

**Division of Elementary and Secondary Education – Office of Special Education  
Advisory Council for the Education of Children with Disabilities  
State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) and  
State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG), July 2021**

**State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)**

The FFY20 SPDG APR was submitted to the Office of Special Education Programs on May 7, 2021.

**Arkansas SPDG 2020–2021 Annual Performance Report, Executive Summary**

The Arkansas State Personnel Development Grant (AR SPDG) was designed to directly align with and intensely support the State Systemic Improvement Plan. The 2020-2021 school year represents the first year of this new effort. The SPDG will function as the “implementation team” for inclusive practices support in targeted districts. The SPDG will facilitate the design and implementation of a professional learning (PL) and technical assistance (TA) system to support the implementation of inclusive practices at the state, regional, district and school levels. Professional learning will be conducted through systematic and sequential training and ongoing coaching at the regional and district levels.

To support alignment and leverage resources within the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the SPDG is part of the Office of Special Education along with the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). The SPDG has also partnered with the DESE Division of Learning Services and Division of Educator Effectiveness and Evaluation. Throughout the past two years, inclusive practices, specifically high-leverage and other evidence-based practices, have been integral to school improvement efforts employed throughout the state; implementation efforts will be accelerated for the districts the AR SPDG is working with intensely.

**State-Level Implementation**

The State Implementation Team (SIT) consists of a DESE Deputy Commissioner, DESE Assistant Commissioners for Learning Services and Educator Effectiveness, the project’s Principal Investigator, the AR SPDG core management team, external partners, and DESE leadership across the divisions of Learning Services, Educator Effectiveness, and the Office of Coordinated Support Services.

- The State Implementation Team completed the SISEP State Capacity Assessment (SCA) in April 2021 with the score being used as baseline data.
- The assessment was administered by SISEP staff and facilitated by SPDG Director, Crystal Bethea and SSIP Coordinator, Dr. Jeff Adams.
- The overall score on the SCA was 22/50 (46%), with the following breakdown by domain:
  - Leadership 6/18 (33%)
  - Infrastructure and Resources 7/12 (58%)
  - Communication and Engagement 9/18 (50%)

During this first implementation year, the Core Management Team (CMT) was established, including internal SPDG staff (Director and Transformation Coordinator), DESE Educator Effectiveness representatives, American Institutes for Research (AIR), The University of Arkansas, Office of Innovation for Education (OIE), The Center for Exceptional Families (TCFEF), and an external evaluator from Insight to Impact Consulting (IIC). Every other week, the SPDG CMT hosted a virtual meeting focused on driving the work of the SPDG goals. During this meeting, the CMT reviewed feedback from the State Implementation Team regarding alignment, implementation, and barriers. The CMT also worked with WestEd to create a formal process in which SPDG can support

and facilitate regional, district, and site level improvement teams to focus on applying improvement science methodologies focused on changes, innovation, and learning that include the following:

- High Leverage Practices
- Evidence-based instructional practices for students with disabilities

The train-the-trainer model includes two service delivery models: (1) Model one builds understanding of how to integrate quick cycles of improvement and problem solving as well as create a formal data-based decision-making process. (2) Model two allows SPDG to utilize the Improvement Science Learning Sprints to support a problem of practice related to professional learning and student equity and access to quality core instruction. Based on the learning sprint and capacity assessment data, WestEd will support SPDG in developing a formal training process to support LEAs in creating a model of improvement with a site improvement plan to support necessary components of professional learning, coaching, and implementation of evidence-based, inclusive practices.

The University of Arkansas, The Office of Innovation for Education (OIE) convened a variety of stakeholders in online focus groups from March-May of 2021 to gather input for co-designing systems. The groups were arranged by classroom teachers, administrators, instructional facilitators/coaches, support services, and outside educators such as higher education and state agency employees. OIE used a co-designed approach to gain feedback on:

- professional learning opportunities that are authentic, valuable, and impactful,
- ongoing collaboration impacting the implementation and sustainability of professional learning, and
- impactful practices and supports embedded in a coaching system.

A total of 155 participants provided perspectives and feedback across 25 focus groups. OIE regularly reported to and worked with members of the SPDG Core Management team throughout the focus group process. OIE is in the process of synthesizing the information into a public report that will be available and provided to all stakeholders. The information gained will provide the SPDG CMT with relevant input that will be used to revise or develop competency-based micro-credentials as well as inform the coaching and technical assistance systems.

### **Regional and District-Level Implementation**

Partnerships with Regional Education Service Cooperatives (ESCs) are key to the implementation and sustainment of the SPDG project. The SPDG includes the CMT providing targeted, intensive support to participating ESCs as the transferred knowledge and skills are critical to the development and sustainment of Regional Implementation Teams (RITs). During the first implementation year, the SPDG established partnerships with two of Arkansas' fifteen ESCs: Guy Fenter Education Service Cooperative (GFESC) and Great Rivers Education Service Cooperative (GRESK). Central to the implementation and success of the project, the ESCs are provided organizational support by the SPDG CMT for the development of a RIT that (1) is supported by the State Implementation Team, and (2) will in turn, support District Implementation Teams. During the 2015-2020 SPDG grant, Great Rivers Education Service Cooperative partnered with SPDG to receive assistance in developing a Regional Implementation Team. The SPDG CMT will continue to support GRESK throughout the 2020-2025 grant to increase and strengthen capacity around professional learning, coaching, and technical assistance. The SPDG services and supports are slated to begin in the summer of 2021 for GFESC.

GRESK used the SISEP Regional Capacity Assessment (RCA) as a needs assessment to determine baseline data around readiness, teaming structures, and communication protocols for supporting the RTI.

- The GRESK Regional Implementation Team completed the SISEP Regional Capacity Assessment (SCA) in April 2021.

- The assessment was administered by SPDG Director and GRESC Teacher Center Coordinator.
- The overall score on the RCA was 29/56 (52%), with the following breakdown by domain:
  - Leadership 11/14 (78%)
  - Competency 8/18 (48%)
  - Organization 10/18 (53%)
  - Stage-based Functioning 0/6 (0%)

Based on regional and district data, the Fort Smith School District (FSPS Cohort 1) is the first SPDG targeted district. Currently, for year 1 of the partnership, the superintendent of FSPS has been charged with selecting five elementary (PK-6) schools along with selecting members for the District Implementation Team (DIT). The SPDG services and supports are slated to begin in the summer of 2021 with FSPS. During years 2-5, the SPDG will add on an additional eight Fort Smith schools for a total of thirteen schools supported across the project. Beginning in January 2022, utilizing an application process, the SPDG will establish partnerships with five new districts (Cohort 2) and five additional districts in year 3 (Cohort 3).

## **State Systemic Improvement Plan**

Continuing Phase III of the SSIP, the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has expanded the plan's implementation of two coherent strategies concentrated on improving DESE's infrastructure and increasing the SiMR. Arkansas's SiMR is focused on improving the literacy achievement of students with disabilities in grades 3-5. To better reflect the expansion of the SSIP, Arkansas's Theory of Action has been revised to better illustrate the connectivity with DESE's strategic initiatives. While the SiMR still remains focused on literacy results for SWD in grades 3-5, SSIP supports have expanded to reflect the need for coordinated literacy efforts throughout the system beyond grade 5. SIM™ aligns well with the science of reading focus of the Arkansas R.I.S.E. Initiative and with the High Leverage Practices for Inclusive Classrooms. The instructional processes built into SIM have complementary and related research foundations with effect sizes that demonstrate improved outcomes for all students through a tiered system of supports. The revised theory of action reflects the addition of the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM™) to other statewide initiatives and reads as follows:

### **Arkansas SSIP Theory of Action**

If DESE aligns and coordinates existing resources, systems, and DESE initiatives: High Reliability Schools (HRS), Professional Learning Communities (PLC), High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) for Inclusive Classrooms, Inclusive Principal Leadership, Reading Initiative for Student Excellence (R.I.S.E.), Response to Intervention (RTI) and the Strategic Instructional Model (SIM™), then DESE will more effectively leverage resources to improve services for SWD and will increase the reach and impact of its work with LEAs.

### **Coherent System of Supports**

In addition to the initiatives outlined in the SSIP Theory of Action, the following DESE-OSE affiliates (known as the Arkansas Collaborative Consultants) are working to build a statewide coaching system that aligns with the SSIP:

- Arkansas Behavior Support Specialists
- Arkansas Brain Injury Support Program
- Arkansas Co-Teaching Project
- Arkansas Transition Services
- Children and Youth with Sensory Impairment
- Educational Audiology and Speech Pathology Resources for Schools

- Easterseals Outreach Program and Technology Services
- State Personnel Development Grant

### **Stakeholder Involvement**

The SSIP Coordinator and the Director of the UA-Little Rock IDEA Data and Research Center facilitated a series of stakeholder meetings focused on the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) indicators. These meetings brought together diverse stakeholders to offer insight and perspective on the Arkansas system of support for students with disabilities. The meetings were held on April 27, May 11, and May 25, 2021.

### **Inclusive Practices**

The SSIP Coordinator, along with the Director of Special Programs and the DESE-OSE Coordinator for Curriculum and Assessment have begun a series of trainings targeting Inclusive Practices across the state. Aspects of the SSIP Theory of Action are covered throughout these professional learning opportunities.