

Division of Elementary and Secondary Education - Special Education Unit Advisory Council for the Education of Children with Disabilities State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) and State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG), October 2020

Create a system of support that is aligned with other Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) Units and is differentiated based on Local Educational Agency (LEA) needs as evidenced by data.

Please note the revised Theory of Action for the SSIP. Revisions reflect the addition of the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) initiatives that are the focus of agency coherence to support students with disabilities. Strategy One continues to focus on creating a coordinated system of support that outlines the necessary organizational structures for the way in which LEA services and supports are identified, managed, and differentiated at the state-level.

Strands of Action	If DESE	Then	Then
<p style="text-align: center;">Collaboration</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Create a system of support that is aligned with other DESE Units and is differentiated based on LEAs' needs as evidenced by data.</p>	<p>...aligns and coordinates existing resources, systems, and DESE initiatives: High Reliability Schools, Professional Learning Communities, High-Leverage Practices, Advancing Inclusive Principal Leadership, Reading Initiative for Student Excellence (RISE), and Response to Intervention</p>	<p>...DESE will more effectively leverage resources to improve services for SWD</p> <p>...DESE will increase the reach and impact of its work with LEAs</p>	<p>...LEAs will have the knowledge and skills necessary to provide high-quality, evidence-based services and supports for SWD by accessing resources, professional development, and technical assistance from DESE</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">PD/TA Development and Dissemination</p> <p style="text-align: center;">In collaboration with other DESE Units, restructure Arkansas' Response to Intervention model using evidence-based personnel development to implement a multi-tiered system of supports for behavior and academics, with a focus on literacy.</p>	<p>...creates a system of professional development and technical assistance that is aligned with other DESE Units and is differentiated based on LEAs needs</p> <p>...designs and implements evidence-based PD and TA for educators of SWD</p> <p>...restructures Arkansas' Response to Intervention model using evidence-based PD and TA to implement a multi-tiered system of supports for behavior and literacy</p>	<p>...DESE will increase its ability to support LEAs capacity to implement evidence-based systems and practices</p> <p>...DESE will have aligned and effective resources available to support LEAs in differentiated and individualized evidence-based practices for all SWD</p>	<p>...All children with disabilities will receive individualized services in the least restrictive environment and demonstrate improved educational results and functional outcomes.</p>

State Systemic Improvement Plan Update:

On September 15, 2020, Arkansas was one of four states invited to present work that has occurred with DESE and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) on Advancing Inclusive Principal Leadership (AIPL). The AIPL work is directly embedded into the Arkansas SSIP Plan to continuously improve Arkansas' coherent system of support to LEAs. As a result of this initiative, High Leverage Practices (HLPs) are now embedded into statewide professional learning initiatives for administrators and educators and HLPs are being increasingly embraced by content specialists throughout our state.

In addition, the Inclusive Schools Pilot Project associated with AIPL has been included in the SSIP, and emphasizes the importance of general and special educators collaborating together in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to optimize outcomes for all students. The Arkansas SSIP State-identified Measurable Result (SiMR) is focused on literacy for grades 3-5 for students with disabilities. The future work of the AIPL that relates to the SSIP will continue to have a literacy focus, as measured by improved student academic achievement and growth, a heightened focus on least restrictive environment (LRE), and expanding Micro-credentials for general and special educators and related services. However, due to COVID-19 and the subsequent cancellation of statewide administration of ACT Aspire, achievement and growth results will not be available for the FFY20 SSIP Report. Arkansas has participated in the IDEA Data Center's SSIP Data Literacy Group to address lack of SSIP data due to COVID-19 for the next SSIP submission in April of 2021.

On August 11, 2020, an Arkansas School-Based Therapy Virtual Conference was held to discuss the statewide vision for growing inclusive practices, with an emphasis on embedding High-Leverage Practices for related services. This work is directly linked to strategy one of the SSIP. Matt Sewell, DESE-SEU Director, and Jeff Adams, SSIP Coordinator, provided a 3 hour morning session focused on inclusive practices. Feedback from the 300+ participants was overwhelmingly positive, and indicative of an area of continued focus for embedding HLPs throughout the system of support for students with disabilities.

On August 13, 2020, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) provided feedback on the latest submission and update of the Arkansas SSIP Plan. There were no OSEP concerns mentioned.

State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)

Current Goals for the State Personnel Development Grant

- Develop statewide Response to Intervention (RTI) resources and tools in the areas of behavior and literacy.
- Increase the capacity of regional and district teams to deliver high quality RTI professional development.
- Improve educators' ability to implement RTI with a focus on evidence-based literacy and behavior support practices.
- Improve literacy and behavior outcomes for all students, especially students with disabilities.

UPDATE

- Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) Tier II modules have been approved by DESE and are ready to be housed on the DESE website.
- PBIS Tier III modules have been through the review process and are in the final revision stage.
- RTI Academic Modules have been finalized and approved by DESE. They will be housed on the DESE website by the end of October.
- SPDG currently submitted a new proposal to OSEP on September 10, 2020, for another five year grant cycle (2020-2025). See the following executive summary for proposed grant goals and activities.

[Arkansas SPDG Executive Summary for the 2020-2025 Grant Cycle Submission](#)

Research indicates that many leaders are not prepared to lead inclusive schools. According to Fowler et al. (2019), only about 50% of special education supervisors and district special education administrators were considered well-prepared. Researchers agree that school leaders play an important role in guaranteeing that students and teachers have access to necessary supports (Fowler et al., 2019; Esposito, Tang & Kulkarni, 2019) and have called for improvements in inclusive leader preparation. When inclusive leaders are in place, they can ensure the core research-based elements are implemented in schools. Research asserts that the required essentials to make inclusion work in schools (Fowler et al., 2019) include:

- High-leverage practices
- Positive and inclusive school climate
- Data-based decision making
- Dedicated time to collaborate with other professionals
- Administrative support
- Evidence-based instructional practices for students with disabilities

These practices should be implemented within a system of support to ensure coherence and alignment with other state and district initiatives and schoolwide adoption. Inclusion is only effective and beneficial for all students when it is implemented with planful strategy, collaboration, and attention to the individual needs of students. Given the need for educators to increase their self-efficacy, knowledge, and skills in educating students with various learning needs, the SPDG proposes the following goals, aligned to three absolute priorities under Title 34 Code of Federal Regulations Section 75.105, in accordance with the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Department of Education:

1. Transform and expand Arkansas' statewide coherent system of supports through competency-based professional learning and coaching that will increase the implementation of high-leverage and other evidence-based practices, which will result in improved outcomes for Students With Disabilities (SWD).

2. Through personnel development and ongoing assistance, increase the capacity of regional and LEA teams to offer high-quality professional learning with a focus on implementing and sustaining integrated high-leverage and other evidence-based practices within a coherent system of support.
3. Increase the knowledge, skill, and implementation of high-leverage and other evidence-based practices by offering general and special educators choice in competency-based professional learning with the added goal of certification and/or badge-recognition as well as a potential educator stipend.

Achievement for students with disabilities remains low in Arkansas. As a result, educators from across the state have requested choice in professional learning opportunities focused on strategies known to have the greatest impact on students with disabilities. Adult learning theory states that participants are more engaged and connected to learning that directly addresses their most pressing needs. Additionally, adult learning is more relevant and impactful when participants feel they have a choice in what they learn. To meet the needs of all students, particularly students with disabilities, teachers must continue to enhance their professional learning by seeking opportunities that promote highly effective teaching practices and support student-focused learning. Professional learning is strong when it increases educator effectiveness, results in professional growth, and improves outcomes for all students (Office of Innovation for Education, 2020).

To further gain stakeholder feedback and to scale-up the alignment of state initiatives, the SPDG and The Office of Innovation for Education (OIE) will partner to replicate and expand a study conducted in early 2020 around professional learning. The purpose of the study is to gain statewide educator feedback around high-leverage and other evidence-based, inclusive practices. Using the educator survey data, SPDG will collaborate with internal and external partners to create competency-based professional learning courses focused on high-leverage, inclusive practices. The courses will allow the SPDG to develop a “dashboard” of choice, leading to completion of a certificate and/or badge-recognition as well as a potential educator stipend. The SPDG will collaborate with the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Office of Educator Effectiveness to align educator pathways to support the Educator Career Continuum Designations. Using flexibility and forward-thinking design, the SPDG will align professional learning with licensure distinctions, including earning microcredentials or badges that may allow an educator to distinguish themselves along a pathway or as part of a set of competencies. The SPDG will house all content courses on a Learning Management System for regional and district access and will be provided to district personnel, general and special educators, and support services in years 2-5 of the grant.

The SPDG will create a cohort in year 1, and continue to add new cohorts each year of the grant. Each cohort will include at least one Educational Services Cooperatives (ESC) with a goal of adding four or more districts each year. The SPDG will support the regions and districts in creating long-term, multi-year plans based on their vision. Within a coherent system of support, each cohort will receive ongoing coaching and job embedded professional learning focused on integrating high-leverage and other evidence-based practices used to increase leadership capacity and fidelity of implementation. Individualized regional and district support allows for coaching, modeling, and feedback within a community of practice and increases leadership capacity to sustain professionals who can support and coach educators on a day to day basis.

In a nested model, educators are supported by a “nested” professional learning system in which there is a pathway for professional growth connecting individual pursuits to priorities and initiatives at the state and district levels. Professional learning addresses individual and collective educator needs, builds on previous experiences, and is based on a shared understanding that educator learning must be relevant and meaningful in order to impact student learning (Learning Forward, 2020). Within partnered ESCs and districts, general and special educators and school support service personnel will have the opportunity to participate in personalized professional learning courses designed for their individual needs. The SPDG will provide targeted, differentiated support to partnered ESCs and district teams as they provide ongoing coaching and job embedded professional learning to teachers

and staff. This activity will support the sustainability of high-leverage and other evidence-based, inclusive practices.

Based on survey data from OIE, educators expressed eagerness to collaborate and network with others within and outside of their schools, districts, and organizations. Educators emphasized the need and desire for learning pertinent to meet the unique needs of the students served, both formal and informal, and often network-based (Office of Innovation for Education, 2020). The SPDG, DESE, and OIE will create “Communities of Practice” which will include members from various DESE units, ESCs, Educational Renewal Zones (ERZs), district- and school-level administrators, and educators from across the state. The goal is to encourage statewide and regional networks to study real and meaningful problems of practice and to expand the reach of teacher leaders.

The SPDG is well positioned to continue its efforts to strengthen the capabilities of educators and administrators to support improved academic and behavior outcomes for students. Building on the established foundation, the SPDG will focus on embedding high-leverage and other evidenced-based, inclusive practices in school improvement efforts and other key initiatives of the DESE to align within a coherent system of supports.