education Leadership in August 2024 and NCSI and based on the continued number of American Indian students with disabilities served under IDEA, the team felt the SIMR should still be a priority and that we align the SSIP and the SPDG as much as possible.

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

YES

Describe how the State addressed the concerns expressed by stakeholders.

At the Spring 2024 and Spring 2025 Joint Partnership meetings, stakeholders expressed concerns around student behavior, exclusionary discipline, and attendance. Discussions at the State Special Education Advisory Panel in 2024-25 also show continued concerns over student behavior and disciplinary practices for students with disabilities. 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).

N/A

17 - Prior FFY Required Actions

None

17 - OSEP Response

The State did not provide any FFY 2024 data for this indicator. Therefore, OSEP could not determine whether the State met its target.

The State did not provide the numerator and denominator descriptions in the FFY 2024 SPP/APR Data table.

17 - Required Actions