Indicator 17: State Systemic Improvement Plan, Phase I
April 1, 2015

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Introduction

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Education began implementing a revised accountability system under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Previously, OSEP focused most of its monitoring and enforcement on compliance-related requirements of IDEA. Concerned that the achievement and graduation rates of students with disabilities have remained low for many years, OSEP is now refocusing its accountability system to emphasize achieving improved results for children with disabilities. This new approach is called results-driven accountability (RDA).

“Results-Driven Accountability (RDA) shifts the Department's accountability efforts from a primary emphasis on compliance to a framework that focuses on improved results for children with disabilities, while continuing to ensure States meet IDEA requirements. RDA emphasizes improving child outcomes such as performance on assessments, graduation rates, and early childhood outcomes. To support this effort, States are being required to develop a State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) as part of their State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR). In developing, implementing, and evaluating the SSIP, [OSEP] expect[s] that a State's focus on results will drive innovation in the use of evidence-based practices in the delivery of services to children with disabilities, which will lead to improved results for children with disabilities.” ([https://osep.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/6573](https://osep.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/6573))

RDA is based on the premise that the results we want to achieve need to drive the actions we take, not the other way around. Simply put, if we want to achieve X goal, what actions must we take to get there? The SSIP requires each state to ask itself:

- What improved results for children with disabilities do we want to achieve?
- What actions must we take to achieve those results?

States are required to develop and implement their individual SSIPs for Parts B and C in three phases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1 - FFY 2013 Delivered by April 2015</th>
<th>Year 2 - FFY 2014 Delivered by Feb 2016</th>
<th>Years 3-6 FFY 2015-18 Feb 2017- Feb 2020</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Phase I Analysis</strong></td>
<td><strong>Phase II Plan</strong></td>
<td><strong>Phase III Evaluation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Data Analysis;</td>
<td>• Multi-year plan addressing;</td>
<td>• Reporting on Progress including;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Infrastructure Analysis;</td>
<td>• Infrastructure Development;</td>
<td>• Results of Ongoing Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• State-identified measureable result;</td>
<td>• Support EIS Program/LEA in Implementing Evidence-Based Practices;</td>
<td>• Extent of Progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Coherent Improvement Strategies;</td>
<td>• Evaluation Plan</td>
<td>• Revisions to the SPP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Theory of Action</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This report documents Alaska EED’s SSIP Phase I.
Snow machines and 4-wheelers crowd the entrances of most rural Alaska schools in winter. (Photo by Mary Marshall) (http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/2013/04/13/ancient-traditions-and-modern-tech-at-work-in-russian-mission-alaska/)

1) Overview and Process

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (Alaska EED or Alaska) followed the SSIP process outlined by the Regional Resource Center Program. (https://osep.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/5517)

Alaska EED developed a core State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) State Team consisting of a special education program administrator and the special education data manager. This core team, with assistance from technical assistance (TA) centers funded by the US Department of Education,
Office of Special Education programs (OSEP), is given the responsibility of developing and overseeing the implementation of the SSIP.

The Alaska EED SSIP State Team familiarized themselves with the requirements of the SSIP, created a general plan of action, and coordinated the development and writing of this plan. They selected broad internal and external stakeholders to assist, lead communication with the stakeholders, and developed the SSIP report.

Alaska EED began communicating with its stakeholders in early 2014. The team initially provided its stakeholders with an overview of the SSIP requirements and informed them of the expectations for engagement during all phases of the SSIP (i.e., conducting data and infrastructure analysis, selecting a SiMR, determining coherent improvement strategies, and developing a theory of action) and their roles throughout the process.

The additional steps of the process are documented in the relevant sections of this report.
11. Conduct in-depth data analysis and explore root causes. Now that your state has named a measurable student/child result as the focus of your SSIP, think about what might be the causes of the underlying problem you have identified. This will be the first step in determining your improvement strategies and, ultimately, crafting your theory of action. To conduct a root cause analysis, consider the following strategies (and, ideally some combination of two or three). Your stakeholder group might also be a great place to go for input on root causes and/or strategies for conducting your root cause analysis.

- Explore existing literature on your outcome area. What has prior research suggested are the root causes of the issue?
- Analyze additional data. What might state data reveal about the root causes of the issue?
- Gather qualitative information. Consider interviewing stakeholders (e.g., for Part B—local special education directors, principals, teachers, parents, advocacy groups; for Part C—local program directors, El staff, parents, physicians, advocacy groups) to try and understand their perspective on the root causes of the issue.

12. Conduct in-depth infrastructure analysis to identify both leverage points and barriers that may affect your SSIP. This is the second step in determining your improvement strategies. Consider your identified measurable student/child result that will be the focus of your SSIP in terms of your existing infrastructure. What aspects of your infrastructure are strengths and could be leveraged to support your SSIP? What aspects of your infrastructure are challenges and could hinder your SSIP and may need to be addressed through your SSIP improvement strategies?

13. Considering both the results of your in-depth data (root cause) analysis and your in-depth infrastructure analysis develop your improvement strategies. It may be helpful to look at the results of your root cause analysis in conjunction with the results of your infrastructure analysis to identify fruitful improvement approaches. For example, let’s assume your SSIP state-identified measurable student result is low achievement for students with disabilities. Your root cause analysis may have revealed that students who lack access to the general curriculum tend to perform at lower levels than their peers and your infrastructure analysis revealed that that inclusion is a current priority of your SPDG work. So you might include that SPDG work (e.g., professional development to the field around effective inclusionary practices) as a piece of your improvement plan. However, your infrastructure analysis may have also revealed that inclusion is not currently a priority within your department’s school improvement division and support provided to low-performing schools. So another improvement strategy may relate to better integrating and aligning inclusion efforts undertaken under your SPDG with turnaround efforts in low-performing schools.

14. Weave together the results of your data analysis (including root cause analysis), your infrastructure analysis results, and your improvement strategies to formulate a theory of action about why the actions you propose taking will lead to improved outcomes for children with disabilities. This theory of action should be a graphic/visual representation of the linkages you and your stakeholders have made across your various analyses and how your improvement strategies will lead to improved outcomes for students/children with disabilities.

States may choose to begin drafting a logic model much earlier in the process and revisit it and refine it as they complete their root cause and infrastructure analyses.
2) SSIP Stakeholder Team

Alaska stakeholders were and continue to be meaningfully involved in every phase of the SSIP, including development, implementation, and evaluation. Alaska EED selected stakeholders based on the perspectives needed for the development, implementation, and evaluation of the SSIP, and has invited additional and different stakeholders to participate in varying tasks. Alaska values stakeholder involvement in each phase of the SSIP.

Alaska’s SSIP Stakeholder Team includes broad internal and external stakeholders. The team consists of representatives from the following:

- EED Special Education Staff
- EED Staff responsible for the Statewide Systems of Support (SSOS)
- EED Data Staff
- LEAs
- School Administrators
Alaska Part C Staff
Special Education Services Agency (SESA)
Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education (Alaska EED’s State Advisory Panel for IDEA Part B and the State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) for IDEA Part C)
Alaska’s Parent Training and Information Center (PTI)
Parents of Children with Disabilities
Students with Disabilities
University and other Institute of Higher Education
Independent contractors
Statewide TA Providers
State Disability Service Agencies (Vocational Rehabilitation, Labor and Employment)
OSEP Technical Assistance Centers
  o Western Regional Resource Center
  o National Center on Specialized Instruction

Over the course of 2014 and early 2015, the SSIP Stakeholder Team met six times in person (1/17, 2/12, 4/11, 7/8, 10/24, 12/11) and three times by webinar and teleconferences (9/23, 11/18, and 3/19/15). The team has been involved in the development and completion of each SSIP component.

The purpose of the team’s initial meetings was capacity building on the SSIP requirements. Stakeholders have been provided with significant capacity building not only on the SSIP requirements, but also on systemic change components and conducting broad data and infrastructure analyses.

The SSIP Stakeholder Team recommended data for review and participated in all of the data analyses with EED. Stakeholders made very valuable requests for additional data points and assisted EED in developing critical questions that led to the SiMR. They also assisted in developing questions for the infrastructure analysis and making conclusions about the analyses. The SiMR, coherent improvement strategies, and theory of action were developed together with the team.

Stakeholder involvement, including decisions made based on stakeholder input, is described in each of the following sections.
3) Data Analysis

Alaska EED and its stakeholders analyzed key data, including data from SPP/APR indicators, 618 data collections, and other data as applicable to identify a clear area of need in Alaska, determine its the root causes contributing to low performance in the area of need, and establish a State-identified measurable result (SiMR) for the SSIP.

Alaska reviewed broad data elements first and through its data analysis process, narrowed its focus. Based on a review of the SPP and APR indicators, Indicator 1 - graduation rates for students with disabilities – stuck out as an area that needs systemic attention.
Over the lifetime of the SPP and APR, Alaska has not been able to move the needle on graduation rates for students with disabilities. As demonstrated in Figure 1, Alaska has not met its targets for graduation rates for students with disabilities over the life of the SPP and has not demonstrated sustained progress. While the general education rate has improved consistently since FFY 2007, the special education rate has not.

Figure 1. Alaska graduation rates reported against SPP targets for FFYs 2008-2013.

Figure 2. Alaska special education graduation rate compared to other states.
In addition to its SPP and APR data, Alaska EED and its stakeholder team reviewed its special education graduation data in comparison to special education graduation rates in other states. As demonstrated in Figure 2, Alaska’s graduation rate is low in comparison with other states. Figure 2 shows that, for the 2011-2012 school year, Alaska’s special education graduation rate ranked only 8th of 50 states.

In addition to the data analysis, Alaska’s initial infrastructure analyses also supported the selection of graduation rates as a focus for the SSIP. Graduation rates for subgroups including students with disabilities have been and continue to be an indicator in Alaska’s determination of focus and priority schools under its Statewide System of Supports. Alaska has also considered graduation rates in its annual determinations of LEAs to determine whether LEAs meet the requirements of IDEA and provided technical assistance on these indicators including the resources provided online at http://education.alaska.gov/tls/sped/TrainingResources.html.

Upon determining that graduation rates for students with disabilities was an area that needed additional attention and systemic improvement, Alaska and its stakeholders learned about potential root causes for low special education graduation rates by reviewing tools and resources developed by the National Dropout Prevention center for Students with Disabilities, the National Post-School Outcomes Center, the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center, and the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition.

From its review of research, Alaska identified the following potential causes, which impacted the data analysis:

- The key indicators that researchers have identified as indicative of who is most likely to drop out are
  - poor grades in core subjects,
  - low attendance,
  - failure to be promoted to the next grade, and
  - disengagement in the classroom, including behavioral problems.

To be most effective in preventing dropout, school systems should focus dropout prevention efforts in the beginning of the middle grades. (http://education.alaska.gov/tls/sped/pdf/Indicators/Indicator%201&2/Article-Presentations/NHSC_ApproachestoDropoutPrevention.pdf)

- Background factors are indeed often associated with dropout, including being born male, economically disadvantaged students, African American, or Latino. (http://education.alaska.gov/tls/sped/pdf/Indicators/Indicator%201&2/Article-Presentations/NHSC_ApproachestoDropoutPrevention.pdf)

- Russell Rumberger (2002), of the University of California at Santa Barbara, has found that there is strong evidence that mobility during high school, as well as during elementary school, poses risks to graduating. A study by Robert Haveman and Barbara Wolfe (1994) similarly concluded that residential mobility reduced the chances of high school graduation even after controlling for a variety of family background variables. (http://education.alaska.gov/tls/sped/pdf/Indicators/Indicator%201&2/Article-Presentations/NHSC_ApproachestoDropoutPrevention.pdf)
Students who are poor, who are members of minority groups, who are male, who transferred among multiple elementary and middle schools, and who are overage for their grade are more likely to drop out of high school. (http://education.alaska.gov/tls/sped/pdf/Indicators/Indicator%201&2/Article-Presentations/IdentifyingPotentialDropouts.pdf)

Students who come from single parent families, have a mother who dropped out of high school, have parents who provide low support for learning, or have parents who do not know their friends’ parents well also are placed at greater risk. (http://education.alaska.gov/tls/sped/pdf/Indicators/Indicator%201&2/Article-Presentations/IdentifyingPotentialDropouts.pdf)

Alaska reviewed a significant amount of data, disaggregated by multiple variables together with stakeholders. Alaska reviewed data disaggregated by multiple factors including LEA, region, race/ethnicity, disability category, and placement, school status under the Statewide System of Supports, etc. The data confirmed the need for a systemic mechanism to address graduation rates for students with disabilities and assisted Alaska in identifying root causes.

Highlights of Alaska’s date review included:
The disaggregation of special education graduation data by race and ethnicity, overall and in focus and priority schools, as shown in Figures 3 and 4.

The graduation data disaggregated by race/ethnicity confirms the need to ensure that all improvement strategies address students from all races and ethnicities, especially Alaska Native students. This is reinforced when looking at Focus and Priority schools. For the SiMR subgroup of
focus and priority schools, 75% of the students leaving special education are Alaska Natives. 39 of 42 Focus and Priority schools have student populations of 94% or more Alaska Natives.

Another highlight of Alaska’s data analysis was the analysis of special education and general education graduation rates by grade configuration. Alaska has many unique school configurations including many schools that serve grades K-12 in one school. Figure 5 illustrates this analysis.

This analysis confirmed that grade configuration does impact graduation rates, for all students and especially for general education students. These results will impact Alaska’s improvement strategies as they will need to be focused on school-level interventions that are appropriate for K-12 schools. Consistent with research that shows the building principal as a crucial factor in improving graduate rates and other school-level data, Alaska will focus on building leadership in school principals and other staff that work in K-12 schools.

In addition to looking at the grade configurations in the 42 focus and priority schools, Alaska EED looked at staffing trends for administration and counseling in those schools. Alaska found that:

- Most of the schools do have an assigned principal;
- A few schools divide administrative responsibilities between a part-time principal and head teacher;
- Some schools only have a head teacher that carries all school-based administrative responsibilities (The definition for a Head Teacher is: Performs duties described under job class of teacher plus duties described under job class of principal, head administrator or education director in a small or rural school where full-time administrative position is not supported.); and
- Only 14 of 42 schools had a counselor hired for the school.

Through its improvement strategies, Alaska will further explore the impact of various administrative structures on graduation rates for students with disabilities. Technical assistance provided through the SSIP will be tailored to specific types and configurations of school leadership.

![Comparison of 2012-13 Graduation Rates for SPED and GenEd students with additional Subgroup Qualifications](image)

Figure 6. Comparison of graduation rates with additional subgroup qualifications.

In addition to looking at school configuration, Alaska looked at the impact of the ESEA reporting subgroups on graduation data. These subgroups are also used as criteria for identifying focus and priority schools. Alaska looked at the impact of socio-economic, limited English proficiency (LEP) and migrant status on graduation rates. The data in Figure 6 confirm, consistent with research, that each of these factors impacts graduation rates for students with disabilities.

These data reinforce Alaska’s decision to focus its SSIP on the Focus and Priority schools identified through the Statewide System of Supports. 37 of the 42 Focus and Priority schools in Alaska’s SiMR have an LEP rate that is greater than the statewide rate of 11.4%. All 42 schools have low socio-economic status rates of greater than the statewide rate of 45%. 30 of 42 schools have migrant rates that are greater than the state average.
### 2013-14 SBA All Grade 3 Reading Results

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<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Below Proficient</th>
<th>Far Below Proficient</th>
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<td>Student w/ disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>10.6</td>
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**Figure 7.** Statewide assessment results for Grade 3 reading.

### 2013-14 SBA Grade 3 Reading Results for Focus/Priority Schools

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advanced</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Below Proficient</th>
<th>Far Below Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Focus/Priority school</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AK Native/Am Indian</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>Asian/Pacific Is</td>
<td>19.6</td>
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<td>Black</td>
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<td>27.2</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>38.3</td>
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<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>21.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student w/ disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students w/o disabilities</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited English</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>30.6</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>51.6</td>
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**Figure 8.** Statewide assessment results for Grade 3 reading in Focus and Priority schools.
Figures 7 and 8 were developed based on research and requests from stakeholders. Alaska reviewed these data to inform its future improvement strategies. The data clearly show that the same subgroups that struggle with graduation rates struggle with 3rd grade reading. While these data do not establish correlation, they do support research that tells us that early academic success is an indicator that impacts high school graduation. This information will be incorporated into Alaska’s improvement activities and will be especially important for the schools that house grades K-12 in one school.

In addition to these data highlights, Alaska reviewed the following data:

- The potential correlation of high stakes exam results to graduation rates for students with disabilities. That review did not reveal a correlation and Alaska’s high stakes graduation exam was discontinued at the end of 2013-2014 so this will not be addressed in the SSIP improvement strategies.

- Dropout data including data disaggregated similarly to the graduation data reviewed. While there is clearly a connection between graduation and dropout data, the data did not reveal new areas of focus for the SSIP.

- District- and school-level data including district and school sizes, special education child counts and other make-up of districts and schools. The findings of these reviews confirmed the decision to follow the structure for the Statewide System of Support and look at schools as the unit for improvement.

- Graduation data by gender, disability category and educational placement. While these factors do impact graduation rates, the impact is not as significant as the factors illustrated above like race/ethnicity and school composition.

- Related APR data including post-school outcome data. Alaska began a review of surveys of dropouts that have been conducted as part of the post-school outcome data collection. That review will continue and results will be incorporated into improvement strategies that are directed at students and providing them supports to encourage graduation.

- Alaska reviewed the results of compliance monitoring of requirements related to graduation and dropout rates to determine whether compliance issues could be a root cause of low graduation rates and a high gap between special education and general education graduation rates. The SSIP State Team reviewed and reported out to stakeholders on these data. Data did not present barriers to improvement. As reported in Alaska’s SPP and APR, Alaska has a high level of compliance with the compliance indicators, including Indicator 13, Secondary Transition. Alaska stakeholders agree that compliance and procedures are in place, it is time to move forward to quality of services provided and focusing on results rather than procedures.

- In addition to quantitative data, Alaska’s SSIP decisions were informed by qualitative data, especially the results of interviews done with dropouts as part of Alaska’s Indicator 14, post-secondary outcomes.

- While a more complete review will continue, Alaska began to look at the current initiatives in place in Alaska schools to improve graduation rates for all students and specifically for students with disabilities. This review is in response to feedback from building principals that they are beginning to suffer from initiative overload.
As part of its review, Alaska also considered other child-level outcomes including proficiency on state exams. However, Alaska is revamping its assessment system and implementing a new assessment during the SSIP. This will impact data and would have made it difficult for Alaska to demonstrate improvement and connect improvement back to the SSIP.

**Summary**

Alaska’s diverse stakeholders agreed that graduation rates were the appropriate focus for the SSIP. Alaska is very confident in the data it reviewed. There are no concerns about the quality of the data. The data do reveal areas where Alaska will focus its improvement strategies, including the graduation rate discrepancies for Native Alaskan students, students who attend schools that serve grades K-12, and students in the LEP, low SES and migrant subgroups.

The Alaska SSIP Stakeholder Team reviewed all data reviewed by EED and were given multiple opportunities to provide input and request additional data. One example of the stakeholders’ influence on the review of data is the request that EED and the stakeholders review both 4 and 5-year cohort data to determine if either set of data is more likely to show improvement. EED put together the data set for review and EED and stakeholders learned that the benefit of using either a 4 or 5-year cohort varies by school district. Further drill down revealed that that for both the Alaska School Performance Index (ASPI) and for meeting the target graduation rate, as approved by its ESEA waiver, Alaska uses either the 4 or 5-year rate, whichever is more beneficial to the school or LEA. Alaska has incorporated this into its SiMR as the process for determining Focus and Priority schools is used to select the schools that are the focus of the SiMR.

Alaska used data to answer many questions posed during internal reviews and by stakeholders. Questions included:

- How does the high stakes graduation exam impact graduation rates?
- Is there a correlation between 3rd grade reading proficiency and graduation rates?
- How does low income impact the graduation rates?

These questions and the data presented in this section will be used as Alaska moves forward in the next phases of the SSIP. In addition to those data, Alaska is relying heavily on the research in the Institute for Educational Sciences (IES) What Works Clearinghouse and the research done by OSEP-funded technical assistance centers to inform its conclusions and improvement strategies, as described throughout the SSIP.

From the data analysis process, Alaska has drawn the following conclusions regarding root causes:

- Alaska’s improvement strategies must address the discrepancies in graduation rates for Native Alaskan students with disabilities.
- Alaska’s improvement strategies must be appropriate for the unique Alaska schools that serve grades K-12 as well as the varying school and school administrative structures in rural Alaska.
- Alaska’s school principals are suffering from initiative overload. The SSIP improvement strategies need to include a review of current initiatives and be implemented in a meaningful way that addresses the initiative overload present in schools.

The data analysis also helped to drive the infrastructure analysis. Alaska learned that its focus on graduation rates for the subgroup of students with disabilities is also a focus of other EED staff, specifically Alaska’s State System of Support (SSOS). Stakeholders clearly asked EED to not create a new system, but to work within existing systems, setting a priority for the infrastructure analysis.
4) Analysis of Infrastructure to Support Improvement and Build Capacity

The purpose of Alaska's infrastructure analysis was to assess the capacity of its current infrastructure to support improvement and build capacity in LEAs and schools to implement, scale up, and sustain the use of evidence-based practices to improve graduation rates for students with disabilities.

Alaska's infrastructure analysis began with an analysis of the special education division and then spread out to encompass the full department. Alaska specifically looked at the capacity of EED to make data-based decisions using outcome data for students with disabilities, track initiatives used by LEAs and schools to improve graduation rates for students with disabilities, and provide and evaluate technical assistance to LEAs and schools specific to improving student outcomes, especially graduation rates.

The infrastructure analysis was conducted through: review of documentation including manuals, interviews; formal and informal discussions; and EED team and stakeholder meetings. Alaska used the results of the data analysis described above to inform and narrow its infrastructure analysis.

Alaska values the relationships that were in place prior to the SSIP infrastructure analysis and the new relationships that are being solidified through the SSIP. A list of representatives (e.g. offices, agencies, positions, individuals, and other stakeholders) who were involved in the development of
Phase I and will be involved in the development and implementation of Phase II of the SSIP is included in the description of the SSIP Stakeholder Team on pages 6 and 7.

Alaska reported out to its stakeholders and solicited feedback throughout the infrastructure analysis. Stakeholders provided additional questions and suggestions for additional review. They also helped EED to determine the results of the analysis that are relevant to the SSIP and will assist in making the SSIP as effective as possible.

**Infrastructure Analysis Process**

Alaska analyzed the capacity of its current infrastructure to support improvement and build capacity in LEAs to implement, scale up, and sustain the use of evidence-based practices to improve graduation rates for children with disabilities. The process for the infrastructure analysis included:

- Review of written policies and procedures related to:
  - Graduation (general and special education);
  - Technical assistance for implementing, scaling up and sustaining initiatives;
  - Special education supports; and
  - Integrated efforts among divisions in the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development.
- Interviews of staff responsible for the above policies and procedures as well as implementation of those policies and procedures.
- Discussion of the results of the analysis with stakeholders.
- Additional reviews and interviews based on additional questions from the stakeholders.
- Compilation of information in seven categories.
Results of the Infrastructure Analysis

**Governance**

The State Board of Education, EED/TLS Administration and the Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education (Alaska’s Special Education Advisory Panel) all agree on the need to address graduation rates for students with disabilities in Alaska. The support of these important stakeholders bring strength to the SSIP both as a potential provider of resources and an accountability mechanism to ensure quality implementation of the SSIP.

Another strength of Alaska’s governance is that the use of stakeholders to plan and evaluate systems is not new. Alaska has a history of using stakeholders, including representatives from the administrative groups described above and district and school representatives to provide significant input on state policies, procedures and initiatives.

Alaska also reviewed the governance of the initial Alaska Flexibility Waiver (https://www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/approved-requests/ak1.pdf), approved by the US Department of Education in 2013 and the application for the waiver renewal submitted March 31, 2015. A strength identified is that those programs involve very similar stakeholders and have the same governance structure and staff. There is a need for improvement in coordinating the governance and ensuring that inter-program communications happen at all levels, all the way to the State Board of Education.

An area for further exploration through the implementation of the SSIP is the availability and use of performance scholarships for LEAs an/or schools. The opportunity to provide even a small fiscal incentive to school districts who are able to move the needle on graduation rates for students with a disabilities can be a great opportunity to encourage innovative improvement strategies.

Through this review, Alaska also learned more about the administration of the Statewide System of Supports (SSOS) and the supports provided to the focus and priority schools identified as described in the waiver.

**Fiscal**

Alaska EED uses a Grant Management System (GMS) to manage the IDEA, ESEA, and CTE federal funds sub-granted to LEAs. The system for fiscal management of these funds is included in the GMS and is administered by TLS finance. Similar procedures and one system for management of various funds allows for collaboration. Alaska plans to add more grants, both formula and competitive, into the GMS system in future years.

From Alaska’s approved ESEA Flexibility waiver (2013):

“The State will support priority schools by providing a SSOS school improvement coach. The SSOS Coaching Program provides on-site technical assistance to support schools and districts in their efforts to improve systems and structures that increase student achievement. Coaches work collaboratively with educators to assess district and school needs and to design and implement interventions based on education research. The SSOS coach will provide on-site support at the school at least one week per month and additional support by distance through email, Skype, phone, etc. The coach will be provided to each priority school through the SSOS State funds, to the extent resources allow. The State will provide additional support to priority schools through SSOS-
supported initiatives such as the Curriculum Alignment Institutes, the annual Alaska School Leadership Institutes, and Cognitive Coaching training. Priority schools will be given first priority in placement of teacher mentors through the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project and principal coaches through the Alaska Administrator Coaching Project. The State may provide support through school board and parent engagement coaches, as resources allow. At its option, the district may engage an external provider to guide the school through the turnaround process for at least three years.

“School districts with priority and focus schools that elect to use external providers to provide support to the schools, either as an external partner to guide the turnaround process, or as an external provider providing support or professional development to the school in a specific area, must use a rigorous process for recruiting, screening, and selecting any external providers. The screening process must verify that a provider has a meaningful plan for contributing to the reform efforts in the school, will implement strategies that are research-based, has a record of success in similar schools, has a healthy fiscal history, and has the capacity to implement the strategies it is proposing. The State priority school liaison will be included as a reviewer in the external provider selection process for any turnaround partners and for any providers that will be providing significant support that do not already have a track record of providing effective support to Alaska’s low-achieving schools. (External providers may be used to provide technical expertise in implementing various components of the intervention model, such as helping a school evaluate its data and determine changes that are needed, providing job-embedded professional development, assisting in curriculum alignment, designing teacher and principal evaluation systems that rely on student data, etc.)

“In addition to support provided to the school through the SSOS program and funds, the State will make SIG 1003g funds available for priority schools as they become available. Current SIG schools from Cohort 2 that are identified as priority schools will have a third year of SIG funds available for 2013-2014. New SIG funds received by the state in 2013-2014 will be available to award to other priority schools upon application by school districts with those schools that choose to implement one of the approved SIG intervention models. The State will make funds from the set-aside from the Title I allocation under 1003(a) for school improvement available for priority and focus schools. Depending upon the amount of funds available in a given year, the State will determine the funding level available to each priority school and will require the priority schools to apply for the funds through a budget and narrative that shows alignment with the required interventions. The State will require a district to use up to 20% of its Title I allocation to serve its priority and focus schools (in lieu of the set-aside required for SES and school choice) as needed, if other funds are not sufficient.” With the implementation of the recent SIG 1003g regulations, these funds will also be available to focus schools as well as priority schools.

The structures put in place for focus and priority schools under the waiver are a strength for the SSIP moving forward working with the same schools. Fiscal structures are in place to ensure proper implementation of evidence-based practices.

In addition, Alaska reviewed its use of discretionary grants and request for proposals (RFPs) to obtain support services and technical assistance relating to specific areas of need. Alaska EED has a robust network of consultants that support targeted goals. There is an identified need to ensure that current and future discretionary grants and request for proposals (RFPs) are informed of and supportive of Alaska’s SSIP.
Quality Standards

Over the past several years, AK EED has emphasized implementation of its standards (http://education.alaska.gov/standards/) across all offices of the department including special education, SSOS, and ESEA/Title I. The standards for all children, including children with disabilities, are rigorous and complete. Alaska adopted college- and career-ready English Language Arts and Mathematics standards in June 2012. The ELA and Math standards can be found on the EED website at https://education.alaska.gov/akstandards/#c3gtabs-ela or https://education.alaska.gov/akstandards/#c3gtabs-math. Alaska also adopted standards in the following content areas: Science, Geography, Government and Citizenship, History, Skills for a Healthy Life, Arts, World Languages, Technology, Employability, Library/Information Literacy, Cultural Standards, and Alaska History that can be found in the Alaska Content and Performance Standards, 4th edition document. The standard set a “high trajectory of expectation” for all students, including special education students. The message from EED staff has consistently been that the standards apply to all students including students with disabilities.

One standards-related strength in Alaska, as reported in Alaska’s ESEA Flexibility waiver, is:

“Alaska Statute 14.20.149 requires each district to align its evaluation system to the professional performance standards adopted by the State Board and incorporate information from all stakeholders—students, parents, and community members, as well as education professionals—in the plan’s design and implementation. The district evaluation system also must collect information on performance from a variety of sources, contain provisions for improvement of sub-standard performance, and provide training for those employees subject to the evaluation system, as well as, the principals who conduct evaluations.”

The alignment of teacher evaluations and district evaluation systems to the state standards can be a great tool for ensuring appropriate, evidence-based improvement strategies are implemented. It also sets up a strong system for professional development.

The Alaska Special Education Handbook (http://education.alaska.gov/tls/sped/pdf/FY15_Handbook/AK_SPED_Handbook.pdf) is a central guide to special education policy and practice in Alaska. It is recognized that future additions of the Handbook will include information to support the Alaska SSIP Plan, potentially including, but not limited to reference material on practices to support graduation, data analysis and information about the integration of Special Education and the State Systems of Support (SSOS).

Professional Development

The greatest strength related to professional development at Alaska EED is detailed in the ESEA Flexibility waiver (2013):

“EED has developed a multi-dimensional professional development plan to support all teachers. Included in this plan are webinar series, presentations, and collaborative efforts as outlined in the Standards Professional Development Timeline. Because of the geography, cost of travel from remote areas, and isolation of a large number of the schools in Alaska, a significant portion of the professional development plan uses distance delivery as the venue.

“One dimension of this plan is the collaborative efforts of EED’s
Special Education team, NCLB Title I and III teams, assessment team, and literacy and mathematics content specialists to offer webinar series and conferences to train teachers of all students with specific emphasis on English language learners and students with disabilities.

“The Limited English Proficient (LEP) Title III program and the Assessment Office developed a series of webinars available to all teachers on the Amplified English Language Development Standards and how they fit into instruction in the general education classroom.

“EED sponsored two professional development workshops in October, 2012 on Academic Language in the Content Areas of Mathematics and Science: Skills and Strategies to Adapt Instruction for English Language Learners. Workshops were held in Palmer and Fairbanks, and EED invited teachers from other districts in the state to participate in these workshops. Additional sessions are planned for the 2013-2014 academic year on Alaska content and English Language Development Standards. EED’s Special Education team and content specialists are working to achieve the goal of making the college- and career-ready standards accessible to all students, including students with disabilities, by using resources available through memberships to the State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards Assessing Special Education Students and the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Alternate Assessment Consortium, through the Office of Special Education Programs, which provide technical assistance to teachers and directors.

“Alaska is a member of both collaboratives. These enterprises address the inclusion of students with disabilities in large-scale standards, assessments, and accountability systems.

“A second dimension of the professional development plan is to conduct training at annual state conferences. During the 2012-2013 school year, the literacy and mathematics content specialists will conduct training workshops for teachers at the following professional development conferences held in Alaska each year: Special Education, Career and Technical Education, and Alaska Society for Technology in Education. During the 2013-2014 school year, content specialists [conducted] training for teachers at the biennial Mathematics/Science, Literacy, and Bilingual Multicultural and Education Equity conferences.

“The final dimension of the professional development plan is to conduct State-sponsored opportunities for educators of all children. EED will sponsor the Literacy Institute, Transforming K-8 Mathematics Instruction Institute, and Curriculum Alignment Institute to help ensure all teachers have the supports needed to teach to the college- and career-ready standards.

“Additionally, EED content specialists will collaborate with teacher leader content consortia and organizations such as the Alaska State Literacy Association and Alaska Council of Teachers of Mathematics to ensure the college- and career-ready standards are being addressed in their statewide professional development efforts.”

The Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference (ASSEC) held winter provides an opportunity for EED, as well as statewide stakeholders, to deliver content directly to the school level. Primarily a conference for special education teachers and families, ASSEC is a venue for conveying both ‘big picture’ concepts as well as practical methodologies. EED will leverage this setting to disseminate SSIP concept and design into the hands of teachers and families.

The Alaska Special Education Service Agency (SESA) (http://sesa.org/) is an Alaska EED-sponsored agency that provides professional development and direct onsite service to teachers and families in relation to individual students with disabilities at the school level. SESA affords EED with the unique opportunity to leverage time at the school and community level to focus on the goals of the Alaska SSIP plan. In particular, supportive professional development in the area of post-secondary transition planning as it relates to individual students will be a critical role for SESA to play in supporting the SSIP and SiMR.
The foundational professional development systems in place are a strength for Alaska, but additional training will be needed in ensuring the maximum effectiveness in meeting the goals of the SSIP.

**Data**

Alaska EED described its special education data collection procedures in the introduction to the SPP/APR.

One of the greatest strengths of Alaska EED’s data system is staff collaboration around data. Due to the small size of Alaska EED, data staff for special education and general education often overlaps and they work very well together.

Data cross all of the areas in the infrastructure, including the ESEA flexibility waiver. From the approved waiver (emphasis added):

“EED uses the Special Education Annual Performance Reporting measures for tracking data, and conducts detailed analysis with this collected data. EED conducts stakeholder sessions twice annually to review the meaning of data results and to develop a plan to best implement the data results to school districts. Factors that were directly tied to the opportunity to achieve college- and career-ready levels are tied to indicators 1-Graduation Rates, 2-Dropout rates and 13-Secondary transition. This information, complemented by the implementation of new Alaska standards, provides the framework to developing student plans at the individual level.”

**Technical Assistance**

Alaska ensures that its LEA directors are provided the most up-to-date information through an annual directors' training, annual new directors' training, and ongoing communication via email, telephone and webinar. These annual trainings, supported with ongoing distance training, cover topics relating to state policy and procedure updates, special education law and instructional best practice. In addition, Alaska participates in the Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference (ASSEC) where information relating to Alaska’s annual performance on its State Performance Plan (SPP) is disseminated and policies and procedures are reviewed with the special education classroom teacher audience. Finally, Alaska EED contributes to special educator preparation at the university level by presenting on special education policy, practice and performance on SPP indicators.

These, combined with the professional development provisions from the ESEA Flexibility waiver, described above, are strengths in the Alaska system.

The greatest need in this area is reviewing the technical assistance specific to graduation rates for students with disabilities. Stakeholders have reported that there are too many initiatives and ideas being pressed on school administrators. This initiative overload highlights the need for a better evaluation process for new initiatives to ensure they are implementable and sustainable. Alaska EED plans to address this using the PDSA cycles described in this document.

In addition, Alaska EED coordinates with its Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center, its Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) initiative (AkCAM) (http://www.akcam.org/) and post-secondary transition initiative (Alaska Transition Outcomes Project) as dissemination points for best practices and awareness training. While these initiatives have strong individual successes
annually, EED and the stakeholders representing these initiatives recognize the need to align these efforts with statewide goals and assure coordination and collaboration that reduces reproduced efforts.

Accountability/Monitoring

Alaska’s special education monitoring system is described in detail in the introduction to its SPP/APR.

The teacher evaluation system, described above in the professional development system, is intimately connected to Alaska’s performance standards.

The SSOS team works with schools to provide guidance and support for school improvement plans and intervention strategies through a technical assistance model rather than specific monitoring for compliance. However, if required elements of a plan are not in place, the EED liaison works with the school to revise the plan. The requirements for school improvement plans are considered in consolidated compliance monitoring for the ESEA programs. EED will need to make decisions on when it is appropriate to integrate compliance monitoring into the evaluation systems in place and when that may not be reasonable.

The most applicable accountability mechanism for Alaska’s SiMR is the identification of focus and priority schools under the SSOS. EED bases its recognition, accountability, and support for schools on the Alaska School Performance Index (ASPI) and revised Annual Measureable Objectives (AMOs). The index was designed to be simple and responsive to public comment, and the accountability plan includes elements currently in State regulation that were adopted through a public process. EED publicized its proposed system, requested feedback from educators, and made changes in response to educator input.

Graduation rate for subgroups, including students with disabilities, is an AMO indicator and is an element of the ASPI index score. Those data are considered when selecting focus and priority schools in addition to other indicators, including performance on statewide assessments, which we know can impact future graduation. From the approved ESEA waiver:

“Alaska will hold districts and schools accountable for improving student achievement, closing achievement gaps, and increasing graduation rates for all students and subgroups through differentiated consequences and interventions based on factors including the school’s ASPI score, whether the school is meeting the AMO targets in reading, writing, and mathematics, and whether the school is improving its graduation rate.”

Current Initiatives

Alaska EED recognizes the need to ensure theSSIP is coordinated and aligned with the improvement work of other initiatives in the State including:

- College- and career-readiness standards (quality standards described above);
- Elementary and Secondary Education Act Waiver (linked to and described above);
- Response to Intervention (RTI) (https://education.alaska.gov/nclb/RTI.html);
- Investing in Innovation (i3) – Alaska Statewide Mentor Project (http://www.alaskamentorproject.org/);
- School Turnaround at the Alaska Comprehensive Center (housed at SERRC) (http://www.alaskacc.org/models/182).
State System of Supports

The mission of Alaska’s SSOS is to support districts as they build their capacity to implement sustainable school improvement strategies with fidelity.

The State System of Support (SSOS) was established to help all students (AS 14.03.015):

- Succeed in education and work,
- Shape a personally worthwhile and satisfying life,
- Exemplify the best values of society, and
- Be effective in improving the character and quality of the world.

The SSOS specializes in helping Alaskan districts, schools, and school boards:

- Develop, sustain, and monitor improvement efforts,
- Build local capacity and increase staff retention rates,
- Align curriculum with Alaska Grade Level Expectations (GLEs),
- Gain meaningful exposure to all content areas,
- Use formative and summative assessment to make decisions and to inform instruction,
- Develop a multi-tiered approach to curriculum delivery that incorporates quality instruction and effective interventions for all students,
- Implement effective instructional strategies that are aligned to curriculum as well as addressing the needs of diverse learners,
- Foster a positive school climate and learning environment that is attentive to local culture,
- Foster staff collaboration through weekly staff meetings that discuss individual student progress,
- Align professional development policies and practices with resources and academic goals,
- Utilize instructional leaders to model and reinforce behavioral expectations, and
- Understand their role in improving student achievement.

The SSOS uses a tri-tiered model to represent our efforts to help districts build their capacity to implement sustainable school improvement strategies. EED provides aligned resources, information, professional development, content coaches, and technical assistance within six domain areas that represent aspects of best practices that substantially influence school and student performance. The six domains are: curriculum, assessment, instruction, supportive learning environment, professional development, and leadership. Depending on which tier a district is in, EED provides the district with varying degrees of support within each domain.

Stakeholder Involvement

As described above, multiple internal and external stakeholders were involved in analyzing the infrastructure. The infrastructure analysis helped Alaska identify representatives who were involved in the development of Phase I (see pages 6 and 7) and will be involved in the development and implementation of Phase II of the SSIP including building principals and EED staff responsible for SSOS.

Potential Measurable Results

Learning about the SSOS was instrumental in assisting Alaska to establish the measurable results for the SiMR. Responding to stakeholder requests, Alaska prioritized fitting the SSIP into existing structures and increasing collaboration across the whole school system, without the silos of special and general education.

The analysis also led EED and its stakeholders to consider looking at data at the school level, which has not been a focus in previous initiatives. Research shows that the building principal is a great change agent and building capacities of building administrators has not been a focus of special education technical assistance in Alaska to this point.
Hugo Kakinya, from Nunamiut School in Anuktuvuk Pass, heads to the state x-country meet. Good luck Hugo!! (https://www.facebook.com/NorthSlopeBoroughSchoolDistrict)

5) State-identified Measurable Result(s) for Children with Disabilities (SiMR)

Alaska’s SiMR is:

- Aligned to SPP/APR Indicator 1, Graduation Rates for Students with Disabilities;
- Based on the data and infrastructure analyses described above;
- The result of the systematic process described in this SSIP, which included broad stakeholder involvement as described in the stakeholder section and throughout the report (broad internal and external stakeholders contributed to its development and review); and
- Aligned directly with Alaska’s State System of Supports (SSOS) and its ESEA Flexibility Waiver, as described above.

SiMR Statement:

Alaska will increase the graduation rates of students with disabilities who attend the 42 schools identified as focus and priority schools in FFY 2013 (school year 2013-2014) under the Statewide System of Supports.
Baseline Data for FFY 2013:

15/80 = 18.75%

In Alaska’s FFY 2013 focus and priority schools, 15 of 80, or 18.75% students with disabilities in the FFY 2013 four-year graduation cohort, who attended the 42 schools identified as focus and priority schools in FFY 2013 under SSOS, graduated with a diploma.

Targets for FFY 2014 through FFY 2018, established by stakeholders:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FFY*</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
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<td>28.75%</td>
<td>33.75%</td>
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<td>43.75%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Per stakeholder advisement, Alaska will not lag data for its SSIP.

Alaska developed the criteria for its SiMR consistent with the SSOS plan and manual. Consistent with the SSOS, Alaska is looking at priority and focus schools that serve grade 12. The FFY 2013 focus and priority schools total 45 schools in 14 school districts. Two of those don’t serve HS and one closed mid-2013-14, bringing the total to 42 that serve 12th graders. The total enrollment in those focus and priority schools is 6,213 with 771 students with disabilities.

Of the 42 FFY 2013 focus and priority schools with 12th graders, 26 have been designated as focus schools and will keep this designation for at least 2 years. For the purposes of the waiver renewal application, the focus schools will remain designated as focus schools through the 2015-2016 school year. Sixteen have been designated as priority schools and will keep that designation for at least 3 years. Working with this cohort of schools over the life of the SSIP will allow Alaska to demonstrate progress. As described in the activities section, tools and technical assistance developed for the focus and priority schools will be made available to all schools. While Alaska EED will not scale up its SiMR to include all schools in Alaska by the final year of the SSIP, it fully anticipates that implementation of the evidence-based practices in the SSIP will ultimately impact Statewide data.

The baseline data confirm that these schools represent the schools that are in most need of assistance in improving graduation rates for students with disabilities. The FFY 2013 special education graduation rate of 18.75% in the focus and priority schools is significantly below the statewide special education graduation rate of 41.9% and the overall graduation rate of 71.2%.

Alaska EED is implementing several changes that may impact graduation rates and result in Alaska needing to revisit and revise its baseline data. The baseline data year, FFY 2013, is the final year of the HSGQE, Alaska’s high-stakes graduation exam. Beginning in FFY 2014, students will not have to pass an exam to graduate. Alaska began implementing the new English Language Arts and Math standards in the 2012-2013 school year and is implementing new assessments based on those standards in spring 2015. Alaska will carefully review graduation data to determine whether data can be compared from year to year and revise its baseline data as determined necessary by its stakeholders.
Definitions relevant to the SiMR:

- **Alaska Diploma**: Alaska has one high school diploma. High school graduation requirements are the same for all students including special education students. There are not tiered diplomas that can be earned in lieu of a diploma. Students can earn certificates of completion and certificates of attendance, but these are not equivalent to or considered a high school diploma.

- **Alaska Graduation Requirements**: To receive a high school diploma, Alaska students must earn at least 21 credits; some school districts require more. The State Board of Education & Early Development stipulates through regulation (4 AAC 06.075) that students must earn four credits in language arts, three in social studies (including one-half credit in Alaska history), two each in math and science, one in health/physical education. The requirement for Alaska history can be met by demonstrating mastery of the state standards for the subject. ([https://www.eed.state.ak.us/faq.html#A8](https://www.eed.state.ak.us/faq.html#A8))

- **Focus/Priority Schools** (from Alaska’s approved ESEA Waiver):
  
  - “The state will identify 5% of Title I schools as the lowest-performing schools, the **priority schools**. To identify these schools, the State will begin with the Title I schools with a 1-star rating. There are 33 Title I schools with a 1-star rating. Within this list, the State will choose the 14 Title I priority schools based on consideration of these factors: ASPI score, SBA proficiency rates in the all-students group and in the four primary subgroups over three years, growth and proficiency index scores averaged over three years, and graduation rates less than 60% (in schools with 12th-graders) over three consecutive years. Additional factors of consideration include: schools with current SIG grants; data from the SSOS desk audit and conversations with the superintendent, school district and school leadership about the school improvement strategies and interventions currently in place; schools currently in corrective action school districts under State intervention; the number and percent of other Title I schools on the 1-star list in the same district; and the size and characteristics of the schools.”

  - “The state will identify 10% of Title I schools as focus schools. According to the definition of focus schools in “ESEA Flexibility, June 7, 2012,” focus schools are defined to be those that are contributing to the achievement gap in the state. In Alaska, the focus schools will be those that have a subgroup or subgroups with low achievement or, at the high school level, low graduation rates. These are low-achieving schools overall rather than schools with within-school gaps between high-achieving and low-achieving subgroups. Focus schools will, in general, represent the next-lowest-performing group of Title I schools. After the identification of the Title I priority schools, the remaining Title I schools with a 1-star rating will be identified as focus schools. Next, the State will sort the Title I schools with a 2-star rating from the least to greatest ASPI score and will select the remainder of the 28 focus schools from this ranked list from least to greatest. Schools identified as focus schools will have one or more low-achieving subgroups and/or a low graduation rate because all the Title I schools with a 1- or 2-star rating had one or more of the four primary subgroups as a factor in their ASPI score and most also had graduation rates of less than 60.”
6) Selection of Coherent Improvement Strategies

Coherent improvement strategies are the broad strategies that will address root causes for low performance and build local capacity to achieve the SiMR. More detailed improvement activities, timelines, resources and responsibility assignments will be reported in Phase II of the SSIP.

After selecting its SiMR, Alaska EED and its broad stakeholder team began identifying broad areas of coherent improvement strategies to build the capacity of its state system, LEAs and schools to improve the graduation rate for students with disabilities and address the root causes identified in the data analysis section.

Alaska EED and its stakeholders referred back to its data and infrastructure analyses to identify potential improvement strategies that address the root causes of low performance, including infrastructure issues. As defined above, the SSIP stakeholder team participated in selecting improvement strategies.

Alaska also referred back to the research, where it identified multiple resources that will be used in the development and implementation of coherent improvement strategies:

- Improving school completion rates encompasses much more than “simply keeping students in school”; students must be engaged within the learning process, therefore, increasing the “holding power” within the classroom and within the school as a whole.”
The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center has identified 16 evidence-based predictors of post-school success for students with disabilities based on a systematic correlational literature review (Test et al., 2009). Findings indicated that students with higher levels of self-determination achieve better post-school outcomes in the areas of education and employment (Halpern et al., 1995; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997).

Application for Teachers
- Get familiar with resources on teaching self-determination skills. For example, self-determination lesson plan starters are available at [http://www.nsttac.org/content/lesson-plan-starters](http://www.nsttac.org/content/lesson-plan-starters).
- Get familiar with Web-Based 2.0 technology tools available to facilitate participation in the IEP process (e.g., Wordle, Toon Doo, Vokis) and investigate Apps available for teaching self-determination skills. PowerPoint is another method for facilitating participation in the IEP process [http://www.vermilinctpc.com/iep/student_directed_je.htm](http://www.vermilinctpc.com/iep/student_directed_je.htm).
- Incorporate self-determination skills across the instructional day. Self-determination skill activities can be incorporated into other instructional activities (e.g., teach goal setting skills at the beginning of an academic or employment lesson). Goal attainment instruction should be a key part of all transition planning activities.
- Collaborate with families to understand cultural values that influence the expression of self-determined behavior – for example, some families may want to focus on goals related to family interdependence rather than student independence.

Application for Administrators
- Research suggests that teachers often believe teaching self-determination skills is important, but do not feel confident in their knowledge of how to teach these skills. Additionally, research suggests teachers often feel there is limited administrative support for teaching self-determination (Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, & Tamura, 2002). Reserve in-service time for professional development on self-determination skill instruction.
- Think about how promoting self-determination fits with other school initiatives – for example, teaching students to manage their own behavior can be a natural fit with positive behavior support.

Application for Families
- Create opportunities at home and in the community for self-determination skills. Support youth to choose between recreational activities, to be a part of setting family goals, or to begin to plan for their future with the input of the family.
- Ask teachers for information about what they are doing at school to promote self-determination skills.
- Talk about these skills with youth and discuss how they fit within your family.

Alaska researched available evidence-based interventions using the What Works Clearinghouse. The most promising intervention it found is the Check and Connect program.
Check and Connect is a structured intervention model designed to assist schools and organizations in identifying students who are at risk for dropping out of school, then pairing those students with mentors who address each student’s individual needs to help them progress toward school completion (http://checkandconnect.org/model/default.html; Christenson et al., 2008).

The Four Components of Check & Connect

1. A mentor who keeps education salient for students
2. Systematic monitoring (the —check component)
3. Timely and individualized intervention (the —connect‖ component)
4. Enhancing home-school communication and home support for learning

Engagement Subtypes

The Check & Connect theory of engagement draws upon the theoretical and empirical literature on high school dropout and school completion (Appleton et al., 2008). Engagement is defined as a multi-dimensional construct, depicted by the four subtypes described below:

(https://checkandconnect.org/model/default.html)

Alaska also plans to use the Predictor Implementation School/ District Self-Assessment developed by the National Post-School Outcomes Center, University of Oregon, and the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC), University of North Carolina at Charlotte. (http://nsttac.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/pdf/ebps/Predictor_Self-Assessment.final.pdf)
Initiative Fatigue

Alaska recognizes the large number of initiatives that have been proposed to Alaska schools in the past several years and appreciated stakeholder feedback that providing additional initiatives and strategies alone would not increase school’s capacity. While new strategies and initiatives are provided often, there is not a system for evaluating the strategies in place and determining whether they should continue. According to one principal on the stakeholder team, new administrators attempt to do it all and do it all very poorly. More experienced administrators simply do not implement new initiatives unless they are very directly tied to improving outcomes for children.
This is not unique to Alaska. On March 25, 2015, EdWeek published an article on Helping Educators Overcome ‘Initiative Fatigue’ ([http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/03/25/helping-educators-overcome-initiative-fatigue.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/03/25/helping-educators-overcome-initiative-fatigue.html)).

Based on this feedback, Alaska believes that it must include improvement strategies centered on setting up systems for evaluating and testing strategies and initiatives prior to implementing them on a large scale in the state. Stakeholders also recognized a need to evaluate the current strategies for increasing graduation rates for students with disabilities to determine if they are working.

In addition to providing evidence-based strategies for schools to implement to improve graduation rates, Alaska’s infrastructure analysis revealed the need for multiple strategies in the initial SSIP that address state-level infrastructure and building the bridge securely between the SSIP and the SSOS.

**Improvement Strategies (sound, logical, aligned)**

Alaska is planning to implement various levels of improvement strategies in order to impact graduation rates. Those activities will occur on four levels: state, school, student and community. All of the improvement activities have the end goal of increasing a school and its community’s capacity to increase graduation rates for students with disabilities. The demographics of the 42 Focus and Priority schools make school- and community-based a priority for the SSIP in addition to the needs for state activities and student-level supports. The strategies listed below tie directly back to the root causes identified through the data and infrastructure analyses above.

**State** improvement strategies will be focused on the needs identified through the infrastructure analysis. The SSIP is a tool to develop integrated procedures for the special education and SSOS teams.

1. Evaluate current initiatives and practices in place in Alaska intended to improve graduation rates for students with disabilities. Scale up effective activities and abandon ineffective practices and initiatives.
2. Establish written protocol at Alaska EED for the integration of the SSIP into the SSOS.
3. Establish procedures for the integration of the SSIP into the SSOS and obtain approval of those procedures from EED administrators.
4. Use the NPDC-SD Dropout Prevention Intervention Framework.
School improvement strategies will be aimed at improving building administration capacity to increase graduation rates for students with disabilities.

“The dropout problem is not an inevitable, immutable feature of American education. Demographics matter, but what happens in schools has a great impact on whether students stay in
school and graduate. Recent research suggests that, even for students who have difficult home lives, dropping out has much to do with how schools operate and the educational experiences students have within them. Moreover, the conventional wisdom that dropping out is a highly idiosyncratic process driven by entirely personal factors is not true for most students who leave school. Most dropouts follow identifiable pathways through the education pipeline."


1. Increase leadership skills of building administration including leadership specific to students with disabilities.

   “Students who drop out often feel that teachers, administrators, and others are not interested in them (Grobe, Niles, & Weisstein, 2001). Caring, knowledgeable adults can establish a climate of trust and support that lets youth know someone is paying attention. These adults can be “teachers, counselors, mentors, case workers, community members . . . who understand and deeply care about youth and provide significant time and attention” (James & Jurich, 1999, p. 340). School programs offering services over a long period foster such trusting relationships between students and adults (Kerka, 2003).”

http://education.alaska.gov/tls/sped/pdf/Indicators/Indicator%201&2/Article-Presentations/TheRoleofParents.pdf

2. Develop a catalog of building-level initiatives with proven results in Alaska schools.

3. Provide technical assistance to building administrators and other school staff through multiple mechanisms.

   “High quality training and ongoing coaching, consultation, and support can assist teachers in making better use of well-designed curricula. As such, student achievement is enhanced by professional development activities that involve teachers working together to align curricula with standards. Teachers and students benefit from well-designed curricula and lessons plans.”

   (http://education.alaska.gov/tls/sped/pdf/Indicators/Indicator%201&2/Article-Presentations/LEA_Recommendations_for_Administrators.pdf)

4. Assist schools to make connections to and work with the Equity Assistance Centers to address disproportionately low graduation rates of Alaskan Native students with disabilities.

   **Student** level improvement strategies will be direct supports to students in Focus and Priority schools based on feedback provided by past and present students.

   “Administrators should develop systems that support student participation in developing their IEP, identify specific types and levels of accommodations and supports a student will need to participate in post-school environments, ensure IEP teams identify and engage responsible agencies, resources, and accommodations required for students to successfully achieve positive post-school outcomes, and promote the value of preparing for, and participating in, postsecondary education.”

   (http://education.alaska.gov/tls/sped/pdf/Indicators/Indicator%201&2/Article-Presentations/LEA_Recommendations_for_Administrators.pdf)

   1. Improve graduation and transition planning.

   2. Evaluate transition plans based on quality and not only presence or absence of required
items.

3. Assess and improve school counseling services.

4. Coordinated interventions aimed at improving graduation rates starting in early grades.

5. Use the Self-Directed IEP Meeting to Teach Student Involvement in the IEP Meeting (Intervention reviewed by NSTTAC). The Self-Directed IEP (SD IEP) lesson package is divided into four instructional units including students leading meeting, reporting interests, reporting skills, and reporting options. It is a multimedia package designed to teach the students the skills needed to manage their own IEP meetings.

Community based improvement strategies will be implemented based on the high number of Focus and Priority schools that have above-average rates of low SES, LEP and migrant students.

1. Increase community investment in special education graduation.

2. Extend student-level counseling and mentorship supports beyond the school.

3. Develop relationships and implement strategies with Tribal corporations and other community stakeholders.

4. Work with parents to improve capacity to impact graduation rates.

"Parent engagement is just as important as student engagement. Parental involvement is essential and family influence is the most accurate predictor of a student’s school achievement."

(http://education.alaska.gov/tls/sped/pdf/Indicators/Indicator%201&2/Article-Presentations/LEA_Recommendations_for_Administrators.pdf)

Family involvement is one of the most important contributors to school completion and success. The most accurate predictor of a student's school achievement is the extent to which his/her family encourages learning.

When families are involved, students are more likely to:

- earn high grade-point averages and scores on standardized tests or rating scales,
- enroll in more challenging academic programs,
- pass more classes and earn more credits,
- attend school regularly,
- display positive attitudes about school,
- graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary programs, and
- refrain from destructive activities such as alcohol and drug use and violence.

Source: National Parent Teacher Association, 2001

http://education.alaska.gov/tls/sped/pdf/Indicators/Indicator%201&2/Article-Presentations/TheRoleofParents.pdf

Improvement Strategy Resources

AKEED Training Resources: (http://education.alaska.gov/tls/sped/TrainingResources.html)
Based on feedback from its stakeholders, especially its LEAs and schools, on initiative fatigue, Alaska is committed to providing evidence-based strategies for improvement to LEAs that have been tested in Alaska through one or more PDSA cycles, as appropriate.

A PDSA, or Plan-Do-Study-Act, Cycle is an iterative, four-stage problem-solving model used for improving a process or carrying out change. When implementing the PDSA cycles to test changes in each of the levels described, it will be important to include internal and external customers; they can provide feedback about what works and what doesn’t.

In applying each PDSA, Alaska’s stakeholders will have to answer three questions:
1. What are we trying to accomplish?
2. How will we know that a change is an improvement?
3. What changes can we make that will result in an improvement?

The PDSA cycle model will allow for small tests of change to assist with initiative overload and to provide Alaska with progress data to report to OSEP in future phases of the SSIP.

For example, a PDSA cycle will be implemented to evaluate transition plans based on quality and not only presence or absence of required items.

- First, a stakeholder group will review available data and processes, develop study questions and predictions. They will review available resources from TA centers and other experts in the area of quality transition planning. They will make a prediction using an “if, then” statement, e.g. “If we involve community partners in developing the transition plan, graduation rates will increase.”

- The stakeholder group will make an assignment to carry out a small test of change, in one school or for a subset of students, e.g. Native American juniors in K-12 schools. Community partners or school staff may be given specific activities.

- The plan will be carried out. Data will be collected on impact on graduation rates.

- Stakeholders will complete an analysis of the data and determine whether the prediction was correct.

- Based on the data analysis, the change will either be abandoned, adapted and re-tested, or adopted and scaled up.

Multiple PDSAs will be happening across the four strategy groups. They will also build sequentially within each strategic group.
Alaska believes that by conducting these tests, it will provide strategies to LEAs and schools that are most likely to yield results for students with disabilities and affect Alaska’s SiMR. Alaska will also ask LEAs and schools to conduct PDSA cycles when implementing improvement strategies, evaluating impact of each strategy.
7) Theory of Action

Theory of Action: A graphic illustration that shows the rationale of how implementing a coherent set of improvement strategies will increase the State’s capacity to lead to meaningful change in LEAs, and achieve improvement in the SiMR.

Alaska developed its theory of action with its full SSIP stakeholder team (described above). Multiple internal and external stakeholders contributed to its development and review.

Alaska’s theory of action is guided by the importance of building capacity sequentially, through series of PDSA cycles. PDSA cycles are broadly used for systemic improvement and require planning, doing, studying and acting for each of a series of tests leading up to full implementation of an improvement strategy.
Alaska SSIP Theory of Action

Overall Goal – Increase SWD Graduation Rate

Data and Infrastructure Analysis

Engage Stakeholders

Develop SIMR

Identify Possible Improvement Strategies

SEA Strategies:
IF SPED and SSOS integrate procedures, THEN capacity will be increase to help schools.

School Strategies:
IF initiatives are tested and evaluated, THEN school administrators will be more likely to implement with fidelity.

Student Strategies:
IF students receive appropriate instruction and interventions at every grade level, THEN graduation rates will increase

Community Strategies:
IF relationships are formed between schools and communities, THEN students will be more motivated to graduate.

Did we increase schools capacity to increase graduation rates for students with disabilities?