

Connecticut State Department of Education



Part B State Systemic Improvement Plan

State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report Indicator 17
April 2015

Phase One:

Data Analysis
Infrastructure Analysis
State Identified Measureable Result (SIMR)
Selection of Coherent Improvement Strategies
Theory of Action

Data Analysis

Systematic process to identify, select, and analyze existing data

Connecticut began its initial planning for the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) through attendance at the March 2014 Northeast Regional Resource Center's SSIP Meeting in Springfield, Massachusetts. Connecticut brought a 7-member internal SSIP team to this meeting: State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) Coordinator, General Supervision Coordinator, Focused Monitoring Coordinator, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) Data Manager, IDEA Data Analyst, State PTI Center Executive Director, and a Local Education Agency special education director. As a result of this meeting, the internal SSIP team met in the summer of 2014 to identify additional Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) staff to join the internal team and plan a process for convening a representative external stakeholder group to advise the CSDE moving forward. Additionally, Connecticut was able to outline the agenda for the first meeting of the external stakeholder group with an introduction to the process as well as the broad data that could potentially be selected as the State-identified Measurable Result (SIMR).

Connecticut convened its first external stakeholder meeting in October of 2014 with two main objectives: 1) to introduce stakeholders to the SSIP process, including their role in the data and infrastructure analysis and identification of the SIMR; and 2) presentation of the broad data analysis pertaining to all SPP/APR results indicators available for SIMR consideration. Discussion began with an explanation of the SIMR and the Office of Special Education Programs' (OSEP) requirements regarding: alignment to an APR indicator; the mandate to be an individual child-level result; connection to other existing state-level initiatives; and availability of resources that the state must have to support the plan and effect change. All SPP/APR indicators were reviewed and evaluated for their potential use as a SIMR. Upon this review, five child-level results indicators were identified; of which three were appropriate for further analysis considering that n-sizes were large enough to meet the SIMR criteria regarding statewide improvement. While compliance indicators were eliminated from consideration as a SIMR, they were later included in the root cause analysis (focused data analysis).

Broad Data Analysis

A broad state-level analysis was conducted on the three remaining indicators: Graduation, Dropout, and Academic Achievement. For each of these indicators, analyses were completed and presented to the stakeholders. Analyses included multi-year trend data comparing students with disabilities to: all-students (including gap analysis); other traditionally underperforming subgroups; and national and regional data. The data used for the graduation and dropout broad data analysis included data aligned to the Connecticut's Approved Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility, including the 4-year on-time adjusted cohort graduation rate, as well as the 5- and 6-year rates currently under consideration in Connecticut's draft ESEA Flexibility renewal application. The data used for academic achievement also aligned with the state's Approved ESEA Flexibility performance index and were analyzed across all four tested subject areas (Math, Reading, Writing, and Science).

Summary of Stakeholder Conclusions Regarding the Broad Analysis:

Indicator 1 (ESEA Flexibility 4-year Cohort Graduation Rate)

- Overall Students with Disabilities (SWD) Graduation Rate
 - Slight increases during 3 of the 4 previous years
 - Ranged from 62.4 – 64.7% over past 4 years
- Gap Between All Students and SWDs Graduation Rate
 - Slowly, but consistently increasing
 - Ranged from 19.3 – 20.8% over past 4 years
- Comparison to U.S. and Other States
 - CT rates are higher than the national average for both All Students and SWDs
 - CT All Students and SWDs rate gap is larger than national gap and most states
- Potential to Use 5-Year or 6-Year Cohort Graduation Rate
 - 5-year rate shows a significantly higher rate than the 4-year rate for SWDs
 - 6-year rate is being considered for CT's draft ESEA Flexibility renewal request
- Comparison of SWDs to other historically underperforming subgroups
 - SWDs underperform all subgroups except English Language Learners (ELL)
- Contributing factor to low graduation rate is the high percentage of students staying on for transition services beyond completion of academic requirements to earn a standard high school diploma; post-secondary transition services are a high priority for the state

Indicator 2 (Dropout)

- Overall SWD Rate
 - Fairly stable from 2010-2012 with a decrease of almost one percent in 2013
 - Ranged from 14.8 – 15.4% over past 4 years
- Gap Between SWD and All Student Rates
 - Consistently widening
 - Ranged from 3.7 – 6.0% over past 4 years
- Comparison to Other States
 - Of neighboring states, CT has the lowest 4-year SWD dropout rate
- Comparison of SWDs to other historically underperforming subgroups
 - SWDs have lowest dropout rate of all other subgroups
- Fewer than 800 students with disabilities in the state of CT dropout annually, which may be insufficient to show statewide growth, when considering the total graduation cohort size

Indicator 3 (Academic Achievement)

- Science: SWDs are performing similarly to all other historically underperforming subgroups except ELL (*Stakeholders noted hands-on learning and applied concepts as an explanation for this higher performance trend*)
- Writing: SWDs are the lowest performing of all historically underperforming subgroups
 - Since writing is assessed within the English Language Arts (ELA) Smarter Balanced (SB) assessment, and not separately, writing is not an option for focus
- Reading: SWDs are performing at least 10 index points lower than all other historically underperforming subgroups except ELL
 - SWD perform poorest on reading versus all other subject areas

- Math: SWDs and ELLs are performing 10-15 index points lower than all other historically underperforming subgroups
 - SWD math performance has a consistent downward trend for four years
 - Math was ruled out as a focus option as no statewide initiatives exist to leverage

As a result of this broad data analysis and extensive stakeholder discussion, the stakeholders advised the CSDE to focus on academic achievement for further analysis, specifically in the area of reading. Stakeholders further recommended that the CSDE focus the work of the SSIP on reading achievement for the following reasons:

- Connecticut SWDs perform lowest in reading when compared to all other subject areas, therefore reading has the greatest opportunity for growth;
- There is potential for selecting a narrower focus within reading achievement given that all approximately 37,000 SWDs take the statewide assessment each year;
- Multiple state-level initiatives can be leveraged with an emphasis on Connecticut’s K-3 Early Literacy Initiative (CK3LI) and differentiated supports and interventions through the Department’s Turnaround Office, as well as CT’s Framework for Response to Intervention (RTI) - Scientific Research Based Interventions (SRBI) - and the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG);
- As of September 2013, existing state law requiring all elementary educators (K-6) to achieve a satisfactory score on the reading instruction examination - Foundations of Reading Test (C.G.S. 10-145d (f)), was amended to include all CT Educators with an endorsement to teach comprehensive special education as well. Statewide, approximately 76 percent of all educators participating on this exam in 2013-14, passed on the first attempt, down from approximately 81 percent in previous years before this requirement went into effect. These data provide anecdotal support of the need for greater professional development in the area of reading instruction for teachers with a comprehensive special education endorsement; and
- Early literacy intervention should improve students’ on-track reading in fourth grade which is a significant predictor of on-time graduation (Butler et al., 1985; Stainthorp & Hughes, 2004; Wagner et al., 1997).

In short, stakeholders felt that selection of a SIMR related to reading achievement would allow the state to focus on an area of extreme need for SWDs that is aligned to existing state-level initiatives and has the potential to effect longitudinal change on graduation/dropout rates and post-secondary outcomes.

Disaggregation by multiple variables/narrow data analysis

For the focused, root cause data analysis, stakeholders requested the CSDE to consider the following categories for disaggregation of reading achievement data: demographics (e.g., grade, Free/Reduced Lunch, ELL, race, etc.), discipline, enrollment and attendance, district type, and indicators specific to students’ special education status (e.g., educational environments, TWNDP, primary disability, etc.). All data from our statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) were included in the focused data analysis, including all CSDE student information system (SIS) data and student-level 618 data. All data were student-level, aggregated to Local Education Agency (LEA) and State Education Agency (SEA) levels for analysis. ESEA Flexibility accountability data constituted the primary unit of analysis. The categories listed were analyzed

separately and in combination to explore interaction effects. Data for students with disabilities were compared to data of non-disabled peers for all analyses on variables available for all children.

Qualitative data were reviewed in the form of the CSDE 2014-2015 SRBI survey results. In the fall of 2014, this survey was administered to Prekindergarten through Grade 12 educators and leaders in Connecticut public schools and districts in order to gather information regarding the implementation of CT's Framework for SRBI statewide. Some of the results from this survey are summarized below and reinforce the stakeholders' recommendation to focus on the area of reading for a SIMR.

In the area of reading:

- Approximately sixty percent of respondents indicated universal screening measures are administered to students three times per year.
- Less than sixty percent of respondents reported district curriculum alignment with the CT Core ELA standards.
- Less than forty percent reported a continuum of differentiated instruction and research-based interventions available to all students in all grades.
- Approximately fifty percent conveyed the occurrence of collaborative meetings between teachers and interventionists to discuss student progress.
- Less than thirty percent described that decision rules and procedures were in place to appropriately match reading intervention to student need.

The following focused, root cause data analysis occurred during the months of October and November 2014. Results of this focused analysis were shared with stakeholders in early November.

Initial analysis of all data began at the district level which did not provide useful context for interpretation because too much variability existed among the 170 entities. Patterns among the district-level data were thoroughly examined to arrive at the district groupings used in the analysis described below.

District Type (ESEA Alliance Districts/State EdReform Districts/Charters)

- Alliance districts are the thirty lowest performing districts statewide;
- Education Reform (EDReform) districts are the lowest 10 of the Alliance districts;
- Both of these groups were used for analysis/comparison to our districts with high socio-economic status (SES); and
- There are very few charter schools in CT, accounting for less than one percent of all SWDs statewide. Analysis of this group by SWD was too small for SIMR consideration.

Summary of Stakeholder Conclusions Regarding the Focused Analysis:

Disability Status and Category

- Lowest performing disability subgroups of SWD included students with: Emotional Disturbance (ED), Intellectual Disabilities (ID) and all low incidence categories (hearing, visual and orthopedic impairments, traumatic brain injuries, developmental delays, deaf/blind and multiple disabilities).

- n-size for each low incidence category is too small for consideration as a SIMR
- Significant differences exist between the reading performance of district SES groups across all disabilities, including non-cognitive impairments. However, differences by district SES were largest for students with Learning Disabilities (LD), ED, and other health impairments (OHI).

Race/Ethnicity

- Performance gaps for SWD by race are large in high SES districts and narrow or non-existent in low SES/Alliance districts.
- Significant differences by race and district type indicated that “where” students are educated (i.e., Low v. High SES districts) might require a differential approach to intervention.

Time with Non-Disabled Peers (TWNDP; compliance data)

- Alliance district students in regular class placements (80-100% TWNDP) performed equal to or below that of resource room students (40-79% TWNDP) in all other high SES districts.
- Placement appears to have a greater impact for students in the high SES districts (25 point gaps between regular class and resource room) than for those in low SES districts (10 point gaps between regular class and resource room).
- The rate of out-of-district placements was significantly higher in Alliance districts.
- TWNDP by SES district analysis indicates a need to consider the role of placement or educational setting when designing interventions at the individual district level.

Grade Level

- The only difference across grade was that 3rd grade SWDs performed significantly lower than SWDs at other grade levels.
- One potential intervention identified by stakeholders was expansion of full-day kindergarten programming by districts. A review of 2014-15 district offerings of full-day versus part-day kindergarten programs found too much consistency for useful discrimination in any data model. Currently,
 - 92% of all districts offer full-day kindergarten to their SWD;
 - Only 12 districts statewide offer half-day kindergarten programs; and
 - 95% of all kindergarten SWDs are served in full-day programs.

Discipline (Discipline by days sanctioned; compliance data)

Sanction categories used in the focused analysis included all students grouped by the cumulative number of days a student was sanctioned due to any disciplinary suspension and/or expulsion, regardless of severity of the offense (0 days sanctioned, less than 10 days sanctioned, 10 or more cumulative days sanctioned).

- Alliance district students with 0 days sanctioned performed more than 10 points lower than students with 10+ days sanctioned in upper SES districts. However, in Alliance districts, there is little difference between the performance of students across sanction categories (0, <10, 10+ days of sanction).
- Removal from class for disciplinary reasons (i.e., suspension or expulsion) impacts the performance of students in upper SES districts (15-20 point gaps between 0 days and 10+

days) more than for those in lower SES districts (5 point gaps between 0 days and 10+ days).

- The ten lowest performing districts accounted for 26% of state enrollment and 65% of students with 10+ days sanctioned.
- High SES districts – reading performance gaps by sanction category exist.
- Low SES districts – sanction category has no impact on reading performance.

Chronic Absenteeism

- SWDs are twice as likely to be chronically absent (absent 10 percent or more days) as those without disabilities.
- Chronically absent students performed comparable to students with good attendance on reading assessments in Alliance districts.
- Chronically absent students in upper SES districts had lower reading performance compared to district peers with good attendance.

Selection of SIMR and Additional Focused Analysis

SIMR: Increase the reading performance of all 3rd grade students with disabilities statewide, as measured by Connecticut's Approved ESEA Flexibility Performance Index.

CT's SIMR is aligned to Indicator 3: Participation and Performance of Children with IEPs on Statewide Assessments. While the SIMR is an academic achievement indicator, and therefore aligned with SPP/APR indicator 3, it is not completely congruent with the measurement and targets of Indicator 3. The SIMR is aligned with Connecticut's Approved ESEA Flexibility and only represents the subgroup of 3rd grade students with disabilities participating on the state's Reading Assessment (both standard and alternate).

Note: Connecticut has received permission to express its SIMR in a numeric form other than a percentage, to align with the state's approved ESEA Flexibility Performance Index. Connecticut has worked diligently to incorporate the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) and SIMR into existing department initiatives, all of which center around our ESEA Flexibility work. It is important to our state to use the same measures of student academic achievement across all monitoring and improvement initiatives, including our work with students with disabilities.

Reading Performance Index Baseline: FFY13 = 33.7

Targets: FFY14 = 33.7; FFY15 = 34.0; FFY16 = 34.3; FFY17 = 34.7; FFY18 = 35.0

The methodology for calculating the Reading Performance Index (RPI) starts with taking the scores on the statewide reading assessments for 3rd grade SWDs and converting that score into an appropriate index point value that ranged from 0 to 100. A reading performance index is calculated by averaging the index points earned by all SWD. The RPI baseline was calculated using the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) student scores from 2012-13, the most current statewide data available. Moving forward, the RPI will be calculated using data from the SB and Connecticut Alternate Assessments (CTAA). Any changes to the calculation that are approved in Connecticut's ESEA Flexibility Renewal application will be incorporated into the SIMR data

used moving forward under the SSIP. Targets were established with the input of the SSIP stakeholders. These targets are reflective of the amount of growth that could be achieved in the RPI based on the 3-year cohort cycle of working with districts (i.e., one-third of the approximately 4500 SWD in 3rd grade statewide). These targets would need to be reset using the 2014-15 SB and CTAA data in the winter of 2015.

As a result of the initial root cause data analysis, stakeholders advised that the CSDE select 3rd grade reading as its SIMR. They cited the following in support of this recommendation:

- A SIMR focused on a specific disability category would be inappropriate as n-sizes are too small and it is not equitable to focus on one disability;
- 3rd grade SWD performed significantly lower than SWD in other grades;
- A single grade-level yields a large enough n-size to effect statewide change;
- SWD perform poorest on reading versus all other assessed subject areas; and
- Multiple state-level initiatives that emphasize early literacy could be leveraged.

Stakeholders further emphasized that previously reviewed compliance data (discipline, identification and race/ethnicity) along with education placement and chronic absenteeism data were meaningful to the theory of action at the LEA level, but constituted barriers to a statewide “one size fits all” intervention model. Therefore, they recommended that the CSDE avoid a singular focus on low SES districts, but instead to develop a plan that would differentiate interventions and supports by all district types (SES groups). They further requested that the CSDE investigate the best prediction model for the performance of SWD on 3rd grade reading assessments.

To determine the best prediction model, regression analyses began with a statewide (all student) model which found that poverty (student free/reduced lunch status) was the greatest predictor, followed by eligibility for special education and related services. A follow-up model was built for the SWD subgroup which found that educational setting (TWNDP) and enrollment in a low SES district were the greatest predictors of reading performance.

Considering the multiple examples where the impact of data varied by district type (e.g., discipline/days sanctioned; chronic absenteeism; race and disability category) as well as the assertion of stakeholders that interventions should be differentiated at the district level, the state-level analysis was insufficient. This led the CSDE to run three separate regression models for low, middle and high SES districts looking to see if data points rose in prominence when controlling for district SES group.

The outcome of the three new regression models based on low, middle and high SES were not as revealing as initially hypothesized. The only model explaining a significant amount of variance in 3rd grade reading achievement of SWDs was the high SES district model ($R^2=.153$). Race/ethnicity and TWNDP were the best predictors in this model, which reinforces the conclusions drawn earlier that in high SES districts - when a student is not educated in the general education classroom, achievement declines and race/ethnicity also play a role in these districts, which have predominately white student enrollment.

Selection of Districts Using a Tiered Intervention Framework

While stakeholder feedback and the additional regression models supported the need for a district-level tiered intervention model, questions remained on how to include districts in the work of the statewide SIMR. Existing CSDE infrastructure would not support a statewide intervention model covering all 170 IDEA districts. For this reason, the CSDE proposed an intervention framework following our newly redesigned special education monitoring cycle. In this new cycle, one-third of all districts would be eligible for inclusion in the intervention, each year. The three-year cycle was built to allow for a statewide representative sample of districts that also incorporates connected “feeder” elementary districts and receiving secondary districts into the same year’s cycle. Each year’s cycle does not include an equal number of districts as the goal of district inclusion was to meet the statewide representative sample requirement across race/ethnicity, age, grade, disability, and gender variables. Additionally, the tiered intervention framework was built to capitalize on existing state-level initiatives including the activities of the state’s Turnaround Office and Bureau of Special Education’s Focused Monitoring System (FM).

Connecticut’s SSIP intervention framework will consist of three tiers:

- **Tier 1** of the intervention framework will include universal resources and supports relative to early literacy (i.e., best practice documents, professional learning modules, provision of the FM Protocol for use as an optional district self-study for the purpose of developing a Theory of Action) available to all 170 school districts throughout the three-year cycle.
- **Tier 2** of the intervention framework will include approximately 25 districts selected from Tier 1, using the districts most current SIMR data. Tier 2 (targeted) districts will receive additional supports provided by the CSDE in order to conduct a root cause analysis of third grade reading achievement, complete an infrastructure analysis, and develop a digital data wall outlining both of these analyses as well as the efficacy of existing related district-level initiatives. Further, Tier 2 districts will be provided the opportunity to participate in an FM Data Wall Showcase and associated professional learning activities. Tier 2 district selection criteria:
 - At least 10 district SWDs have valid scores on the 3rd grade reading assessment, and;
 - District 3rd grade reading performance index for SWDs is less than 60 points; or
 - The 3rd grade reading performance index gap between general education students and SWD is at least 30 points.
- **Tier 3** of the intervention framework will include approximately 15 districts selected from Tier 2, based upon review of the digital data wall, existing infrastructure and district-level initiatives. Tier 3 districts will benefit from intensive technical assistance and professional learning activities provided by the CSDE through one of two avenues:
 - Tier 3 districts that are one of Connecticut’s Alliance districts (30 lowest performing districts in the state), will receive intensive interventions/supports as part of the existing initiatives of Connecticut’s Turnaround Office in partnership with the Bureau of Special Education (BSE). At a minimum, these districts will be required to include a specific section in their Alliance District Improvement Plan regarding the SIMR and associated improvement activities targeting reading achievement of SWDs.

- All other districts selected for inclusion in Tier 3 will receive intensive interventions/supports through Connecticut's existing Special Education FM process. These districts will be required to develop a theory of action and corresponding improvement plan with supports by the CSDE and Connecticut's professional development center(s).

While Connecticut will tier interventions at the district-level, the SIMR will be measured statewide. Connecticut believes that the proposed intervention framework will allow districts to receive the level of support most beneficial to their individual need and encourage individualization of approaches to improving 3rd grade reading achievement. This district-level model allows the department to target the districts with the most need with intensive supports and all other districts with statewide intervention options, all while focusing on districts with large enough 3rd grade SWD counts to ensure improvement in the RPI statewide. Additionally, by using a 3-year cycle of monitoring, the CSDE will be able to include each district in some level of reading intervention, twice during the six years of the SSIP.

Additional data needed/methods and timelines to collect

- Connecticut is interested in including data regarding the readiness of students with disabilities entering Kindergarten into the district and state root cause analyses. While Connecticut currently does not have Kindergarten readiness data, the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and the CSDE are partnering with the University of Connecticut to develop a revised Kindergarten Entrance Inventory (KEI) and a tool for assessment related to the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS) for children from birth to five years of age. In September 2013, Connecticut joined a seven-state consortium to develop the revised KEI. The consortium has aligned standards and work is underway on an inventory that addresses the domains of Social Foundations, Language and Literacy, Mathematics, and Physical Well-Being and Motor Development through a set of selected response items, performance tasks, and observational rubrics for teachers. It is expected that the new KEI will be available for full state-wide census administration in fall of 2017. The revised KEI will provide information to stakeholders at the local, regional, and state levels about how well-prepared children are for kindergarten. Families and teachers will learn about each student's skills and relative strengths and weaknesses in these domains. School, local district, and state leaders will learn about students' levels of preparedness for kindergarten, which will facilitate programmatic decision-making at the school, district, community and state levels.
- The CSDE was interested in whether a district's choice of an early literacy intervention and associated assessments might bring clarity to the regression models. To that end, the department administered a survey of all district directors of special education requesting they report which reading interventions and which district-level formative reading assessments were being used in their districts. Survey data show that each district is using multiple interventions and multiple formative assessments. While useful for qualitative purposes in understanding district context, these data were not useful in conducting the regression.

Data Quality

Connecticut takes pride in the quality and comprehensiveness of its data collection systems and is confident in the accuracy, breadth and depth of available data. The Bureau of Data Collection, Research and Evaluation (BDCRE) conducts the data collections required under the IDEA and ESEA. All data regarding children are collected via multiple unique but “linked” data collection systems. These are complex systems that inter-relate based upon a unique state assigned student identifier (SASID) and the statewide PSIS-Registration System. PSIS-Registration uses the SASID to track all students in public education, their movements across and within school systems, and ensures that all other state data collections are working from the same base set of student information.

Valid and Reliable Data

Valid data are data that are an accurate representation of the population and free of error. Reliable data are data that are consistent over time. The CSDE uses a number of internal procedures to ensure the validity and reliability of data. These internal procedures include:

- SASID matching across all data collection systems;
- Thorough documentation of all data variables across all data collection systems, variable definitions, FAQs, and all associated data edits (technical and functional specifications documents, record layouts and data collection system handbooks);
- Extensive automated system edit checks and data cleaning processes;
- Numerous “live” data verification reports, year-to-year change reports, and data cleaning reports for LEAs within each of the CSDE’s data collection systems, immediately accessible by LEAs upon submission of data (available on-line 24 hours a day, seven days a week);
- CSDE technical assistance staff assigned for each data collection system;
- Administrative override system in the Special Education Data Application and Collection (SEDAC) system that identifies potential data with noncompliance immediately upon reporting by the LEA; system additionally coordinates the official notification of a finding of noncompliance and tracks the verification of correction of noncompliance;
- Annual random sampling of individualized education programs (IEP) for inclusion in the SEDAC Desk Audit System;
- Published timelines for reporting;
- Annual coordinated training for LEA personnel on all major data collections systems: SEDAC, SIS, SIS-Registration, Discipline System, Evaluation Timelines, and Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO). By integrating all trainings, LEA personnel receive training simultaneously, become knowledgeable of how all separate CSDE data collection systems are linked and interdependent, and leave the training with knowledge of the CSDE’s singular, coordinated message on student data; and
- Focused monitoring, conducted by the BSE, which validates data through triangulation with other data sources including: record reviews, desk audits, surveys, on-site observations, and student/teacher/parent interviews.

Each database has an extensive system of internal data edits, which help to ensure the reliability of the data. The internal data edits have three levels:

- Hard Edit: Data format is not suitable for the intended use; does not conform to data warehouse documentation requirements. Data are rejected; district required to resubmit.

- Soft Edit: Data is accepted into state system but violates internal data edits and must be reviewed by LEA for accuracy. In some cases the internal edit identifies noncompliance or data entry errors and in other cases the internal edit identifies LEA misunderstanding of the data field and its use. In addition to field level edits, year-to-year change reports and other aggregate data verification reports allow for the identification of systemic data anomalies. These reports are available within the data collection systems and do not require CSDE intervention for the LEA to access and assess immediately upon reporting data.
- Administrative Override: Data are accurate but outside the parameters of compliance with the IDEA. Noncompliance is identified and documented, findings and corrective actions are issued and timely correction and verification of noncompliance is all recorded within the database.

Reflection of Actual Practice

The CSDE examines its data collection processes on a regular basis to ensure the valid and reliable data collected reflect actual practice. Each year, BDCRE staff work collaboratively to revise the CSDE data collection systems' internal data edits and create new data checks that assist in ensuring accurate reporting and/or identification of inaccuracies in reporting. Through this collaboration, staff clarifies data element definitions, updates FAQs documents, and expands technical assistance opportunities. The staff, in turn, communicates revised information to LEA personnel.

In addition, data collection system handbooks are updated and provided to LEA personnel in two forms: the *Annual Handbook* and a "*Highlighted*" *Annual Handbook*, which draws attention to all changes from the previous published version. Also, the BDCRE holds an annual coordinated training on all major data collections systems for LEA personnel. Throughout the year, LEAs receive notification of any changes, updates and clarifications to the CSDE data collection systems and procedures via associated help pages online and e-mail correspondence from BDCRE staff.

Analysis of State Infrastructure to Support Improvement and Build Capacity

The CSDE developed an internal SSIP leadership team that completed a “high-level” review of the State’s systems and invited representatives from various agency offices, as well as external partners, to the November OSEP SSIP Technical Assistance meeting. In addition to OSEP and U.S. Department of Education staff, the CSDE’s Chief Operating Officer; as well as representatives from the Office of Student Supports and Organizational Effectiveness, Performance Office, Turnaround Office, Academic Office, Choice Office, Talent Office, Regional School Choice Office (RSCO), State Education Resource Center (SERC), Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center – Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), and a representative from the Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education (ConnCASE); participated in the two-day meeting. Connecticut engaged Attorney Susan Marks, of the former Northeast Regional Resource Center (NERRC), to facilitate the group’s use of NERRC’s *In-Depth Infrastructure Analysis Tool*, which was designed to assist states in (1) analyzing strengths and challenges in infrastructure alignment, resources, organizational capacity and readiness; and (2) connecting the State’s infrastructure to the SSIP. Having a diverse group of participants, with knowledge of existing systems across the agency and the state, allowed the CSDE to complete a comprehensive assessment of its current infrastructure in relation to the identification of an appropriate SIMR.

Since November 2014, further focused analysis of the State’s infrastructure has continued. The CSDE’s leadership team, which represents the entire agency, has met weekly to inform the development of Connecticut’s new ESEA Flexibility Renewal request and the SSIP. The State recognizes that working collaboratively to align these two initiatives is critical for building capacity in districts to implement, scale up, and sustain the use of evidence-based practices to improve results for children with disabilities. The leadership team considered the SIMR, existing infrastructure systems and possible linkages with developing systems. The two initiatives were developed in tandem to complement one another and support shared goals.

The State also engaged its SSIP stakeholders to assist with the analysis of the State’s infrastructure. In December 2014, the State provided information to the stakeholders on various existing State initiatives that had the potential to support the SSIP work. Stakeholders were then able to use that information, along with the data analysis, to comment on and inform the development of the State’s SIMR.

Governance

In January 2012, the Connecticut State Board of Education approved the Commissioner of Education’s reorganization plan for the CSDE. This reorganization resulted in a department structure based on strategic priorities rather than compliance and created the structure and capacity to implement legislative priorities and other agency initiatives. Since this structure was implemented in 2012, the CSDE has been successfully reorganized to include the Office of Student Supports and Organizational Effectiveness, led by the Chief Operating Officer, and the newly formed Academic, Performance, Talent, and Turnaround Offices. The leaders of these offices work in close collaboration to lead and oversee the implementation of the major aspects of Connecticut’s educational reform efforts (e.g., ESEA Flexibility and the SSIP).

The CSDE seeks to maximize the use and impact of its resources in its efforts to improve results for all students, including students with disabilities. In doing so, CSDE is able to leverage financial, human and other resources to create initiatives that are supported, coordinated and represent priorities of the agency such as the SIMR-related work.

Within the CSDE, the BSE works closely with other Bureaus and Offices throughout the Department. This is done in a variety of ways, both formally and informally, to help ensure that efforts focused on improved results for students with disabilities are informed and coordinated throughout the agency.

Formally, communication and collaboration between sections of the Department occurs around various initiatives involving district-level work. For example, the BSE supports and works closely with staff in the Performance Office who are primarily responsible for a broad range of data collection activities related to students with disabilities. The Bureau of Special Education works closely with Performance Office colleagues to review and analyze student and district data, in an effort to identify districts that may be in need of specific intervention and support for the SIMR. Staff in the Performance Office, including the Part B Data Manager, take a lead role in providing information for a variety of federal reports, including the SPP/APR, as well as collect, compile and analyze data for focused monitoring.

The BSE also is directly connected to the Academic Office and staff who oversee Department work related to students with disabilities, including SRBI, which is Connecticut's RTI framework, as well as alternate assessments and test accommodations. Ongoing communication between relevant staff occurs to help ensure that students with disabilities throughout the state are provided with appropriate instruction/interventions and assessments. These are key components to the State's SSIP Theory of Action.

Related services are a significant part of services and supports for students with disabilities and the BSE supports a number of staff with related service expertise. These staff members, representing school psychology, social work, school counseling and health services, are physically located in the Department's Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services & Adult Education and work closely with the BSE and contribute significantly to the CSDE's efforts to improve student results, and provide support and guidance within the CSDE as well as to the field. Supports are provided in relation to: students with emotional disturbance, suspension and expulsion, positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) and disproportionate identification of students with disabilities.

Connecticut has a new state agency, the OEC, established in 2013. The OEC helps to support young children with disabilities within the state's overall early childhood efforts. The CSDE and the BSE have a close working relationship with the OEC and respective staff share information between the two agencies as appropriate.

Finally, the BSE supports work within the CSDE's Information Technology (IT) Office. Working with staff in IT helps to ensure that the Department has effective and efficient systems in place to support a wide variety of special education related matters, including individual student data collection in the areas of: early childhood outcomes, discipline, and evaluation

timelines among others. These data are important for supporting the districts' work with the SIMR. Additionally, any system identified compliance concerns may negatively impact a district's implementation of its improvement plan.

In all of the above, the CSDE actively promotes communication and collaboration between the Bureaus and Offices and strives to ensure that the work is well coordinated. The goal is always to promote positive outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities. As appropriate, the CSDE utilizes IDEA set aside funds to financially support key staff or parts of staff in the Performance Office, the Academic Office, the Information Technology Office, and the Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services & Adult Education. These staff members are strategically positioned to be engaged in decision making for various agency initiatives and help to extend the focus on students with disabilities beyond the BSE. As with all complex organizations, there is always potential to improve communication between the various arms of the agency. This is one area for focus in the department as we integrate the SSIP work into the work of the Turnaround and Academic Offices.

The State prides itself in involving diverse stakeholders, understands that multiple perspectives are essential in helping to ensure positive outcomes, and values the input it receives. For example, the State Advisory Council on Special Education (SAC) and ConnCASE (state special education administrators professional organization) were provided with regular updates on the SSIP work and provided feedback on the plan's development. ConnCASE and the SAC also had several representatives serve on the SSIP Stakeholder Group.

The Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) and the State Education Resource Center (SERC) are able to assist the state in developing implementation capacity at the State, regional, district and school levels. The state also coordinates with these organizations to disseminate information to the field and collect feedback on various initiatives. See more detailed explanations regarding the roles of the RESCs and SERC in the "Existing Initiatives" section below.

Fiscal

Through the Bureau of Grants Management, the State Department of Education is responsible for the distribution of \$3 billion in state and federal funds for educational purposes. The Bureau's primary mission is to ensure that all towns, regional school districts, regional educational service centers and other eligible educational agencies receive their proper share of state and federal grants in aid for education. The office monitors public elementary and secondary education expenditures to ensure compliance with state requirements and for maintaining such fiscal records as are necessary to report on the financial condition of education in Connecticut.

The Bureau is divided into two areas, the Calculations and Pupil Data unit and the Process and Quality Control unit. Calculations and Pupil Data is responsible for the collection, maintenance, analyzing, and verification of various data elements (i.e., general enrollment, special student populations, income and poverty data, and expenditures in total and by detailed category) for use in calculating state and federal formula grant entitlements. They design all formula grant calculations based on federal and state statute and provide technical assistance to internal program managers and school business officials statewide. The Process and Quality

Control unit provides an independent quality control review of each grant calculation, each data analysis and each major report prepared within the division. This includes a process review to assess compliance with established procedures, to note any exceptions and to recommend process changes as appropriate. They maintain the agency's grant payment system. Some grants have statutory payment dates, but most are subject to a cash management requirement that necessitates monthly disbursements as grantees draw down available funds as needed. Finally they collect end-of-year expenditure reports for most state and federal grants and reconcile expenditures to the budgeted spending plan of the grantee. Expenditures which vary from the approved budget by more than the amount permitted under agency policy must be reviewed to determine whether a refund is necessary

The State funds improvement strategies with a combination of federal and state funds. The State uses both quantitative and qualitative data to guide the development and implementation of improvement strategies. As one of the State's primary professional development providers, SERC reviews multiple data points and creates Results-Based Accountability (RBA) report cards for various initiatives subsidized by the CSDE. The RBA report cards are used to assess the effectiveness of specific interventions/trainings, inform revisions and the development of new improvement strategies. For 2015-16 forward, the CSDE has targeted a portion of IDEA set aside funds to support activities related to the implementation of SSIP improvement strategies, specifically for Tier 2 and Tier 3 districts. The Chief Operating Officer, in partnership with the BSE Chief and the Bureau of Grants Management, will be responsible for approving the allocation of fiscal resources and monitoring use of funds related to the implementation of SSIP improvement strategies.

Quality Standards

As part of its commitment to high quality standards and assessments, the CSDE has undertaken the following ongoing activities:

- Actively engaged stakeholders using multiple pathways, including meetings, committees, councils, conferences, surveys, newsletters, communication toolkits, the launch of the Web site ctcorestandards.org by the Academic Office, as well as the creation and dissemination of parent materials translated into the top seven languages spoken by Connecticut students.
- Worked with the Governor's Common Core State Standards Task Force, which studied successful implementation practices and made recommendations to highlight needed strategic actions.
- Implemented Task Force recommendations, many of which were in process, including:
 - Provided supports for standards implementation in the form of hundreds of teacher mini-grants; 1200 days of customized, in-district coaching and technical assistance, teacher access to the SB Digital Library of resources; \$34 million in technology updates for local education agencies; and 20,000 copies of an instructional guide for school and district leaders.
 - Deployed a statewide professional development plan focused on the significant instructional shifts needed to achieve mastery of new standards at each grade level; delivery of aligned supportive instruction for ELL and SWD; and the strategies, tools, and knowledge school and district administrators will require to lead transition to the

- new standards. To date, over 1,000 coaches have been trained, and thousands of educators have participated in regional and/or online professional development.
- Delivered dozens of workshops on the SB Assessment System, including assessment literacy, digital library resources, and critical training titled, “Connecting the Assessment Claims to Classroom Instruction.” This training emphasizes that the best preparation for annual testing is high-quality curriculum and teaching to the standards.
 - The first operational administration of the SB Assessment for students in grades 3-8 and 11 and an alternative assessment aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards (CCS) for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will occur in spring 2015.
 - Creation of online resources and online courses for college and career ready standards with target audiences of teachers and leaders (to be launched in May 2015).

The area for improvement most critical for the BSE to fully realize the goal of the SIMR, is to increase capacity and efficacy of BSE staff in the area of research-based literacy instruction and interventions for students with disabilities. The Academic Office will be an essential partner in this internal professional learning.

Professional Development (PD)

The CSDE recognizes the importance of high quality professional development offerings for district personnel. The CSDE also recognizes the importance of parent/family training to empower parents and families in their role in the special education process. Therefore, the CSDE:

- partners with SERC, the RESC Alliance, CPAC and other organizations to ensure that regularly scheduled, relevant professional development offerings and parent/family trainings are available to the public to address various topics (both compliance-focused and results-focused) related to special education;
- looks regularly at the patterns and trends across monitoring activities and uses the information to plan appropriate future offerings with the SERC, the RESC Alliance, and other service delivery providers;
- utilizes the Turnaround Office organizes quarterly Convenings to provide Alliance Districts with professional development in the four framework areas (Talent, Academics, Culture and Climate, and Operations);
- instructed the Turnaround Office to review the Alliance District Plans and data from quarterly monitoring visits to develop the agenda for the Convenings; and
- contracted with Mass Insight, another PD partner for the CSDE, developed the Alliance District quarterly monitoring data dashboard and project manages the Alliance District applications.

The Academic Office is committed to providing CT educators with access to resource and tools and professional learning opportunities throughout the K-12 learning continuum.

The CTCORESTANDARDS.ORG is a Web site devoted to providing Connecticut educators, families and community members with valuable and accurate information as well as concrete supports such as:

- Model units and lessons and standards-aligned classroom materials;

- Program models to assist leaders and educators in their transition to the new standards;
- Resources for professional development and learning; and
- Parent-, student- and community-friendly materials to learn more about the CCS.

A recently added page to the site is dedicated to Universal Design for Learning (UDL). A general overview for understanding UDL is provided through linked resources and articles, videos and webinars. The implementation for UDL is supported through resources for planning for implementation, curriculum development, and classroom videos that link UDL to the CCS. There are also professional development modules and additional online resources for understanding and using UDL.

Additional professional development opportunities include:

- SB Digital Library, an online collection of instructional and professional learning resources contributed by educators for educators. These resources are aligned with the CCS.
- A professional learning series titled, “Meeting the Challenge: CT Core Standards Success for English Learners and Students with Disabilities,” a 3-module series of professional learning opportunities are for educators who implement CCS aligned curriculum, instructional practices and assessments while meeting the needs of a wide variety of learners. Public Consulting Group’s (PCG’s) national experts in special education and English as a Second Language (ESL) have designed these professional learning modules for school teams consisting of a school principal (or other school leader), a special educator serving SWD, an ELL educator serving English learners and two general educators.
- CSDE Principal Webinar Series: The CSDE is collaborating with Connecticut Association of Schools to offer professional development opportunities to CT school principals, central office administrators and other invited guests for a series of workshops to support the implementation of the CCS.
- Smarter Balanced: Connecting the Claims to Instruction is professional development designed for Math and ELA teachers. Throughout these presentations, strategies and engaging activities are modeled to complement CCS aligned instruction, while also demonstrating connections to the SB assessments.
- Since 2012, the Academic Office, in partnership with the Commission on Children, the University of Connecticut and literacy experts from Literacy How and Hill for Literacy have launched a two year K-3 Reading Assessment Study as well as an Intensive K-3 Reading Model Pilot. The pilot, serving six low performing schools in Connecticut’s Alliance and/or Priority districts, provides internal and external coaches with literacy expertise, extensive literacy leadership training and teacher literacy training to build capacity and sustainability. The pilot, funded by statute, functions to develop an exemplar K-3 Literacy model that incorporates research based literacy instruction and multiple tiered interventions and supports. The pilot will serve as an exemplar for all Connecticut’s schools, but especially Connecticut’s lowest performing schools.
- To expand the reach of the pilot’s promising outcomes, a modified form of project focusing on literacy assessment and literacy leadership team training has been expanded to an additional 17 Alliance and/or Priority District schools in 2014-15.

- Connecticut is conducting a K-3 Reading Instruction Skills Survey to all Connecticut Teachers beginning in winter 2015. The survey's results will be used to plan extensive K-3 reading professional learning in the five fundamentals of early reading – phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary.

Potentially, an area for improvement in the area of professional development supports for schools and districts would begin with a needs assessment and review of existing PD, research new PD opportunities related to literacy and identify any issues of access to existing PD for teachers of students with disabilities.

Technical Assistance (TA)

Technical assistance activities are critical for ensuring the implementation of IDEA requirements and distributing best practices to LEA personnel and families. The BSE conducts a number of TA activities to help promote compliance and best practices in the provision of special education services across Connecticut.

For example, the BSE regularly publishes its Bureau Bulletin, which provides updates to LEA personnel and families regarding special education policy and practice, upcoming BSE activities and professional development and/or TA opportunities. In another example, the BSE Chief issues memoranda to special education directors regarding guidance about the provision of special education services or new/revised BSE practices. In a final example, the Commissioner of Education issues “C-Letters” to superintendents regarding guidance about education policy or new/revised CSDE practices.

The BSE also provides a great deal of TA to LEA personnel and families regarding the provision of special education services through telephone and e-mail contacts. The BSE has developed an organization system to manage the voluminous number of contacts received each week. Each BSE consultant accepts contacts from a group of LEAs in order to ensure the timely response to inquiries and establish a regular contact between the BSE and LEA personnel and families from a particular district. These communications serve as an opportunity to provide TA, establish a collaborative relationship between the CSDE and its constituents and promote both compliance and best practices regarding special education services.

In 2014-15, through a competitive application process, the CSDE's Academic Office funded 1200 days of TA and instructional coaching in implementation of the CCS including, but not limited to, K-3 Reading supports. These services were provided through our regional partners, RESCs, to 67 districts statewide.

The Performance Office spends a great deal of manpower on the provision of TA to LEAs across the state. In addition to annual statewide Data Summit trainings for all district data managers associated with each data collection system in the state, the staff of the Performance Office also train district Special Education Directors annually on their data collection and reporting responsibilities. Technical assistance is offered throughout the year in the form of webinars for all data collections where data accuracy is emphasized. Targeted TA is provided as a part of the FM digital data wall requirement of LEAs. Analysts in the Performance Office work one-on-one with LEA directors to support their data analysis needs for this portion of the improvement

planning process. Ongoing TA is provided by the state data managers for each collection in the form of help desk services and online TA documents including user guides, functional specifications and data dictionaries.

Data

A description of the CSDE data infrastructure is outlined in detail in both the “Data Analysis” and the “Existing Initiatives – Performance Office” sections.

Accountability/Monitoring

The CSDE’s General Supervision System (GSS), coordinated by the BSE, is an integrated management system of CSDE compliance monitoring and program improvement activities. The purpose of the GSS is to ensure that LEAs are compliant in their implementation of the IDEA and Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) Sections 10-76a to 10-76h, inclusive, and to improve the educational results and functional outcomes for all children with disabilities.

The CSDE’s GSS has been designed to support federal and state special education requirements with the intent of enabling LEA compliance, correcting any deficiencies identified through LEA monitoring, and improving organizational practices of LEAs. Further the GSS provides an infrastructure for examining the extent to which compliance monitoring and program improvement activities elicit critical patterns and trends for use in understanding the needs of individual LEAs and the state as a whole. Some activities under the GSS fall into one of two prongs – compliance monitoring activities and program improvement activities, while others appear in both. Under each prong, there are several CSDE activities that work together to ensure the overall purpose of the GSS and the CSDE’s responsibility under 34 C.F.R Section 300.149 are met.

The BSE has tailored its policies, procedures and practices to address the identification and timely correction of noncompliance to align with the federal guidance and reflect state priorities. These policies and procedures apply across all compliance monitoring activities. While the compliance monitoring activities may appear seemingly unrelated, as a result of applying the same policies, procedures and practices to each monitoring area, there is a consistency across the activities.

The primary areas of focus of the CSDE’s compliance monitoring activities are: improving educational results and functional outcomes for all children with disabilities; and ensuring that LEAs meet the program requirements under the IDEA, Part B. The GSS emphasizes performance-based results across indicators in areas of compliance, data management, policies and practices, technical assistance, fiscal management, and improvement activities. While there is a BSE consultant dedicated to the coordination of the GSS and related activities, the compliance monitoring activities are managed individually by other BSE staff. These staff are the primary point of contact for their areas and are responsible for overseeing the day to day operations of his/her compliance monitoring activity. Consultants participate in on-site visits, conduct desk audits, review data submissions, and verify completion of corrective actions across multiple monitoring activities to support their colleagues and to keep informed regarding the procedures and practices being used within the system.

Procedures for each of the compliance monitoring activities are designed and implemented to ensure that LEAs meet the requirements under the IDEA, Part B. These procedures include the use of a variety of activities, such as on-site visits, district self-assessments, annual performance reporting, desk audits, complaint investigations and program review evaluations, which lead to a determination around LEA compliance.

With regard to ESEA Flexibility Accountability and Monitoring, Connecticut uses a five category school classification system (C.G.S. Section 10-223e). The CSDE uses the most recent available data for all ESEA accountability indicators (including results from the SB assessment in 2014-15) to update its list of school classifications and to publish annual Profile & Performance Reports (PPR), which outline a school or district's progress on a wide variety of college and career ready metrics. Per state law, the school classifications will be labeled as Category 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. Category 4 will be newly identified Turnaround and Focus Schools. Category 5 will be previously identified Turnaround and Focus schools that have not exited.

The CSDE will continue to target interventions and supports in the previously identified 30 lowest performing districts (i.e., the Alliance Districts). The CSDE's Turnaround and Performance Teams partner with districts to ensure that schools in each of these accountability categories receive appropriate levels of support. The lower-performing schools receive more support from the state, their home districts, and RESCs and are required to engage in a process of diagnosis, planning, intervention, and monitoring. The higher-performing schools, however, are given the information they need to drive their own improvement.

The CSDE helps build district and school capacity through financial resources and TA through Alliance District programs by partnering with the districts as they plan for school and district level intervention, as well as the removal of barriers and duplication. The state's 30 lowest-performing districts receive substantial funding, conditional on district reform plans in key areas defined by the state. Each Alliance District plan must identify critical improvements in academic achievement, talent recruitment and retention, positive climate and culture, and improved operations. The State's Turnaround Team acts as a resource to districts as they implement and monitor interventions in low performing schools.

As with all major CSDE initiatives, stakeholder input is essential to the State's accountability and monitoring processes. Stakeholder involvement at the ESEA Flexibility level included a wide variety of parent, school and community group representatives at all levels of design and implementation planning. BSE stakeholders groups meet throughout the annual monitoring cycle to provide input on the review and revision of ongoing monitoring activities.

Finally, the CSDE Performance Office and BSE worked diligently to ensure alignment of the SIMR with the ESEA Flexibility calculations. Work moving forward will focus efforts toward coordinated reporting of the SIMR on the State's PPRs in an effort to highlight the SSIP and reading achievement of SWDs.

Existing Initiatives

Focused Monitoring (FM) System

The intent of the BSE's FM System is to monitor procedural compliance with the IDEA while providing support and TA to LEAs toward their effectiveness of efforts to educate SWDs. Connecticut's FM System has been in place for 11 years and has undergone targeted updates several times to meet the changing priorities of the state and the needs of districts to effectively educate SWD. The focused monitoring steering committee (FMSC) is comprised of diverse stakeholders representing various education interests such as IDEA Part C, General and Special Education Administrators, SAC, CPAC, ConnCASE, SERC, and multiple CSDE offices. The FMSC has been integral in advising the State on development of the below described practices and procedures. With the support of the FMSC, the FM System has been leveraged as the process driver used to implement and monitor the SSIP at the district level.

The BSE's FM System has three tiers:

Tier 1: Tier 1 consists of an annual IDEA compliance review and the FMSC analysis of data related to SWDs for approximately 60 Connecticut LEAs. Based on the review of these data, the FMSC identifies data of concern and recommends approximately 25 LEAs of the original 60 to participate in Tier 2 of the FM system. The remaining LEAs not identified for participation in Tier 2, are provided universal Tier 1 supports for use in district.

Tier 2: In Tier 2, approximately 25 of the original 60 LEAs participate in the development and submission of a digital data wall presentation based on their data of concern. Submissions are reviewed by CSDE and SERC consultants. Approximately 15 LEAs are identified to receive additional support and TA under Tier 3 of the FM system to address their data of concern. The remaining LEAs not identified for participation in Tier 3, are provided universal Tier 1 supports for use in district.

Tier 3: In Tier 3, identified LEAs participate in up to four in-district sessions designed to improve outcomes for SWDs. Activities include a further analysis of the district's data of concern and root causes, the development of a district focus for improvement, a comprehensive review of the district's infrastructure as related to the identified focus for improvement, the development of a Theory of Action Implementation Plan and planning progress-reporting conferences.

The BSE's established FM system is being leveraged to become a key component in the State's SSIP theory of action. During the data analysis activity in Tier 1 of the FM process, data related to the State's SIMR will be the primary factor in determining which districts are selected for SSIP Tier 2 level supports. Tier 2 and Tier 3 of the FM system have also been reworked to align with the targeted and intensive supports offered in the SSIP work with districts.

State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)

The SPDG is aimed at sustaining and expanding a coordinated, statewide system of professional development, coaching, and support to schools, PreK-12, to improve educational outcomes through a continuum of academic and behavior supports for all students. Its goal is to increase the number of schools in the state implementing scientifically research-based core literacy

instruction and school-wide positive behavioral supports driven by CCS and personal/social learning expectations through the provision of multi-tiered interventions and use of data driven decision-making. The grant strives to improve the academic achievement of all students with a specific focus on SWD, students of color, and ELL.

In addition to programming on Connecticut's SRBI Framework, comprehensive reading instruction, PBIS, and data driven decision-making, participants will receive support on determining educational benefit for students with disabilities, developing standards-based IEPs, and increasing family/community engagement. Participation in SPDG includes: seven days of differentiated, statewide professional development; six days of on-site, job-embedded technical assistance and coaching support tailored to meet the needs of each school; a stipend to defray cost for substitute coverage, data collection systems, and instructional materials; annual use of School-Wide Information Systems (SWIS); and regular facilitated self-assessment of implementation. To date, seventy-eight schools representing thirty-eight of Connecticut's 201 school districts have participated in the SPDG process.

Connecticut's SPDG also has an extensive stakeholder group that advises this work. This group is comprised of the following: the RESC Alliance, Connecticut Parent Information and Resource Center (CT PIRC), CPAC, CT Birth to Three System, the School Improvement Grant (SIG) Network, SERC, and the Center for Behavioral Education & Research (CBER).

A clear connection exists between Connecticut's SPDG and SSIP/SIMR, and the work already completed for the SPDG can be leveraged to support the new SSIP work. Some of the SPDG resources and materials, either developed specifically for the SPDG initiative or created separately but used in the process, can be used for district SIMR work. For example, SERC has developed an IEP Rubric that measures the quality of IEP development for SWD. The rubric is constructed on the premise that all students are entitled to the general education curriculum within the least restrictive environment (LRE), and therefore the design of an IEP is focused on student outcomes based in the general education curriculum. The rubric provides educators and families a means to assess the quality of an IEP by shifting the IEP from a mere list of legal or compliance tasks to an instructional tool, supporting a student in achieving the same general education standards as non-disabled peers. Also used in the SPDG process is an SRBI Self-Assessment Tool that focuses on Instruction, Assessment and Decision-Making Systems as well as Leadership; as well as a Literacy Evaluation Tool (LET), that is designed to provide feedback on the efficacy of literacy curriculum and instruction.

Turnaround Office

The Alliance District Program is a unique and targeted investment in Connecticut's thirty lowest-performing districts. Connecticut General Statute (C.G.S.) Section 10-262u established a process for identifying Alliance Districts and allocating increased Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding to support district strategies to dramatically increase student outcomes and close achievement gaps by pursuing bold and innovative reforms. Pursuant to C.G.S. § 262u, each Alliance District's receipt of its designated ECS funding is conditioned upon district submission and the Commissioner of Education's approval of a plan, district progress and performance relative to the plan, and subsequent annual amendments, in the context of the district's overall strategy to improve academic achievement. The CSDE reviews district plans on an annual basis

and approves plans aligned to the goals of the program. Annual plan approval is predicated upon district implementation and performance during the prior year. Each Alliance District is assigned a Turnaround Office Consultant who conducts quarterly monitoring meetings and provide technical assistance on the development, implementation, and monitoring of the district plan. In preparation for quarterly monitoring meetings, districts complete a dashboard and submit data relative to reading and math achievement, student and faulty attendance, and discipline. They also provide updates on the implementation of their Alliance District Plan.

The CSDE Turnaround Office has developed a framework for school and district transformation efforts. This framework identifies four overarching and research-based leverage points for school and district improvement: Academics, Talent, Culture and Climate, and Operations. Districts receive professional development in these areas through quarterly meetings. Alliance Districts are required to address each of these areas in their plan by developing a core set of strategies. Preschool through third grade literacy is one of the academic related reform priorities that Alliance Districts may identify in their plan.

Priority School Districts are school districts identified as having the greatest academic need in the state. Currently 15 of the 30 Alliance Districts are also Priority Districts. This program was initiated by the State Board of Education in 1983, to improve the quality of education available and to focus on funding a specific set of initiatives. One of these initiatives is early reading intervention. Priority School Districts are required by statute to spend at least 20 percent of their funds on promoting early literacy. Priority School Districts are also required by statute to submit K-3 reading universal screening assessment data for all students to identify those that are “substantially deficient” in reading. This screening occurs multiple times per year. While these data might be useful in future analyses, currently the reporting limitations make the data unusable at a district-level for inclusion in the Tier 2 targeted supports root cause analysis work.

Under the proposed SSIP implementation framework, Alliance Districts selected for inclusion in SSIP Tier 2 Targeted Supports will be required to conduct a root cause analysis and create a digital data wall outlining the district’s conclusions and strategies for improved literacy outcomes for students with disabilities in grade 3. The CSDE team evaluating the submitted data wall will include consultants from the BSE, the Academic Office, as well as Turnaround Office. Regardless of whether any Alliance District is selected for SSIP Tier 3 intensive supports, all Alliance districts will be required to revise their approved Alliance District Plan to specifically include data and improvement activities around a reform priority focused on Kindergarten through grade 3 literacy for students with disabilities. Any further intensive supports provided to Tier 3 Alliance Districts will be managed through the Turnaround Office with support from the BSE.

In 2016, districts will be required to include a specific, targeted goal to address K-3 Reading in their Alliance District Program application. While many are actively engaged in early literacy improvements, a focus on students with disabilities is not always explicit. This addition to the application process will further the improvement efforts in every Alliance District.

Academic Office

Connecticut Core Standards (CCS)

The CCS, adopted by the State Board of Education in 2010, provide teachers, students and families with clear expectations of what a student should know and be able to do at each grade level. The standards focus on ELA & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects and Mathematics. School districts develop local curricula based on these college and career standards. Taken together, standards, high quality curriculum, and instruction prepare students, including SWDs, to meet the demands of 21st Century study, work and life.

In ELA/literacy, students are exposed to a balance of literary and informational texts across all subject areas, including social studies, science and the technical subjects. With attention to reading closely and carefully, students are encouraged to use text evidence to support critical thinking, conclusions drawn, and analyses made within and across texts. Students are also expected to develop facility with academic language, and produce clear and coherent writing across multiple modes for a variety of purposes and audiences. Additionally, focused instruction will help ensure that students gain adequate mastery of speaking and listening skills, so that as students progress through elementary, middle and high school, they will be ready for the demands of college and career.

The CCS are the foundation for curricula development in local school districts, including literacy instruction in the early grades, which are included explicitly in the CCS for ELA. Known as “foundational reading skills” within the standards, there can be no doubt that teachers must address all components of early reading including phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary. These standards and the district-level curriculum are important keys to the individualized root cause analysis required of SSIP Tier 2 and 3 districts and will act as drivers for the development of their early literacy improvement plans for SWD.

Connecticut’s K-3 Literacy Initiative (CK3LI)

The priority goals of CK3LI are:

1. Implement leadership routines and systems necessary to institute evidence-based literacy practices within a tiered instructional model and build capacity to ensure sustainability of the school-wide literacy model.
2. Collaborate with schools to implement research-based programs within a multi-tiered system of support framework.
3. Create a consistent knowledge base and common language among teachers that is based on the overview of reading, current reading research and evidence-based practices in reading and writing instruction.
4. Collaborate with the school leaders to establish a framework and process for using scientifically-based dynamic assessments to make instructional decisions at the district, school, grade, classroom and individual student levels.
5. Develop and implement a school-home/family model for student support.

On July 9, 2014, the Connecticut State Board of Education approved a menu of research-based K-3 reading assessments. The menu of research-based reading assessments must be used by districts for the purpose of Universal Screening for Reading of the entire K-3 student population. Many of the assessments found on the menu (curriculum based measures and computer adaptive

measures) are already used widely in Grades K-3 across Connecticut. These measures have been evaluated for technical adequacy through the National Center on Response to Intervention.

From a PD perspective, the CK3LI has developed the following training modules:

- Phonological Awareness: The Key to How Language Works
- Enhancing Oral Language: A Pathway to Deep Literacy
- Explicit Small Group Reading Instruction
- Comprehension: The Journey to Strategic Thinking
- Enhancing Vocabulary to Unlock the Treasures of Text
- Explicit and Differentiated Code Instruction
- Fluency: The Essential Link to Building Comprehension
- Independent Literacy Practice: The Key to Mastery
- The Principal's Role in the Instructional Process of Literacy

While currently the CK3LI is only fully implemented in under 20 schools across the state, the potential exists to scale up this initiative progressively each year through the inclusion of SSIP Tier 2 and 3 districts. The existing training modules could also be leveraged easily as they directly relate to the district, school and classroom level SIMR work.

Scientific research-based interventions (SRBI)

Connecticut's SRBI, the state's RTI framework, is a systemic approach with successive tiers that involve three increasingly intensive levels of intervention. All three tiers are part of a comprehensive educational system involving scientific, research-based core general education practices and interventions, with supports from a wide range of support services personnel. In particular, the tiers should not be viewed as categorical placements or as "gates" to special education. Multiple resources are readily available on the state's website to assist districts, including three topic briefs, training materials, data team guidance documents and parent informational materials. These resources will be used as needed to support district development of strong SRBI frameworks to further support appropriate tiered literacy instruction.

On May 21, 2015, the CSDE is partnering with SERC to present the spring 2015 Symposium II which has the theme of Using Data for Development, Decision Making, and Effective Instruction. The intended outcomes for participants are:

- Generate and learn critical factors to consider when planning and making ongoing adjustments to school articulated approach to teaching to ensure achievement;
- Generate and learn promising instructional practices targeting particular instructional focus areas and student populations and supporting research basis; and
- Generate and learn collaborative approaches and practices for effectively including families in school-based decision making to improve student achievement.

Performance Office

The Performance Office is responsible for the timely and accurate collection of all federal and state mandated data necessary to support informed decision-making and action by schools, districts, the CSDE and other stakeholders. The Office develops performance metrics, establishes targets and published analyses and reports to enable provision of supports and interventions tied to state initiatives supported by the work of other CSDE offices.

Connecticut's data systems are coordinated under our state's Agency Data Governance Body which has both formal and informal committees that control decision making regarding data security, access, use and collection. Additionally, the CSDE Data Governance body sits under an inter-agency data governance umbrella that supports interoperability of our state systems.

Connecticut has an SLDS that is unique-identifier driven from preschool through higher education. The SLDS helps turn data into information regarding college and career readiness and early warning indicators. The CSDE is moving toward a unified vision of comprehensive, actionable, longitudinal data accessible by both internal and external constituents, including parents and community members. It is this vision that allowed for the extensive analysis provided under the "Data Analysis" section of the SSIP; specifically the high level of sophistication of our data systems and the longitudinal linkages embedded into the system's design.

More detail about the work of Connecticut's Performance office to ensure valid and reliable data collection can be seen within the "Data Analysis" section.

Talent Office

Connecticut recognizes that teacher and principal administrator evaluation and support systems are a critical part of its comprehensive plan to build an environment that ensures equal equity opportunity and excellence in education for all Connecticut students, including SWDs. Since early 2012, the CSDE has engaged the leadership and expertise of a legislatively- enacted council of educators, policymakers, and advocates, the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC), in the undertaking of a major reform effort to consult with the CSDE in the development of new guidelines for the evaluation of teachers and administrators across the state.

In February 2012, PEAC agreed on the following design for the state model for administrator evaluation and support system:

- Multiple student learning measures/indicators: 45 percent, half of which are based on the state test and the other half to be locally determined, with parameters set by the state;
- Observations of principal performance and practice: 40 percent, based on the six performance expectations in the Connecticut Leadership Standards; it includes a focus on all practices involving teacher quality and teacher evaluation;
- Staff, community, and/or student feedback including surveys: 10 percent, based on all or some of the six performance expectations in the Connecticut Leadership Standards; and
- Teacher performance growth and effectiveness outcomes: five percent based on teacher effectiveness measures such as a) increasing the percentage of teachers making adequate growth in student achievement; or b) differing strategies for teachers at differing levels of effectiveness.

The state's teacher and principal administrator evaluation and support systems will play a critical role in developing the capacity of district staff to provide comprehensive literacy supports to SWD. The CSDE's overarching goal is to ensure Connecticut's new evaluation and support system serves as an effective tool for educators and administrators to measure their performance, identify where members need support, and provide appropriate professional development strategies. Furthermore, on-going analysis of the performance of special educators on the

Foundations of Reading Test will assist the state in making recommendations to the state's teacher training programs, and in developing appropriate PD for in-service teachers to ensure our SWDs are receiving literacy instruction from qualified personnel.

The Office of Early Childhood

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) was established in 2013 to coordinate and improve the various early childhood programs and components in the state to create a cohesive high-quality early childhood system. The OEC oversees a coordinated system of early childhood care, education and support. The OEC:

- Provides funding, standards, regulations, training and oversight to ensure that early care and education programs for young children
 - are safe, healthy and nurturing;
 - effectively support children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development; and,
 - are accessible to all children, particularly those facing barriers, risks or challenges to their healthy development and success.
- Provides home visiting services, funding and training to support families raising young children to ensure the children's health, well-being and positive growth and development and to prevent child abuse or neglect.

Connecticut's Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS) were created through the work of the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet and its Early Learning Standards Workgroup. In addition, over 100 state and national experts participated in some way during the development process, helping to ensure a strong and comprehensive set of Early Learning Standards for Connecticut.

The CT ELDS were published in the spring of 2014 and include the areas of: cognition, social and emotional development, physical development and health, language and literacy, creative arts, mathematics, science and social studies. The learning progressions within the CT ELDS promote:

- Equity for all children, through the setting of high, but appropriate, expectations;
- High-quality early learning experiences, by providing clear goals and trajectories of learning;
- Provision of individual support, based on each child's growth and development;
- Families' understanding of what their children are learning and how they can support them;
- Teachers' understanding of age-appropriate content and approaches to children's learning; and,
- Communication across sectors, based upon these common goals for children.

Success on the state's literacy SIMR will depend highly on SWDs having a strong literacy foundation built during the early development years of birth through age five. Therefore, the BSE will be partnering with the OEC and using the CT ELDS to ensure preschool educators are well trained in implementing appropriate literacy instruction, assessing students' literacy skills, and providing individualized supports for young children and families. The OEC will be a valuable partner as the CSDE moves into Phase 2 of the SSIP.

Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center

The Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), serving as Connecticut's federally designated Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center is an important partner of the CSDE and the BSE in their activities to support SWD and their families. For more than 15 years the CSDE has had a Personal Services Agreement (PSA) with CPAC that illustrates this shared work and provides CPAC with funding to help support its efforts.

The purpose of the current PSA is to provide financial support to the CPAC to further the CSDE's continued development and expansion of a comprehensive system of supports and training for parents and educators. It is expected that strong and effective collaboration between families and schools will serve to improve services and outcomes for SWD ages 3 through 21.

Under the provisions of the current agreement, CPAC will provide parent participants with ongoing training opportunities to update their knowledge of topics including: policies, practices and procedures related to the implementation of the IDEA, the SPP/APR/SSIP, the ESEA and the CCS. Specific to the SSIP and the SIMR, CPAC will: 1) support the CSDE in district level monitoring activities; 2) participate in the stakeholder group working with the CSDE around implementation of the SSIP and efforts to support the SIMR; 3.) actively participate in site visits to school districts in support of the development of improvement plans; 4.) share relevant information with parents and families; and conduct follow-up parent activities (such as parent training and parent group technical assistance), as needed.

State Education Resource Center (SERC)

The SERC, formerly known as the Special Education Resource Center, was established by the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) in 1969 as a centralized resource for families and educators regarding special education. In 2005, the CGA amended the statute to rename it the State Education Resource Center, signifying a meaningful integration of special education and general education into a single system.

The SERC is a quasi-public agency primarily funded by the CSDE. The SERC services a broad range of constituents, including state level policy makers, educators, families, and community members through a variety of venues and mediums, including the library, web and in-person supports. The SERC is responsible for three major functions: provision of resources, a centralized library, and professional learning; and provides PD and information dissemination on the latest research and best practices to educators, service providers, and families throughout the state, as well as job-embedded technical assistance and training within schools, programs, and districts in collaboration with the CSDE.

The SERC Library offers a comprehensive collection of resources for educators and parents, including tests, online journals, a DVD and video collection, CD-ROM programs, young people's disability awareness literature, and reference and research materials. The SERC has produced several resources on assistive technology (AT) for educators and families serving children with a range of needs. The SERC had supported the CSDE and the CT Birth to Three Program in completing the Connecticut Assistive Technology Guidelines. The SERC coordinates many conferences on behalf of the CSDE and Birth to Three, such as the "Together

We Will” conference which provides valuable training, resources, and networking for Birth to Three and Early Childhood service providers and educators.

The SERC has been assisting schools in their efforts to implement a continuum of academic and behavioral supports for all students using SRBI and PBIS. SERC’s Analyzing Literacy Data (ALD) project, which SERC first developed as part of a previous SPDG in 2007, is built around establishing achievable, but ambitious literacy goals for students at all levels. It is intended to improve outcomes for the entire group of students as well as students with IEPs, FRL students, ELLs and students of color.

As SERC has already established a wide array of resources and supports for districts in areas related to the state’s SSIP/SIMR (e.g., SRBI, AT, ALD project), the CSDE will be well positioned to capitalize on aligning existing TA and PD with the refocused vision of FM and the SSIP tiered supports. The SERC will be a primary partner as the state looks to develop and expand the provision of TA related to literacy for SWDs.

Regional Educational Service Centers (RESC)

The RESCs were created more than 40 years ago by legislative mandate to help districts communicate and collaborate. Some years later, a formal Alliance of Connecticut's six RESCs was established. RESCs are public education agencies whose main purpose is to "furnish programs and services" to Connecticut's public school districts. RESCs’ cost efficient, cooperative efforts have saved money for Connecticut school districts and have enabled schools to expand services beyond what they could have accomplished alone. The RESC Alliance works with the Departments of Children & Families, Education, Mental Health & Addiction Services, Developmental Services, Public Health, Social Services and the Board of Education & Services for the Blind (BESB) on statewide issues and projects. Each of the six state RESCs impacts public education in numerous ways including: operating public magnet schools, operating public special education segregated programs, and providing PD and instructional support services for member districts in its region.

Nearly five percent of Connecticut’s SWD are educated within RESC schools and programs. Additionally, the PD consultants at each of the RESCs have expertise in curriculum development, literacy instruction, SRBI, differentiated instruction, universal design for learning (UDL), and other related areas. Because of these two reasons, the RESCs will be another key partner as the CSDE moves into Phase 2 of the SSIP.

State Advisory Council (SAC)

The SAC is Connecticut’s “State Advisory Panel” per the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the C.G.S. In accordance with the federal special education regulations (see 34 C.F.R. § 300.167), the purpose of the SAC is to provide “policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the State.” The SAC membership requirements are described in 34 C.F.R. § 300.168 and in the C.G.S. Section 10-76i. A majority of the members of the SAC must be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities (ages birth through 26). Members are appointed by the Governor of the State of Connecticut, or any other official authorized under State law to make such appointments. The SAC members must be individuals involved in, or concerned with the education of children with

disabilities; and representative of the ethnic and racial diversity of, and the types of disabilities found in, the state population. The duties of the SAC are described in 34 C.F.R. § 300.169 and in the C.G.S. Section 10-76i. The federal duties are the following actions:

- advise the SEA of unmet needs within the State in the education of children with disabilities;
- comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding the education of children with disabilities;
- advise the SEA in developing evaluations and reporting on data to the Secretary under section 618 of the Act;
- advise the SEA in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports under IDEA Part B; and
- advise the SEA in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities.

The SAC meets regularly throughout the year and council representatives have been assigned to the following State agency stakeholder groups: SSIP, Academic Achievement Indicator, Disproportionality Indicators, Evaluation Timeline Indicator, Graduation/Dropout Indicators, Parent Involvement Indicator, Preschool Indicators, Education Placement Indicator, Suspension and Expulsion Indicator, Transition/Post-School Outcomes Indicators, Transition Task Force, BESB, Connecticut Equity Plan Stakeholder Group, State Board of Education Special Education Ad Hoc Committee and Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD). The SAC Ad Hoc Committees include: SRBI, School Climate, Approved Private Special Education Programs (APSEP), and Education Evaluation and Support.

As outlined in federal regulation, the SAC's duties include advising the state on the unmet needs of SWDs statewide. The SAC's representation already exists throughout the BSE's SPP/APR, which includes the SSIP/SIMR. Their feedback on our progress related to the SIMR will be critical to continuous improvement in the area of literacy for SWD.

Higher Education

There are SSIP/SIMR related initiatives being incorporated into Connecticut institutes of higher education teacher preparation programs. Beginning in July 2015, any program of teacher preparation leading to professional certification is required to include, as part of the curriculum, instruction in literacy skills and processes that reflects current research and best practices in the field of literacy training, and include the detection and recognition of, and evidence-based interventions for, students with dyslexia (Public Act 14-39).

While the benefits of the new legislation may not be realized immediately, including coursework on the detection and recognition of, and evidence-based interventions for, students with dyslexia in the state's teacher preparation programs will help ensure that Connecticut students are given appropriate reading interventions and, if appropriate, referred for special education evaluation in a timely manner.

In July 2013, the Talent Office applied for and was awarded a grant from the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform (CEEDAR) Center, funded by the OSEP. The purpose of the grant was to support intensive technical assistance in:

- reforming teacher and leadership preparation programs to embed evidence-based practices;
- revising licensure standards to align with reforms in teacher and leadership preparation;
- refining personnel evaluation systems in teacher and leadership preparation programs; and
- realigning policy structures and professional learning systems.

The CEEDAR initiative aligns and integrates seamlessly with all major Talent Office and Academic Office goals and strategies including:

- PEAC
- Professional Learning System Reform
- Transforming Connecticut’s educator preparation systems: Educator Preparation Advisory Council (EPAC)
- Network for Transforming Educator Preparation (NTEP) Grant from the Council of Chief School Officers (CCSSO)
- CCS and SB Assessment Implementation
- Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program (Connecticut’s induction program for beginning teachers); and
- Connecticut’s SRBI Framework

A CEEDAR state leadership team, a subcommittee of EPAC to work on preparation curriculum reform, was convened in February 2014. It includes faculty teams from Central Connecticut State University, University of Saint Joseph and Southern Connecticut State University, as well as school district representatives, advocacy groups and professional organizations.

With the support of the national CEEDAR Center, the CSDE and faculty teams are receiving intensive technical assistance to reform existing curricula to ensure the integration of evidence-based practices into content instruction and field placements for candidates in teacher preparation programs. The focus is to improve the delivery of supports for SWD, ELLs and struggling learners in K-12 schools throughout the state. The CEEDAR Center and CSDE have sponsored statewide institutes with national experts in the field of evidence-based practices in literacy and writing. Currently the faculty teams are analyzing their initial teacher preparation program curricula and syllabi against research-based innovation configurations to determine gaps, redundancies or priorities to consider in the redesign of program curricula. The revised curricula will be submitted for a peer review by national experts and faculty teams will be provided feedback. The institutions will then implement the revised curricula focused on evidence-based practices in literacy and writing, as well as measure impact of the training on teacher candidates’ skills in evidence-based practices ability to lead K-12 students to demonstrate competency to improve core and specialized instruction in the college- and career-ready standards in reading, writing and comprehension skills in argumentation. Based on the work of the CEEDAR partner institutions, the CSDE and members of the faculty teams will coordinate a plan to scale up to all other educator preparation institutions in 2017.

Stakeholder Input

In September 2013, at its annual “Back to School Meeting” with LEAs from throughout the state, the BSE made available a fact sheet outlining the process for the development of the

SSIP. That document was also posted on the SERC Web site with other meeting materials. In April 2014, a letter was sent to the ConnCASE requesting members representing each of the state's regions to participate in a statewide stakeholder group designed to assist the CSDE with disseminating information and acquiring input on the SSIP from their region's constituents. It was further requested that those participants be chosen from LEAs that represent the state's economic and racial diversity. A similar request was forwarded to the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS). Additional participants were sought from the following groups/organizations: SERC, CPAC, SAC, the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, and the African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities. The stakeholder group was further comprised of a subset of representatives from offices within the BSE, the Performance Office, as well as the Academic and Turnaround Offices. Multiple informational meetings were conducted during the summer of 2014 to familiarize stakeholders with the SSIP process.

At its September 2014 "Back to School Meeting", the BSE provided an update on the state's progress with the SSIP development process. Associated materials were posted on the SERC Web site. That same month, a similar presentation was made to the SAC. Since the fall of 2014, monthly stakeholder meetings have taken place, with conference call access made available to participants unable to travel to the meeting site. Updates on the process of SSIP development have been provided at monthly meetings of the BSE, providing BSE staff the opportunity to provide input. In an effort to align the SSIP with Connecticut's ESEA Flexibility renewal request and gain input on the SSIP from CSDE personnel throughout the agency, the BSE's SSIP Program Manager has participated in weekly meetings with the CSDE's Leadership Team.

Multiple stakeholder meetings, as well as meetings among internal participants were devoted to infrastructure analysis aimed at determining system capacity to support improvement and aimed at identifying means to build capacity to implement, scale up and sustain evidence-based practices to improve results. Specifically, SERC facilitated an SSIP meeting during which external stakeholders participated in a gallery walk designed to elicit member input regarding: best practices in literacy instruction; effective interventions targeted at each of the three tier levels of the implementation framework; and potential partners for Phase 2 of the SSIP.

A subset of external stakeholders worked with representatives from across all CSDE Offices and OSEP/ESEA staff in a process utilizing NERRC's *In-Depth Infrastructure Analysis Tool*, designed to assist the State in (1) analyzing strengths and challenges in infrastructure alignment, resources, organizational capacity and readiness; and (2) connecting the State's infrastructure to the SSIP. This process allowed the CSDE to complete a comprehensive assessment of its current infrastructure in relation to the identification of an appropriate SIMR.

State Identified Measurable Result (SIMR)

Increase the reading performance of all 3rd grade students with disabilities statewide, as measured by Connecticut's Approved ESEA Flexibility Performance Index.

Connecticut's SIMR is aligned to SPP/APR Indicator 3: Participation and Performance of Children with IEPs on Statewide Assessments. While the SIMR is an academic achievement indicator, and therefore aligned with Indicator 3, it is not completely congruent with the measurement and targets of Indicator 3. The SIMR is aligned with Connecticut's Approved ESEA Flexibility and only represents the subgroup of 3rd grade students with disabilities participating on the state's Reading Assessment (both standard and alternate).

Note: Connecticut has received permission to express its SIMR in a numeric form other than a percentage, to align with the state's approved ESEA Flexibility Performance Index. Connecticut has worked diligently to incorporate the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) and SIMR into existing department initiatives, all of which center around our ESEA Flexibility work. It is important to our state to use the same measures of student academic achievement across all monitoring and improvement initiatives, including our work with students with disabilities.

Reading Performance Index Baseline: FFY13 = 33.7

Targets: FFY14 = 33.7; FFY15 = 34.0; FFY16 = 34.3; FFY17 = 34.7; FFY18 = 35.0

The methodology for calculating the Reading Performance Index (RPI) starts with taking the scores on the statewide reading assessments for 3rd grade SWDs and converting that score into an appropriate index point value that ranged from 0 to 100. A reading performance index is calculated by averaging the index points earned by all SWD. The RPI baseline was calculated using the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) student scores from 2012-13, the most current statewide data available. Moving forward, the RPI will be calculated using data from the SB and Connecticut Alternate Assessments (CTAA). Any changes to the calculation that are approved in Connecticut's ESEA Flexibility Renewal application will be incorporated into the SIMR data used moving forward under the SSIP. Targets were established with the input of the SSIP stakeholders. These targets are reflective of the amount of growth that could be achieved in the RPI based on the 3-year cohort cycle of working with districts (i.e., one-third of the approximately 4500 SWD in 3rd grade statewide). These targets would need to be reset using the 2014-15 SB and CTAA data in the winter of 2015.

Selection of Coherent Improvement Strategies

Connecticut utilized the input and expertise of a variety of individuals, offices, and agencies, both within and outside of CSDE, in proposing improvement strategies aimed at measurable improvement in its SIMR (see Infrastructure Section detailing the participation of external and internal stakeholder members).

Since the process for the development of Connecticut's SSIP and the process for submission of the state's ESEA flexibility renewal request occurred simultaneously, components of each process were utilized to inform the other and, to the degree possible, align priorities, initiatives and activities. That collaborative work involving CSDE leadership (including: the Office of Student Supports and Organizational Effectiveness -which includes the BSE; Academic Office, Performance Office, Talent Office, and Turnaround Office) was accomplished through weekly meetings. The BSE's SSIP Project Manager participated in the ESEA Flexibility Renewal application planning sessions for the purpose of aligning the two initiatives. Additionally, through the process of monthly updates and discussions, consultants from both the BSE and the Performance Office have participated in the development of the SSIP.

Connecticut's data analysis revealed variability across the state's 170 school districts with regard to the reading achievement of third grade students with disabilities, including differences related to district SES, placement in LRE, attendance rates, and removal from class for disciplinary sanctions. As detailed in the "Data Analysis" section, it was the consensus of stakeholders that the state's framework for intervention allows for the ability to differentiate improvement strategies at the district level according to uniquely identified district needs. From such discussion two themes emerged:

- The need for a tiered system of supports/interventions; and
- The need for the development of individualized district improvement plans.

The notion of proposing a tiered framework of interventions and supports was generated through discussion regarding Connecticut's focus on increasing the intellectually disabled population's participation and progress in general education settings during the implementation of the *P.J. et al. v. State of Connecticut, Board of Education, et al. Settlement Agreement*. That statewide process, including its differentiated supports, resulted in significant positive outcomes supporting the goals of the *Settlement Agreement*. Having had the experience of implementing a tiered approach to supporting educators in methods and practices to determine the LRE for SWD, it was determined that the "lessons learned" though the *Settlement Agreement* process could be applied to Connecticut's SSIP.

Through its provision of TA as part of the *Settlement Agreement*, SERC "scaled up" efforts to affect systemic change through this district-level approach customized to the needs and infrastructure of individual school systems. TA was provided to district level teams, teams that were required to include general and special education leaders, as well as other key decision makers and stakeholders. This team was to be empowered to identify and implement strategies, particularly professional development, that would impact more inclusive practice for students with ID. It was also critical for TA providers to support district level teams in connecting these

strategies to the district's larger improvement/reform efforts. The *Settlement Agreement* concepts of "scaling up" interventions and tailoring improvement plans to district needs will be replicated in Connecticut's SSIP framework.

All the CSDE's SIMR work with stakeholders resulted in a district-level tiered intervention framework built to capitalize on existing state-level initiatives including the activities of the state's Turnaround Office and BSE FM System.

Tier 1 of the intervention model will include universal resources and supports relative to early literacy that will be made available to all of the state's districts throughout the three-year cycle, with a plan to add/expand resources each year. Among those resources:

- best practice documents;
- professional learning modules;
- links to state/national resources, and
- the BSE's FM Protocol for use as an optional district self-study for the purpose of conducting data, infrastructure and root cause analyses in order to develop a district-specific theory of action and improvement plan.

Tier 2 of the intervention framework will include approximately 25 districts selected from Tier 1, using the districts most current SIMR data. Tier 2 (targeted) districts will receive additional supports provided by the CSDE, be required to conduct a root cause analysis of third grade reading achievement, complete an analysis of the efficacy of existing district-level initiatives, and develop a digital data wall of their findings. Submissions are reviewed by BSE, Performance Office, Turnaround Office, Academic Office and SERC consultants, according to an established set of criteria. Following such review, Tier 2 districts will be provided the opportunity to participate in a Data Wall Showcase and associated professional learning activities. Further, Tier 2 districts not identified for Tier 3 intervention may be required to complete a Theory of Action subject to monitoring by the BSE.

Tier 3 of the intervention framework will include approximately 15 districts selected from Tier 2, based upon review of the digital data wall. Districts participating in this level of intervention are required to assemble a diverse team of professionals (i.e., administration, special education, general education, data and subject area expertise) for the purpose conducting the analyses below and developing an implementation plan. Tier 3 districts will benefit from intensive TA and professional learning activities provided by the CSDE and Connecticut's PD centers through one of two avenues:

- Tier 3 districts that are one of Connecticut's Alliance districts (30 lowest performing districts in the state), will receive intensive interventions/supports as part of the existing initiatives of the Turnaround Office in partnership with the BSE. At a minimum, these districts will be required to include a specific section in their Alliance District Improvement Plan regarding the SIMR and associated improvement activities targeting early reading achievement of SWDs.
- All other districts selected for inclusion in Tier 3 will receive intensive interventions/supports through the BSE's existing FM process. These districts will be required to expand upon the Tier 2 data analysis; complete infrastructure and root cause analyses; and develop a theory of action and corresponding improvement plan.

Each district will be developing a plan that is based on its own data, infrastructure and root cause analysis. The intervention plan for each district will be focused on the identified needs of that district. The components related to literacy that must be addressed, through both the analysis and the development of an improvement plan, are:

- the effective use of a universal screening measure, selected from the CSDE’s menu or research-based universal screening reading assessments;
- an established/functional process for the analysis of data for the purpose of instructional planning;
- a review of the district’s multi-tiered system of support process (SRBI) to include: the identification of current instruction and intervention techniques being used in the district; ensuring that core instruction is implemented with fidelity (collaboratively between general and special education); and a determination of the need to make changes in the process through use of the CSDE’s SRBI self-assessment;
- the writing of IEP goals and objectives in alignment with CCS,
- the development of student-specific intervention plans that match each student’s profile (i.e, learning/language/literacy strengths and weaknesses) and include the monitoring of each student’s progress frequently in order to individualize and adjust instruction; and
- a plan for parent engagement in supporting student reading.

Connecticut’s statewide root cause analysis led the stakeholder advisory team to recommend using a tiered intervention framework. This district-specific design requires that improvement strategies be tailored to the contributing factors identified through each district’s infrastructure and root cause analyses. The resulting improvement plan will address the district-level contributing factors (including both process and compliance areas) determined as barriers to reading proficiency. Due to the variety of potential improvement strategies that may be suitable for each district, it would be inappropriate to limit districts to a finite set of strategies outlined within this plan. However, to illustrate what the State would expect in a district plan, the following examples are provided.

Identified Contributing Factor Example #1: Suspension/Expulsion

If a district found a correlation between low reading achievement and the use of suspension/expulsion as the district’s primary classroom management technique, the following activities may be appropriate interventions for inclusion in its improvement plan:

- Completion of the Indicator 4 (Discipline) Self-Assessment, designed to determine if the district is in compliance with the regulatory provisions of IDEA and is demonstrating best practices (i.e., acknowledging and incorporating students’ cultural, social and developmental diversity to enrich learning opportunities, creating a school climate that is responsive to and respectful of the learning needs of students with diverse backgrounds, interests and performance levels, and providing explicit instruction about social skills to develop students’ social competence) and responsible and ethical behavior by using a continuum of proactive strategies that may be individualized to student needs;
- Provision of professional learning in diffusion techniques, de-escalation, behavior management, reducing challenging behavior, improving communication and repairing relationships;
- Teaching students pro-social skills and self-regulation strategies;

- Utilization of the School-wide PBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory to provide a valid, reliable and efficient measure of the extent to which school personnel are applying the core features of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports.

Identified Contributing Factor Example #2: Time With Non-disabled Peers

If a district found a correlation between low reading achievement and the disproportionate use of resource room, self-contained classrooms and/or out-of-district placements, the following activities may be appropriate interventions for inclusion in its improvement plan:

- Investigation of district adherence to the accurate completion of the LRE (Least Restrictive Environment) Checklist;
- Utilization of the LRE Self-Assessment;
- Utilization of the IEP rubric for low performing segregated students;
- Determination of district need and associated professional learning regarding:
 - Differentiated Instruction;
 - Co-teaching; and
 - the Educational Benefit Process.

Although Connecticut’s SIMR will be measured by Connecticut’s Approved ESEA Flexibility RPI, each district will be required to include multiple measures for the purpose of monitoring progress on each component (reading achievement and contributing factors) of its comprehensive improvement plan.

While specific improvement strategies are required at the district-level under the proposed tiered intervention framework, the following state-level activities are necessary to improve the State’s infrastructure and strengthen the CSDE’s ability to support LEA implementation of evidenced-based practices to improve results for SWDs.

- The work that has taken place toward the submission of the SSIP and the completion of the ESEA flexibility renewal request has required the collaboration of all CSDE Offices; however, regular/targeted time must be established for the continued planning and monitoring of the SSIP implementation. The Chief for the Bureau of Special Education will play a vital role in this process.
- The Alliance District application will be revised so that all participating districts are required to include a K-3 reading goal explicitly targeting SWDs.
- An intra-office team structure to provide SSIP Tier 3 supports in a collaborative and cohesive manner will need to be developed by the BSE and Turnaround Office.
- The Performance Office will include district level SIMR data in the annual PPR (district/school report cards) to highlight the importance of this work. (Any published data will follow state public reporting rules regarding subgroup “n” size.)
- Within the CSDE’s Web site, the BSE will create a page devoted to the SSIP where both information and resources will be posted.
- The RESCs and the OEC will be engaged in conversation/planning with the CSDE regarding their potential involvement in support of the SSIP.
- Connecticut’s Institutes of Higher Education must be more fully engaged as partners in the state’s SSIP efforts with regard to teacher preparation and the implementation of research-based interventions for the improvement of reading achievement.

- A variety of PD opportunities currently exist through the work of the CSDE and various PD providers. A plan will need to be developed to conduct a needs assessment, research currently available offerings and catalog them in an easily accessible platform. A review of the needs assessment will result in the development of additional PD offerings.
- In order for the BSE to effectively participate in efforts related to improving literacy outcomes, BSE staff members will need to engage in professional learning in the area of research-based literacy instruction and interventions for students with disabilities. The Academic Office and CSDEs external partners will be integral to the provision of such professional learning.
- Information and resources regarding a parent’s role in supporting reading, and a plan for their distribution, will be developed in collaboration with CPAC.

SSIP – THEORY OF ACTION

SIMR - Increase the reading performance of all 3rd grade students with disabilities statewide, as measured by Connecticut’s Approved ESEA Flexibility Performance Index

