Connecticut State Department of Education
Part B State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)

CSDE

CONNECTICUT STATE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
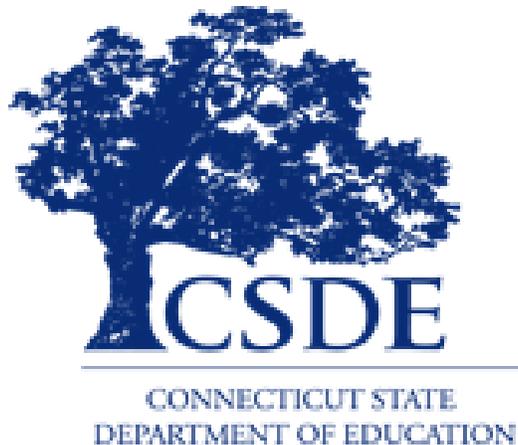
State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report

Indicator 17 – Phase III (Year 4)

April 2020

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A. Summary of Phase III – Year 4

An Overview: Connecticut's Tiered Cohort Model
Connecticut's SSIP Implementation Plan is based on a three-tiered model in which each district in the state has been assigned to one of three cohorts (A, B and C). Districts in each cohort are further identified to receive different levels of support (Tier 1 – Universal, Tier 2 – Targeted, Tier 3 – Intensive). SSIP district activities (i.e., technical assistance, professional learning and monitoring) occur over the course of two school years for each cohort.

Since the last SSIP report submitted (April 2019), the following activities have occurred:
- Cohorts A, B and C – Tier 1 Universal Support (Spring 2019 through Winter 2020)
- Cohort A – Tier 3 Professional learning activities (Spring 2019)
- Cohort A – Tier 3 Follow up professional learning activities (Fall 2020 through Winter 2020)
- Cohort B – Tier 2 Technical assistance: DLET protocol facilitation (Winter 2020)
- Cohort B – Tier 2 Stakeholder input (Winter 2020)
- Cohort C – Tier 3 Completed Follow up professional learning activities (Spring 2019)
- Cohort C – Tier 3 Stakeholder input (Winter 2020)

B. Progress in Implementing the SSIP

State-Level Activities

SSIP Leadership Team
The SSIP Leadership Team continued to meet to analyze data, plan professional learning opportunities and review input from stakeholders, which informed the SSIP processes, including some alternative means of engagement, over the past year. More importantly, the SSIP Leadership Team has been convening to plan a major redesign to the State's SSIP system of support and technical assistance model (see Section E "Progress toward Achieving Intended Improvements" on page 17 for more detail). The SSIP Leadership Team, in collaboration with consultants from SERC who provide technical assistance to districts, reviewed the feedback that was provided by Cohort A districts as well as the anecdotal notes taken by facilitators during the DLET reconciliation process to identify topic areas for which professional learning could be developed/provided. Collaborative meetings between Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and State Education Resource Center (SERC) staff were also used to plan district-level technical assistance and professional learning activities, which included the addition of a new offering for the Cohort A Tier 3 districts this year – Writing Standards-based IEPs.

Tier 1 Support: Web-based Repository of SSIP Resources

The SSIP Leadership team performed an audit of the documents in the State's SSIP resource repository this year. The SSIP Web page, hosted on the CSDE's Web site, holds resource documents focusing on evidenced-based instructional practices and best practices for evaluating and instructing students with specific learning disabilities/dyslexia and can be found at: http://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Special-Education/State-Systemic-Improvement-Plan-SSIP. During FFY 2018, 247 unique users accessed the Web-based repository of SSIP resources a total of 414 times.

Intra-agency Collaboration
Ongoing collaboration between the BSE and other offices in the agency helps to ensure a coordinated effort for district improvement planning strategies. Consistent with the State's Theory of Action, staff from the BSE have participated in the Turnaround Office's FFY 2018 Beginning of Year and Middle of Year Monitoring activities. Additionally, the Bureau of Special Education's Division Director accompanied the CSDE's Chief Performance Officer and Chief Turnaround Officer on 10 district visits to discuss multiple issues including the achievement of students with disabilities and English learners with district administrators. This model supports connections between continuous improvement efforts occurring in shared districts across the agency.

Data Analysis and Selection of Cohort B Districts
FFY 2018 Smarter Balanced (SB) assessment data were analyzed to select districts to receive SSIP support during the 2019-20 school year. Data were analyzed using a two-part decision rule. First, districts in Cohort A were rank ordered from highest to lowest for the performance of third grade students in the statewide literacy assessment. Next, an ordering of the achievement gap between students with disabilities (SWD) and their typical peers was overlaid on the rank ordering to identify districts with the lowest achievement for SWD in combination with the largest gap between SWD and students not receiving special education and related services. This year, eight districts were identified through the data analysis process to receive additional support. Two of the eight districts were required to participate in the District Literacy Evaluation Tool (DLET) completion/reconciliation process. The other six districts had already completed the DLET self-assessment and were exempted from this technical assistance activity. An alternate activity was used with these districts. See the "Key Changes to Implementation and Improvement Strategies" section for more information.

SSIP Evaluation Report
CSDE staff completed the data collection, data analysis, evaluation reviews and prepared the SSIP report again this year.

District-Level Activities and Evidence-Based Practices

During the fourth year of the implementation phase of the SSIP, there has been a continued emphasis on district-level activities.

Tier 1 Support: ReadConn
ReadConn is a yearlong K-3 reading professional learning initiative that is focused on identifying students' needs related to critical early literacy skills and delivering explicit, evidence-based instruction regardless of reading approach or program. The learning content is designed specifically to support both K-3 special education and general education teachers who serve students with disabilities. Outcomes include improved expertise and proficiency of participants in identifying necessary foundational skills and student skills gaps as well as monitoring students' progress and response to instruction. The program consists of six-person district teams that include one school-based administrator, one school literacy leader (e.g., instructional coach), two special education teachers and two general education teachers teaching in grades K-3, inclusive.

Designed to support the implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction aligned to the Connecticut Core English/language arts Standards, the ReadConn initiative uses a combination of in-person meetings and online modules to address the following components of reading:

- Phonological Awareness and Language

- Phonics

- Advanced Word Recognition and Fluency

- Vocabulary and Comprehension

The ReadConn curriculum for instruction and implementation of evidenced-based practices uses the Scarborough Reading Model as its foundation. Instructional approaches that support teachers in identifying gaps in students' ability to become increasingly strategic in language comprehension skills such as background knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, language structures, verbal reasoning and literacy knowledge, while at the same time increasing automaticity in word recognition skills like phonological awareness, decoding and encoding and sight recognition. The goal is to have students become skilled readers with fluent execution and coordination of word recognition and text comprehension.

As noted in last year's SSIP report, more specific content related to the instruction of students with disabilities was added to the training presentations and materials for the ReadConn initiative including understanding the impact of a reading disability on learning, alternate approaches to instruction, and using accessible educational materials (AEM).

During FFY 2018, there were 80 school-based teams, including 166 special education teachers, that participated in the ReadConn professional learning series. Twenty-nine of the teams were from Opportunity District (lowest performing) schools and three of the teams were from Alliance District (low performing) schools.

Tier 2 Support: Level One Dyslexia Specialist Certificate
Participants in this professional learning series learn systematic, structured methods for teaching decoding, encoding, and oral and written expression to students with learning disorders and specific language disabilities. Participants have the opportunity to define and model strategies to teach students who have specific reading disabilities; identify skills needed to develop basic proficiency in reading and spelling; and learn the developmental progression of oral language skills that prepare students for reading proficiency. Participants receive the books *Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers* by Louisa Moats P.D. and *Multisensory Teaching of Basic Language Skills* by Beverly J. Wolf M.Ed. and Judith Birsh Ed.D.

Six regional sessions of this four-day workshop series were offered during FFY 2018. The four-day workshop provided the 104 participants from Cohort A (special education teachers, speech and language pathologists, reading interventionists and coaches) an opportunity to receive a Level One Dyslexia Specialist Certificate.

Tier 2 Support: Assistive Technology and Accessible Educational Materials Training
This in-district professional learning opportunity assists districts/schools in reviewing their infrastructure around assistive technology (AT) and accessible educational materials (AEM) in terms of philosophy, policies, structures and practices. The training was offered to all 10 Cohort A Tier 2 districts. The sessions address the development of an AT Team, the establishment of an AT cycle (consideration-assessment-documentation-implementation and evaluation), the evaluation of existing inventory, as well as the consideration of best practices for the documentation of AT in the IEP. Further, participants practice the decision-making process around the provision of AEM, consider how to provide equitable access to educational materials through the use of AEM, and develop an action plan to implement AEM and build a sustainable system to ensure the delivery of accessible materials in a timely manner and on a regular basis. During FFY 2018, five SSIP Tier 2 districts participated in the AT/AEM training.

Tier 3 Support: IEP Development/IEP Rubric Professional Learning
Consistent with the CSDE's Theory of Action, this professional learning activity offered in April and May of 2019 to the five Cohort A Tier 3 districts focused on familiarizing district administrators, general education teachers and special education staff on the IEP Rubric tool and reviewing individualized education programs (IEPs) for students with an annual goal in the area of reading. Developed by SERC, the IEP Rubric tool is designed to measure the quality of IEP development for students with disabilities. The IEP Rubric defines 14 indicators needed for quality IEP development in the following four categories:

- Gap Analysis of Present Level of Performance

- Levels of Support: Supplemental instruction, Accommodations, and Modifications

- IEP Goals and Objectives

- Types of Support and Placement

The rubric is designed to analyze IEPs holistically as well as by individual indicator. Three of the five districts (a total of 65 participants) elected to engage in this professional learning activity.

Tier 3 Support: Follow Up Professional Learning Support
The CSDE, in collaboration with our partners at SERC, provided in-district professional learning support on evidence-based practices for Cohort A Tier 3 districts between October 2019 and March 2020.

The IEP Development/IEP Rubric training was made available for district staff who had not participated in the spring 2019 training. Additionally, a new training focused on developing standards-based IEPs was offered to the Cohort A Tier 3 districts. The four learning objectives for this new training are as follows:

1. Learn a three-step process for writing standards-based IEPs

   Step 1: Collect data and determine present level of performance (PLOP) in relation to age-appropriate, grade level standards.

   Step 2: "Gap Analysis": Unwrap standards, identify setting demands, and determine impact of student's characteristics (strengths and concerns); select specialized instruction, accommodations, and modifications (if needed).

   Step 3: Ensure goals and objectives include the condition for learning, demonstration of learning, and performance criteria, keeping in mind access, participation, and progress;

2. Understand how to select age appropriate, grade level standards related to a student's strengths and concerns/needs;

3. Identify conditions for learning and specially designed instruction needed to attain IEP goals; and

4. Practice writing comprehensive present levels, and new goals and objectives that will result in educational benefit.

Tier 3 Support: Customized Professional Learning
Informed by the results of the DLET, individualized professional learning for Cohort C Tier 3 districts was completed in late spring/early summer of 2019. Areas of focus for the customized district support included:

- Developing a coherent process of assessing students for the purpose of identifying specific needs, targeting appropriate interventions, and effectively progress monitoring;
- Increasing the access, participation and progress of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum;
- Creating/refining and consistently implementing an effective scientific research-based intervention (SRBI) system;

- Aligning the instructional and intervention practices of regular and special education personnel with regard to assessment, materials, strategies, and progress monitoring tools.

<u>Technical Assistance for Newly Identified Cohort B Districts</u>
This year's technical assistance remained the same as in previous years. CSDE and SERC staff facilitated this session with teams from Cohort B districts. District teams generally include administrators in both special education and curriculum/language arts, elementary/primary school principals, reading teachers and interventionists, general and special education teachers and speech and language pathologists. Following the in-district session, each of the districts received its own summary document containing (1) the reconciled scores for the DLET indicators, (2) a list of areas of strength and areas for improvement based on the conversation during the session, (3) data considerations, and (4) related resources.

Key Changes to Implementation and Improvement Strategies

Since FFY 2018 was the fourth year of Phase III and the State's SSIP intervention framework uses a three-year cohort model, the group of districts from which the CSDE would select the Tier 2 districts cycled back to the same group of districts from FFY 2015. Once the district selection rules were applied to the cohort's current data, six districts that were identified to receive additional support were the same districts selected previously. While consideration was given to the idea of not including these "repeating districts" and selecting different districts, the determination was made that further engagement with the districts to assess the district's successes and challenges in implementing improvement strategies would be beneficial. The SSIP Leadership Team understands the limitations of using the sole measure of the statewide assessment for district selection and appreciates that there may be additional data collected and used by districts that help to provide further clarity on student achievement in reading.   Therefore, a review of district-level student assessment data was also included. Finally, the CSDE is currently in the process of confirming details for the provision of no-cost structured literacy training for staff in these districts who work with students with disabilities in grades K-3.

Stakeholder Involvement in SSIP Implementation

<u>LEA Stakeholder Input</u>
The SSIP Leadership Team determined that a survey of former SSIP district staff members would assist the CSDE in gauging the effectiveness of SSIP implementation. The feedback provided by the individuals who directly received the resources, supports, and interventions has helped the SSIP Leadership Team prioritize future activities.

In May and June of 2019, the CSDE sent a sessions evaluation to the Cohort A Tier 3 district staff seeking input from these stakeholders on the professional learning activity that focused on familiarizing district general education and special education staff on the IEP Rubric tool and

reviewing student individualized education programs (IEPs) for students with an annual goal in reading. Each participant was asked to indicate their level of agreement to a series of seven statements using a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A summary of those responses is represented below:

1. In response to the statement: "The goals and purpose of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) have been clearly communicated to our district team," 50 percent agreed; 50 percent strongly agreed.

2. In response to the statement: "The IEP analysis activity was helpful and informative," 20 percent agreed; 80 percent strongly agreed.

3. In response to the statement: "The IEP rubric will be a beneficial tool to inform the district's IEP development efforts over time," 35 percent agreed; 65 percent strongly agreed.

4. In response to the statement: "The pacing and amount of information discussed was appropriate for the time allocated," 58 percent agreed; 37 percent strongly agreed.

5. In response to the statement: "The information was presented in a way that promoted active engagement with opportunities for processing and collaboration," 28 percent agreed; 67 percent strongly agreed.

6. In response to the statement: "The facilitators were well prepared and able to respond to our questions," 20 percent agreed; 80 percent strongly agreed.

7. In response to the statement, "The next steps in the SSIP process were clearly communicated to our district team," 50 percent agreed; 40 percent strongly agreed.

Similarly, in the winter of 2020, in follow-up to the DLET reconciliation activity, district participants were asked to provide feedback to the CSDE. Each participant was asked to indicate their level of agreement to a series of seven statements using a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The respondents represented a cross-section of district staff serving in the following positions: Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, District Curriculum/Literacy Administrators, Directors of Special Education/Pupil Personnel Services, Elementary School Principals, General Education Teachers, Special Education Teachers, Literacy Coaches, Reading Teachers/Interventionists, and Speech and Language Pathologists.

A summary of those responses is represented below:

1. In response to the statement: "The goals and purpose of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) have been clearly communicated to our district team," 53 percent agreed; 47 percent strongly agreed.

2. In response to the statement: "The District Literacy Evaluation Tool (DLET) consensus process was an effective approach to assessing our district's needs with respect to early literacy practices," 33 percent agreed; 67 percent strongly agreed.

3. In response to the statement, "As a result of the DLET consensus process, our district is better positioned to prioritize and act on these needs," 40 percent agreed; 60 percent strongly agreed.

4. In response to the statement, "The pacing and amount of information discussed was appropriate for the time allocated," 40 percent agreed; 60 percent strongly agreed.

5. In response to the statement, "The information was presented in a way that promoted active engagement with opportunities for processing and collaboration," 47 percent agreed; 53 percent strongly agreed.

6. In response to the statement, "The facilitators were well-prepared and able to respond to questions," 27 percent agreed; 73 percent strongly agreed.

7. In response to the statement, "The next steps in the SSIP process were clearly communicated to our district team," 53 percent agreed; 40 percent strongly agreed.

The high percentage of "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" responses for FFY 2018 is consistent with the FFY 2017 responses and demonstrates district satisfaction with the process.

Connecticut Council for Administrators of Special Education (ConnCASE) Regional Forums
The Special Education Division Director meets on a regularly scheduled basis with LEA Special Education Directors representing the six regions of the state. These regional forums provide a means for the sharing of information with regard to the state's SSIP process and allows for the provision of feedback and discussion regarding state-wide needs around early literacy for SWD from the LEA perspective to help inform future planning for technical assistance and professional learning.

The Special Education Division Director's participation in regularly scheduled regional meetings across the state with district special education administrators has provided a direct means of both sharing information and gathering feedback regarding the SSIP including district literacy initiatives, reading programs, tiered interventions and areas needing support.

<u>Stakeholder Input for SIMR Target Setting</u>
The CSDE engaged the State Advisory Council for Special Education (SAC) and the newly formed LEA Advisory Committee to discuss the SSIP work and seek input on the SIMR target for FFY 2019.

State Advisory Council on Special Education
Connecticut's State Advisory Council (SAC) on Special Education also serves as one of the primary stakeholder groups for the SSIP work. Increased membership in FFY 2018 has resulted in a group that is comprised of multiple parents, two students, representatives of advocacy groups (CT Parent Advocacy Center, CT Commission on Women, Children and Seniors, Disability Rights CT, Center for Children's Advocacy), representatives of public, private, and charter schools, a representative from CT's General Assembly, as well as representatives from multiple state agencies (CSDE, Department of Children and Families, Department of Developmental Services, Corrections, and the Judicial Department). The SAC receives information on SSIP implementation, progress data and improvement strategies and has the opportunity to provide feedback to the BSE as well as share information with constituents.

LEA Advisory Committee
The LEA Advisory Committee was developed to inform the BSE's General Monitoring and Supervision efforts by providing participants opportunities to: increase their knowledge and understanding of the current General Monitoring and Supervision System in Connecticut; provide feedback on the current system and share their own related experiences; advise the BSE on improvements to the system and to suggest areas of focus that would have the greatest impact on student outcomes; and provide feedback on any proposed changes to our system prior to statewide implementation.

<u>Stakeholder Input on Revisions to SSIP Support Model</u>

C. Data on Implementation and Outcomes

The CSDE has continued to rely on the DLET data as a means of gauging implementation fidelity, identifying individual district-level strengths and needs, and identifying consistent trends across the state for the purpose of informing the Department's technical assistance and professional learning plans. This year, individuals on teams from two districts completed the DLET self-assessment and participated in the DLET reconciliation process.

The DLET reconciliation process, facilitated by CSDE and SERC consultants, resulted in the implementation levels represented below. Consensus responses to each of the indicators in the seven components identified below were rated according to the range: (0) not in place; (1) initially in place; (2) partially in place; and (3) fully in place. The percentages represented below indicate the levels of implementation for each of the seven components of the tool as well as a composite level of implementation level for the district.

District Literacy Evaluation Tool (DLET) Data – District A

DLET Component	Implementation Level Percentage
Assessing Students	94
Reading Curriculum/Core Literacy Instruction	81
Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI)	67
Students with Disabilities	79
Professional Learning	50
Systems	54
Family Engagement	75
Total Mean Composite	71

The District A team identified the following areas for improvement:

- Increase the use of student work samples to improve instructional decision-making
- Continue to strengthen teachers' capacity to differentiate instruction
- Incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in curricular units of study
- Strengthen instructional delivery through use of culturally relevant pedagogy
- Establish well-defined tiers of instruction and develop targeted intervention plans
- Improve use of reading data to inform IEP development
- Educate teachers in the use of AT and AEM
- Increase teachers' understanding of formal and informal methods for assessing reading development
- Maximize the efficacy of school-based data teams

District Literacy Evaluation Tool (DLET) Data – District B

DLET Component	Implementation Level Percentage
Assessing Students	78
Reading Curriculum/Core Literacy Instruction	57
Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI)	71
Students with Disabilities	71
Professional Learning	56
Systems	83
Family Engagement	67
Total Mean Composite	6

The District B team identified the following areas for improvement:

- Analyze data consistently and regularly to inform instruction and intervention
- Use evidence-based core curriculum and materials with greater consistency to differentiate instruction and increase access for students with disabilities
- Incorporate UDL principles in curricular units of study
- Conduct comprehensive and effective intervention planning
- Monitor students' response to intervention more frequently
- Improve use of reading data to inform IEP development
- Provide training and coaching in core literacy instruction
- Monitor fidelity of school-based data teams
- Engage parents in strategic and varied ways to support child's reading at home

Statewide Assessment (Smarter Balanced) Growth Data
Tracking the student growth rate in the statewide assessment from one year to the next is one way to measure improvement in reading achievement for students. As part of the State's accountability system, the CSDE sets individual growth targets for students each year based upon their performance on the previous year's assessment. Then the following year, each student's growth rate is calculated as well as the percent of the student's target that they achieved. The year-to-year growth rate percentage for both students with disabilities and non-special education students is calculated at the school and district level. Additionally the average percentage of achievement against the set targets is determined for each subgroup of students. These data can be tracked for each district; a summary for districts participating in Tier 3 SSIP interventions is provided below.

Cohort B Summary
The CSDE provided Tier 3 SSIP support to six districts during FFY 2016. The Smarter Balanced English/language arts (3rd grade) assessment data from the spring 2016 administration were used as the basis for the SSIP district selection process.

The students who were enrolled in third grade for the 2016 administration of the statewide assessment then participated in the fourth grade assessment during the 2017 administration. When the performance of students with disabilities as third graders is compared to their performance as fourth graders, all six of the Cohort B Tier 3 districts showed growth in achievement on the Smarter Balanced English/language arts assessment. The special education subgroup's growth percentage for five of the Cohort B Tier 3 districts was above the state average. Two of the districts had greater growth for the students with disabilities subgroup than the non-special education group. When looking at the average percentage of target achieved for the students with disabilities subgroup, five of the six districts were above the state average and two of the districts had achievement rates above 70 percent.

The third to fourth grade growth percentages for these students are represented here:

State of Connecticut
Special Education Growth Percentage = 25.20
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 40.30
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 51.4

District A
Special Education Growth Percentage = 42.90
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 33.80
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 50.90

District B
Special Education Growth Percentage = 41.5
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 43.10
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 70.70

District C
Special Education Growth Percentage = 23.70
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 35.10
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 52.70

District D
Special Education Growth Percentage = 26.10
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 40.80
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 55.10

District E
Special Education Growth Percentage = 32.00
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 44.40
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 68.50

District F
Special Education Growth Percentage = 41.50
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 39.30
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 71.30

Cohort C Summary
The CSDE provided Tier 3 SSIP support to five districts during FFY 2017. The Smarter Balanced English/language arts (3rd grade) assessment data from the spring 2017 administration were used as the basis for the SSIP district selection process.

The students who were enrolled in third grade for the 2017 administration of the statewide assessment then participated in the fourth grade assessment during the 2018 administration. When the performance of students with disabilities as third graders is compared to their performance as fourth graders, all five of the Cohort C Tier 3 districts showed growth in achievement on the Smarter Balanced English/language arts assessment. The special education subgroup's growth percentage for four of the Cohort C Tier 3 districts was above the state average. Three of the districts had greater growth for the students with disabilities subgroup than the non-special education group. When looking at the average percentage of target achieved for the students with disabilities subgroup, two of the five districts were above the state average and two of the districts had achievement rates above 60 percent.

The third to fourth grade growth percentages for these students are represented here:

State of Connecticut
Special Education Growth Percentage = 29.70
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 45.30
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 56.70

District G
Special Education Growth Percentage = 42.10
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 40.40
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 68.50

District H
Special Education Growth Percentage = 35.70
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 27.40
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 55.20

District I
Special Education Growth Percentage = 31.60
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 26.00
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 46.40

District J
Special Education Growth Percentage = 33.30
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 57.50
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 63.20

District K
Special Education Growth Percentage = 22.20
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 36.00
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 47.70

Cohort A Summary
The CSDE provided Tier 3 SSIP support to five districts during FFY 2018. The Smarter Balanced English/language arts (3rd grade) assessment data from the spring 2018 administration were used as the basis for the SSIP district selection process.

The students who were enrolled in third grade for the 2018 administration of the statewide assessment then participated in the fourth grade assessment during the 2019 administration. When the performance of students with disabilities as third graders is compared to their performance as fourth graders, all five of the Cohort A Tier 3 districts showed growth in achievement on the Smarter Balanced English/language arts assessment. The special education subgroup's growth percentage for four of the Cohort A Tier 3 districts was above the state average. When looking at the average percentage of target achieved for the students with disabilities subgroup, three of the five districts were above the state average and two of the districts had achievement rates above 60 percent.

The third to fourth grade growth percentages for these students are represented here:

State of Connecticut
Special Education Growth Percentage = 27.00
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 43.90
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 52.00

District L
Special Education Growth Percentage = 36.40
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 44.40
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 64.40

District M
Special Education Growth Percentage = 39.60
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 49.40
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 63.80

District N
Special Education Growth Percentage = 25.50
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 32.50
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 41.40

District O
Special Education Growth Percentage = 28.60
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 33.90
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 58.90

District P
Special Education Growth Percentage = 30.80
Non-Special Education Growth Percentage = 37.50
Average Percentage of Target Achieved for Special Education = 49.90

In conclusion, the data across cohorts represent that progress toward increasing student achievement in reading is occurring in the districts selected to participate in the SSIP Tier 3 technical assistance and professional learning activities. The 16 districts from the three different cohorts were originally selected for SSIP participation because the third grade students with disabilities in each district had the lowest achievement in reading for the cohort and the gap between the students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers was the highest in the cohort. The students with disabilities in 13 of these 16 districts had average growth rates higher than the state average, and in five of the districts, the growth rate for students with disabilities was greater than their nondisabled peers. These data support that the changes to early literacy instruction and intervention in the SSIP Tier 3 districts have had a positive effect on the reading achievement for students with disabilities in the state.

D. Data Quality Issues

For FFY 2018, the area that continued to be the biggest challenge is the analysis of district universal screening data. The State has developed a menu of approved assessments from which districts may select. There are currently six assessments on the list:

1. AIMSweb Tests of Early Literacy or Reading
2. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)
3. DIBELS Next and mCLASS
4. NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)
5. STAR Reading Assessment
6. i-Ready Diagnostic Reading Assessment

As there is not one uniform assessment used by districts throughout the state, it is difficult to incorporate data from these assessments in the district selection process and follow-up progress monitoring. Additionally, some districts do not have the capacity to easily disaggregate the data by subgroup, and different subtests may be administered in the different grade levels (K-3), which hinders cross-grade comparison. In fact, some districts use different assessments at different grade levels. As part of the Tier 2 technical assistance session, the CSDE asks districts to provide the previous year's universal screening data from the fall, winter, and spring administrations for SWD is grades K-3. These data are also requested as part of our progress monitoring of districts; however, the follow-up monitoring cycle is affected by the time it takes to provide technical assistance and for improvement activities to be implemented. As a result, the subsequent data reviewed for progress monitoring represents different points in time across two school years.

E. Progress Toward Achieving Intended Improvements

By the conclusion of the 2018-19 school year, the CSDE had completed a full review of the relevant data (i.e. number of SWDs in grade three taking the state assessment, District Performance Index [DPI] for SWDs in grade three, and the gap in performance between those SWDs and their typical peers) for all of the state's 170 districts. Over the course of Phase III of SSIP implementation, twenty percent of the state's districts had participated in SSIP-related activities at either or both the Tier 2 and Tier 3 levels of engagement with the CSDE. Three hundred district personnel completed the DLET and participated in district planning to address the early literacy needs of SWDs. By the conclusion of the 2018-19 school year, the SSIP Leadership Team began its deliberations around the need to revise its plan.
When the CSDE conducted its data analysis in 2019-2020, with the same cohort of districts that had been reviewed and engaged with during 2016-17, eight districts were identified for what would historically have been Tier 2 support. Of those eight districts, two had not engaged in SSIP-related activities in the past, five had participated previously at the Tier 2 level of engagement and the one remaining district had received Tier 3 support. The phenomenon of "repeating districts" further served to support the need to adjust the State's SSIP plan.

In the fall of 2019, the CSDE reached out to its Technical Assistance (TA) provider at the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) to facilitate multiple discussions for the purpose of: reviewing the history of the State's SSIP work, identifying the strengths and challenges associated with that work, proposing a plan for district engagement during 2019-20, identifying the consistent needs highlighted by districts over the past three years and considering options for the revision of the State's plan. Two full day, in-person meetings took place with the SSIP Leadership Team and the NCSI TA provider, with ongoing virtual communication continuing to date.

That process resulted in the identification of the following strengths associated with the CSDE's SSIP activities:
-   The SSIP data analysis process through a cohort model, which resulted in the review of data for all of the districts in the state over the course of three years;
-   The inclusion of the gap in performance between SWDs and their typical peers as part of that analysis, which resulted in engagement with districts that would not have occurred through previous monitoring efforts;
-   The use/effectiveness of the DLET instrument as a means of identifying district-level strengths and challenges relative to the performance of SWDs in the area of literacy;
-   The DLET facilitation process, which included broad stakeholder representation within districts, representation that districts frequently indicated would not otherwise have occurred;
-   District-level professional learning and technical assistance aimed at systems-level challenges; and

- District-level professional learning through IEP Rubric Training and the writing of standards-based IEP goals and objectives.

That process resulted in the identification of the following challenges associated with the CSDE's SSIP previous activities:
- The complication of bridging the activities for one cohort over two years which resulted in technical assistance and professional learning opportunities for two different cohorts occurring at the same time;
- The fact that the DLET reconciliation process most often lead to the identification of systems-level district need(s) (e.g., absence of sufficient tools for the assessment of reading performance and progress, inadequate or ineffective MTSS structures or processes, lack of established procedures or practices for the review and analysis of data);
- The difficulty in connecting systems-level support/intervention to teacher practices and student outcomes;
- Capacity issues related to instituting fidelity measures to evaluate the implementation of evidence-based practices; and
- Inconsistent tools to measure student-level data across districts.

That process resulted in the identification of the following consistent needs, expressed across districts over the past three years:
- Pairing SWDs with the most highly qualified teachers of reading instruction/ intervention;
- Addressing the professional learning needs of special education teachers in the area of reading instruction/intervention;
- The ability to pair assessment results to the appropriate intervention, effectively progress monitor and make adjustments as necessary; and
- The effective collaboration between general education and special education.

That process resulted in a revised plan for working with districts, identified through the data analysis process during 2019-20, to include:
- Completion of the DLET and the DLET reconciliation activity conducted with the two districts that had not engaged in SSIP-related activities with the CSDE in the past;
- Structured discussions between the CSDE and district personnel in the "repeating districts" focused on: a review of longitudinal data, a review of the DLET summary that had been generated three years ago, a district status report on improvement activities that that have taken place since the CSDE's engagement, and the district's identification of its ongoing challenges in meeting the early literacy needs of SWDs; and
- The CSDEs proposal for professional learning support during 2019-2020: IEP Rubric Training; the Development of Standards-Based IEP Goals and Objectives, and training in evidence-based structured literacy instruction/intervention (specifically: Wilson and Orton-Gillingham).

Note: At the time of submission, the CSDE had completed the DLET reconciliation activity with its two new districts and engaged in discussions with four of the six "repeating districts." That process, as well as the IEP Rubric and Goals and Objectives training, was interrupted by the COVID-19 crisis. Plans are still in place to provide the structured literacy training during the summer of 2020.

The work of the SSIP Leadership Team, facilitated by the NCSI TA provider, also resulted in a plan to reach out to stakeholders as a means of informing the CSDE's SSIP work moving forward. A questionnaire was developed and distributed to all of the districts who have engaged in either Tier 2 or Tier 3 level work over the past three years. District leaders/teams were asked to consider and provide feedback to the CSDE regarding: successful assessment practices, ongoing assessment challenges, perceived strengths and challenges in the writing of IEPs that result in reading progress for students, the challenges that hinder student access to the general education curriculum, the district's ability to pair the most challenged readers with the best qualified teachers of reading, the identification of positive/successful professional learning opportunities and practices, and the identification of ongoing professional learning needs/challenges.

Note: The COVID-19 crisis has hindered the return and analysis of some of these responses.

The responses received to date, however, have identified the following ongoing needs and challenges relative to the provision of early literacy instruction/intervention of SWDs:

- An abundance of assessments and a significant learning curve on the part of teachers regarding their use, purpose, and effectiveness in identifying students' needs;
- The effective use of assessment information that results in the appropriate identification of intervention(s) for individual students;
- The need to address foundational skills, particularly in schools that are implementing Readers and Writers Workshop;
- Explicit instruction in Phonemic Awareness and Phonics;
- The preparation of special education teachers in the teaching of reading; and
- The vulnerability of district-level coaching positions, subject to both budget cuts and re-assignment due to the need for student intervention.

Also, meetings aimed at securing additional stakeholder input on revisions to CT's SSIP plan had been scheduled with the SAC and the LEA Advisory Committee. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, both of those meetings will need to be re-scheduled.

Measurable improvements in the SIMR in relation to targets

The State Identified Measurable Result (SIMR) for the Connecticut State Department of Education's State Systemic Improvement Plan is to increase the reading performance of all third-grade students with disabilities (SWD) statewide, as measured by Connecticut's English Language Arts (ELA) Performance Index. The methodology for calculating the ELA Performance

Index starts by taking the scale score on the statewide ELA assessments: the Smarter Balanced (SB) Assessment and the Connecticut Alternate Assessment (CTAA), and converting that scale score into an appropriate index point value that ranges from 0 to 110. The ELA Performance Index is then calculated by averaging the index points earned by all participating third grade students with disabilities.

SIMR Data

FFY 2013 SIMR Data = 33.7
Target = Baseline

FFY 2014 SIMR Data = 50.1
Target = New Baseline

FFY 2015 SIMR Data = 51.4
Target = 50.1
Number of Students = 4,897

FFY 2016 SIMR Data = 50.2
Target = 50.3
Number of Students = 5,088

FFY 2017 SIMR Data = 51.5
SIMR Target = 50.7
Number of Students = 5,344

FFY 2018 SIMR Data = 51.5
SIMR Target = 51.1
Number of Students = 5,564

Connecticut met its FFY 2018 SIMR target.

The FFY 2018 SIMR data continue to show the same achievement rate for SWD (51.5) as FFY 2017.

The number of SWD included in the SIMR data analysis has increased by 220 when compared to FFY 2017 and by 667 since FFY 2015.

Further analysis of the SIMR trend data from the last five years shows that the trend of a decrease in the gap in performance between SWD and their typical peers did not continue for FFY 2018.

Gap between SWD and Not SWD for FFY 2014 = 22

Gap between SWD and Not SWD for FFY 2015 = 21.4

Gap between SWD and Not SWD for FFY 2016 = 21.3

Gap between SWD and Not SWD for FFY 2017 = 21.2

Gap between SWD and Not SWD for FFY 2018 = 21.7

After the consideration of stakeholder input, the CSDE has set the state's FFY 2019 SIMR Target.

FFY 2019 SIMR Target = 51.5

An increase in the target by 0.4 for FFY 2019 is consistent with the change from FFY 2016 to FFY 2017 and from FFY 2017 to FFY 2018.

F. Plans for Next Year

As a result of the SSIP Leadership Team's identification of the need to revise the manner in which the State provides SSIP support, the CSDE is committed to a partnership with Dr. Michael Coyne and Dr. Devin Kearns of the University of Connecticut (UCONN) to deliver SSIP supports to Connecticut's school districts.   This partnership would involve the extensive training of district/school-level staff in the implementation of Data-Based Individualization (DBI). In collaboration with the CSDE, UCONN personnel would additionally be responsible for: the development and implementation of an SSIP program evaluation, establishing a means for student-level data collection, the provision of in-district coaches, and the development of a plan to monitor the fidelity of implementation.

DBI is:
- a research-based support system tested successfully over the last thirty years;
- a way to provide support to students with serious academic difficulty in reading; and
- a set of practices that includes:
    - implementing research-based programs;
    - collecting progress-monitoring data; and
    - adapting instruction based on student progress.

DBI is a way of providing Tier 3 support. It is used to help students, including SWDs, who have not responded to (a) primary prevention (Tier 1) general education classroom instruction and (b) secondary prevention (Tier 2) instruction. DBI can be used within or outside of special education. It requires a school DBI team to work together to make decisions about student needs.   It also requires that members of the team complete tasks between team meetings. School teams require significant support to become fluent with the processes. Experts, including coaches, provide focused professional development and user-friendly resources to assist schools in the implementation of DBI. Professional development is provide for school-level instructional coaches as well as building and district leaders.

Discussions to date with the State's UCONN partners have included consideration of: the data analysis necessary to identify potential participating districts/schools; the manner in which those districts/schools would be recruited to engage in this work; the means of identifying district/school readiness for participation in this work, and a proposed timeline for rolling out these efforts.

At the time of submission, the CSDE had not yet entered into a contract with UCONN to secure this partnership, but that is anticipated to happen in the very near future.

Finally, the State has benefitted from both the virtual and in-person technical assistance opportunities provided by the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) and appreciates this additional support. The CSDE plans to continue its involvement in two of the new NCSI collaboratives (Evidence-based Practices and Results-based Accountability) to engage with other states and TA providers in an effort to best support the SSIP and the reading achievement of students with disabilities.