

COMPONENT 2: INFRASTRUCTURE ANALYSIS

2.A. A description of how the State 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 results for students with disabilities.

A SSIP workgroup was developed to complete the investigative work of the SSIP and translate collaborative discussions into outcomes for the plan. The workgroup members include the State Special Education Director, the Data Manager for the Office of Special Services, the SPP/APR Coordinator, the Federal Programs Coordinator, the Special Purpose Private School Programs Coordinator, and the Special Education/General Education Liaison. The role of the liaison is to actively participate and engage in the development of activities within the Learning Systems Teams (Standards and Instructional Support Team and School Improvement Team), the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG), and the State Systemic Improvement Plan.

The SSIP workgroup sought out additional Maine DOE personnel including content specialists from the Standards and Instructional Support team, focus school coaches from the School Improvement team, and the SPDG coordinator to develop an understanding of initiative mission, outcomes and activities. The SSIP Infrastructure Analysis Template was used to prompt investigative questions about the infrastructure components, the strengths of the initiative and opportunities for improvement that the SSIP might leverage. This information was brought back to the SSIP workgroup where we discussed our understanding of what these teams are doing and experiences with these activities as they are occurring in the field.

Education Evolving: Maine's Plan for Putting Learners First is the Maine DOE strategic plan, unveiled in January, 2012. The plan laid the framework within which Maine's model of proficiency-based education is being implemented. We learned of activities happening within these initiatives designed to support educators in utilizing well-established evidence based practices of improved proficiency. These practices include 1) access to the general education curriculum; 2) aligned curriculum and assessment; and 3) universal designs for learning, including multiple pathways for learning and demonstration of knowledge. We looked for alignment of these initiatives with activities the Maine DOE Office of Special Services (OSS) currently provides, attempts to provide, or identifies it needs to provide but is unable due to staffing or another barrier. Further, we looked for alignment of activities within all Maine DOE teams, including within the Office of Special Services, that addressed or may address root causes of poor proficiency that were identified by our stakeholders group or during SSIP workgroup discussions.

An infrastructure chart was constructed to provide clarity on the connections among various initiatives (see Appendix B, Label 1, page 40). This flow chart was necessary to bring all members of the workgroup to a place of mutual understanding. A pleasant challenge we faced is the fact that Maine DOE initiatives have been in the process of de-siloing their practices over the last two years creating overlap and cross team activity.

We brought this tool and others that broke down and defined the activities within Maine DOE to the stakeholders at the SSIP stakeholder meeting September 23, 2014. The group reviewed the SSIP work completed to date, including the infrastructure analysis, and identified and prioritized possible SSIP improvement strategies in light of the existing State infrastructure (see Appendix A, Label 4, page 33).

When discussing local education agencies, Maine DOE and this SSIP refer to school districts as school administrative units (SAUs).

2.B. A description of how the State's systems infrastructure (e.g., governance, fiscal, quality standards, professional development, data, technical assistance, and accountability/monitoring).

The **Maine DOE Leadership Team** is made up of the Chief Academic Officer, the Office of Special Services, Data and

Technology, fiscal, and communications. The team oversees initiatives that involve members across divisions and sub-teams within the Maine DOE.

Leadership Team			
Chief Academic Officer, Office of Special Services (OSS), Data and Technology, Fiscal, Communications			
Learning Systems Team (LST): Standards and Instructional Support	Learning Systems Team (LST): School Improvement	State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)	State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)

The **Learning System Team** manages several teams that participate in initiatives that cross teams and areas of expertise. The **Standards and Instructional Support Team** includes:

- 1) Standards and Assessment: supporting teachers and their school teams in using evidence based teaching strategies. These include the Literacy for ME (<http://www.maine.gov/doe/literacy-for-me/>) and STEM (<http://www.maine.gov/doe/stem/>) initiatives, and school administrative unit (SAU) report cards with support from content specialists for those schools receiving grades of D or F (<http://www.maine.gov/doe/schoolreportcards/resources/index.html>).
- 2) Regional Representatives: providing a point of contact for SAUs within their superintendent regions.
- 3) General Education/Special Education Liaison: is an educator with expertise in special education practices. This individual is a member of the Standards and Instructional Support Team.

The **School Improvement Team** supports those schools with the greatest gaps in proficiency between groups of students (focus schools) and schools with low overall performance in proficiency (priority schools). Maine’s differentiated accountability system (<http://www.maine.gov/doe/accountability/documents/approved-system-interventions.pdf>) identifies the professional development available to all schools, including those that do not fall into the priority and focus school categories and are eligible for Title I funding: schools in the monitor, progressing, and meeting categories. Most closely aligned with the needs of students with disabilities, focus schools receive support through the coaching model, using the Indistar system of leadership development. Coaches facilitate SAUs self-assessment and use of data for effective improvement planning and implementation of the plan. Target indicators were created for the Indistar program with the support of underlying evidence in the form of white papers for effective self-selection by the SAUs.

Maine requires each SAU to have a system of measuring **educator effectiveness** with at least 20% of the measure based on achievement of students.

Maine students will be graduating beginning in 2018 with a standards based diploma, aligned with **proficiency-based education** practices required by Maine legislation. Students will be required to meet standards in eight content areas to receive a high school diploma. Work in this area addresses the shift to demonstration of proficiency in content standards, putting achievement of standards behind the diploma. Content specialists are supporting schools in the implementation of the revised Maine Learning Results which incorporate the Common Core State Standards for mathematics and English language arts. The General Education/Special Education Liaison supports the content specialists and schools in universal designs for learning, multiple pathways for demonstration of proficiency, and standards-aligned IEP goal development.

The **Office of Special Services (OSS)** implements the **State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)**. The work funded by this grant has an established system and structure of professional development and technical assistance. The SPDG encompasses five goals, three of which specifically align with the measurable result of the SSIP:

- 1) improving teachers’ skill sets (goal 1),

- 2) improving the use of data to inform placement decisions (goal 2), and
- 3) improving IEP goal alignment with standards and improving inclusive practices (goal 3).

All goals under the SPDG use a coaching model as the implementation driver that supports the regional leaders in developing their resources and skills for their SAUs. Coaches are professionals in the field, who may already fill a coaching role, or may be department specialists depending on the leader team's focus and the region's improvement plan. Coaches are trained to provide evidence based practices in the goal areas, including observational and data feedback. Content specialists support regional leader teams on standards-aligned instruction.

The **State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)** will leverage the existing de-siloing of teams to maximize the effectiveness of the professional development and support being provided, thus improving outcomes for all students.

Many other facets of the Maine DOE infrastructure impact functions of the general supervision system and daily operations of SAUs. Yearly **monitoring** of public school special education programs occurs as part of the general supervision system. This system of accountability includes compliance and outcomes review. Quality standards are integrated into the corrective action plans developed by the State and implemented by SAUs determined to be out of compliance in the provision of a free and appropriate public education. By developing the action plans SAUs implement and complete the State is assured the SAUs have corrected individual instances of noncompliance and are demonstrating systemic improvement in practice. Specific areas of need, such as effective postsecondary transition planning and using data and facilitated discussions when determining least restrictive environment are woven into professional development that varies according to the needs of the SAU.

The **Maine DOE's Data Warehouse** provides SAUs, community members, families and other interested parties quick and easy access to data regarding SAUs and the outcomes for their students. The data is available to inform the work of educators to improve those student outcomes. It is an equally powerful tool for parents and students who want to find out how their local schools are performing and how their performance compares to the performance of other Maine schools, districts, and the entire State. The Data Warehouse is divided into three primary sections: Snapshots, Data Tables, and Growth Model.

Snapshots offer a graphical look at data on enrollment, dropout and graduation rates, standardized test performance, school spending, staff salaries and years of experience, student discipline, special education services and more. Data tables offer numerical information about discipline, dropout and graduation rates, English learners, enrollment, finance, standardized test performance, students' special education status, student attendance and free and reduced-price lunch eligibility. The growth model offers a graphical and numerical look at how student achievement has changed from year to year at an individual school, in a particular district or in the entire State of Maine.

The **Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI)** and the comprehensive integration of technology was addressed in *Education Evolving*, Maine's strategic plan, recognizing the longstanding practice of technology supporting learning in Maine. MLTI, begun a decade ago, has provided one-to-one computing in education. This initiative continues to address the many opportunities for technology to support and improve learner outcomes. A comprehensive State plan for technology integration has been developed. The Maine DOE developed the plan with input from Maine's schools and school districts, and in collaboration with IT personnel and educators across the State. The outcome of this plan is for information and instructional technologies in Maine to be supporting instructional practice and efficient school system operations (*Education Evolving*, http://www.maine.gov/doe/plan/education_evolving/cpa5.html#cpa5-3).

The vision of Maine DOE's **fiscal** responsibility to its SAUs was described in Maine DOE's Strategic Plan (*Education Evolving*, http://www.maine.gov/doe/plan/education_evolving/cpa5.html#cpa5-2). The State's Medicaid program, MaineCare, was identified as a critical partner in identifying new ways to ensure that schools and health care providers have clear policies to follow in the use of MaineCare funding for health services provided in schools. Maine Governor LePage's zero-based budget initiative requiring state agencies to review their practices to identify efficient procedures and improved service models provided an opportunity for the Maine DOE to identify a goal in the plan of adequately and effectively supporting Maine's schools. Cross team work is an example of this process. Similarly, individual school districts face choices in spending and we

see variation in how districts choose to dedicate their funds. While some districts earmark substantial dollars to professional development, others put little or no money aside for training or the ability to be available for training. Some expenditures are covered through what a district proposes to spend with IDEA Part B local entitlement. However, local control is strong in Maine's school districts. Maine DOE is challenged with supporting districts in prioritizing how they may choose to spend their professional development funds.

Maine DOE **communication network** provides information to the citizens of Maine in a variety of ways. Maine DOE communicates with the field and the community via regular Commissioner's Updates. These emails originate from the Maine DOE newsroom and inform members of the listserv on current events within the Maine DOE and the field of education as it relates to Maine. "News and Views", notices and reporting requirements, administrative letters, publications, and even a Twitter feed are all communicated to the field as participants choose to subscribe via e-mail. Citizens can also visit the Maine DOE Newsroom anytime at <http://mainedoeneews.net/> to read about Maine DOE activities or sign on to the listserv.

All professional development opportunities sponsored by or provided through the Maine DOE are posted on the Maine DOE Professional Development Calendar at <http://www.maine.gov/doe/calendar/>. Visitors can read about each of the professional development sessions.

There are multiple forms of communication and many resources which educators, students, families and community members can access through the State's website and learn what is happening with the various Maine DOE initiatives (e.g. proficiency-based education, educator effectiveness, differentiated accountability, Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI), state personnel development grant (SPDG)). These resources offer, among other things, evidence-based tools with instructions for use, recorded trainings accessible at any time and live trainings to attend in areas of need or interest. Maine DOE teams communicate about activities and the results of these activities through the Commissioner's Updates and can refer the field back to information that is then stored in archives.

2.C. A description of the current strengths, the extent the systems are coordinated, and areas for improvement within and across the systems.

To consider the strengths and challenges of the existing infrastructure in connection with the development of the SSIP, we detailed each team and each initiative, identifying the priority and what the initiative had to offer our systemic improvement plan. We also pointed out the challenges each priority would bring to the plan's success (see Appendix B, Label 2, page 41).

Strengths in the system begin with the overall mechanisms for communication which, while not specifically outlined in the comparison, provide a reliable and predictable method of information sharing. SAUs know where and how to get information and have come to expect updates to arrive through the Maine DOE Newsroom. The Governor's and Commissioner's Initiatives are another strength of the system because of the emphasis on accountability and improved results for all students. Several initiatives fall under this umbrella, including the school report cards (A-F schools), transparency and accountability through the Data Warehouse, and the development of the Strategic Plan. The challenges are competition for time, fiscal resources, and staff focus given the competing demands on the SEA and SAUs.

At this point in our investigation and analyses for the SSIP, stakeholders identified math proficiency for students with disabilities as the content area requiring the most support, and outcomes for students with disabilities in grade 3-8 in math as the State-identified Measurable Result (SiMR). State priorities of Standards and Assessment and School Improvement are most directly related to the SiMR. Content specialists provide technical assistance and professional development to schools identified using various measures including proficiency on state-wide assessments as well as progress in moving towards proficiency. Focus school coaches provide specific, differentiated support to schools with a within-school gap between student sub-groups, with the goal of increasing demonstration of proficiency. Challenges that exist in these initiatives include perceptions and perspectives of schools and SAUs identified as having needs, and the ability of these very schools to shoulder additional activities. These insights have informed how we have considered implementation of the SSIP. The SSIP is an opportunity for the needs of students with disabilities to be the focus of interventions in schools and SAUs currently receiving support or funds from the Maine DOE for various initiatives. In addition, schools and SAUs not currently receiving or eligible

to receive intervention in given initiatives (i.e., schools must be designated Title I in order to be identified as a focus school or priority school and receive that support) could receive support through the SSIP.

Work of the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) is also well aligned to the State-identified Measurable Result. With goals including improving teachers' skill sets, improving inclusive practices, improving use of data to inform placement decisions and improving IEP goal alignment with learning standards, the outcomes of the SSIP benefit from SPDG work. In addition, the implementation of SPDG goals uses an established system and structure of professional development that could be utilized. Timing of the SPDG is a challenge, given that the current SPDG is entering the last year of the five year grant. SSIP activities will need to be written into a future SPDG grant.

Proficiency Based Education (PBE) implements many activities both independent of and woven into SPDG work addressing aligned IEPs. The Maine legislature enacted into law proficiency-based diploma standards (Title 20-A, Part 3, Chapter 207-A, Subchapter 3, Section 4722-A), the requirement that all Maine students will meet standards in eight content areas to receive a high school diploma beginning in 2018. Many SAUs have applied for, and been awarded, extensions to the proficiency based diploma, as far out as 2020. In addition, statute requires SAUs to provide multiple pathways of learning. The professional development provided around PBE is substantial in order to support SAUs in their implementation of these laws. For more information on getting to proficiency, see <http://maine.gov/doe/proficiency/index.html>. Challenges exist with successful implementation of PBE. How do students with disabilities gain greater, and equitable, access to the general curriculum? How will all students graduate if schools do not have or develop adequate supports for students to access and demonstrate proficiency on the standards? Potential solutions to these challenges are connected to those SPDG activities addressing inclusive education and differentiated instruction.

The components of our infrastructure that facilitate the use of quality practices include initiatives that utilize implementation teams to support the implementation, sustainability, and scale-up of usable interventions. The strongest examples of the use of implementation teams include the work organized through the goals of SPDG and focus school work occurring within the School Improvement Team. Both of these initiatives establish implementation teams at the level receiving the support. For focus school work the implementation team is at the building level, and occasionally the district level. With SPDG goal work the implementation team is at the district level and regional level. Both of these initiatives also have implementation teams at the state level. Communication amongst the State, regions, districts and buildings occur between the implementation teams responsible for the drivers at that level. The implementation team is accountable for developing a support system designed to address organizational and systemic issues as they arise and achieve positive results.

Stakeholders also identified components of our infrastructure that inhibit the use of quality practices (see Appendix A, Label 4, page 33). These included barriers inhibiting the information the SEA provides to the field regarding math resources for special education teachers and inclusionary practices for general education teachers from reaching the teachers that need it. Barriers are preventing buildings and districts from developing and implementing strong tiered support systems (e.g., Response to Intervention, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) so that there is wide variation around the State in the quality of these systems from district to district, and building to building.

The relevant areas for improvement within and across the systems in relation to the SiMR include an aligned practice of coaching that is targeted specifically to the needs of special education teachers and general education teachers as they relate to special education students. Special education students are general education students first. Their general education teachers are in need of inclusive teaching strategies to successfully educate these students in their classrooms to the fullest extent possible. These students bring with them and their education a disability in an academic, functional, or developmental area that is substantially impacting their progress in content areas, particularly math. Their special education teachers are in need of instructional strategies for math that exploit areas of strength and support areas of need. Coaching is an evidence-based training practice that has been shown to have the highest training outcomes for knowledge of content, skill implementation, and classroom application when paired with administrative support and data feedback (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Schools will receive coaching in areas that they identify as barriers impacting proficiency in math for students with disabilities. These

barriers may include development of inclusive teaching strategies for general educators and a lack of understanding of math instructional practices by special educators.

Coaching is currently being used as an intervention strategy in the SPDG and School Improvement Team's focus school work. In both of these initiatives, implementation teams complete a self-assessment to identify the health of the building or district related to indicators of effective practices at that level. The team develops an action plan based around indicators identified as needed by the building or district. In the case of focus school action plans, these indicators are part of the Indistar program and supported by evidence citing the effectiveness of the practice. The SSIP workgroup has engaged the Northeast Comprehensive Center with the consideration of using Dirigo Star, Maine's version of Indistar, as well as the development of the SSIP coaching model. The breadth and depth with which coaching practices can address the entire process of an implementation team, from self-assessment to collection of data to track progress can be expanded through the SSIP to address the needs currently not being met as determined by data, infrastructure analysis, and stakeholder input.

2.D. A description of current State-level improvement plans and initiatives, including special and general education improvement plans and initiatives and the extent to which they are aligned, and how they are, or could be, integrated.

The process followed with regard to the general and special education initiatives, grants, or SEA-wide activities that impact the capacity of local programs and schools with which the SEA currently engages to improve results for all students, including students with disabilities, was to identify those initiatives and team leaders, requesting a contact from that initiative to participate in and inform the development of the SSIP. These contacts met with the SSIP coordinator early in the process to provide a foundational understanding of the activities of the team and specific initiatives. These contacts continued as participants at the stakeholders meetings to inform the membership as they worked through the data, formulated hypotheses and provided qualitative data and practical experiences.

Opportunities for alignment of various State initiatives currently exist and are being actively implemented. SPDG goals align with outcomes identified for focus schools. Schools and districts access content specialists to achieve their professional development goals. Content specialists provide some professional development related to proficiency-based education and inclusive teaching strategies by leveraging activities implemented through SPDG. This occurs with open communication amongst team members and cross-collaboration on effective and efficient delivery of information to the field. SEA staff are an available resource and their ability to contribute to relevant activities is only inhibited by limitations of time. Expanding staff resources with necessary knowledge and experience will greatly increase access to professional development provided by the SEA.

In summary, the relative areas of strength within and across systems include general education and special education initiatives and activities that have been actively moving away from their silos of practice for several years. This de-siloing of teams embodies all the reform initiatives addressing all students, including students with disabilities. Implementing PBE, differentiated accountability system of supports, educator effectiveness, and the several other educational reforms Maine has initiated could not occur with teams working on their own. Fast forward to professional development being delivered to SAUs in Maine in 2015, and one will find activities that may focus on a subset of students but have intended outcomes for all students. Cross-collaboration and cross-communication between and among teams ensure all students are considered as general education students first. Expectations are high for all students. The supports their teachers and educational leaders need to meet those high expectations are provided in a multitude of ways and are communicated to the field on a regular basis.

2.E. The State provided baseline data and targets that are measurable and rigorous (expressed as percentages) for each of the five years from FFY 2014 through FFY 2018, with the FFY 2018 target reflecting measurable improvement over the FFY 2013 baseline data.

See Baseline and Targets section of Indicator 17: State Systemic Improvement Plan.

2.F. A description of stakeholder involvement in the analysis of the State's infrastructure.

At the July 23, 2014 stakeholder's meeting, members decided to focus on math for students with disabilities in grades 3-8 given the data showing downward trends across all grades in math and qualitative and quantitative data pointing to root causes implicating teacher preparedness and instructional strategies, among others (see Appendix A, Label 4, page 33). At this same meeting the broad SEA infrastructure overview was shared with stakeholders. Members then brainstormed local initiatives that aligned with the selected measurable result, and which State-level initiatives might offer evidence-based improvement strategies that would support positive outcomes on the measurable result.

In-depth infrastructure analysis was shared at the next stakeholders meeting September 23, 2014, to further inform the conversation addressing improvement strategies that are evidence-based and may align with State priorities. Stakeholders reconsidered old information and integrated new information to re-assess root causes of decreased proficiency in math. Overarching root causes were identified. Stakeholders discussed improvement strategies that connected to identified root causes. In addition, stakeholders brainstormed priorities of and for the State, identifying patterns in these priorities as they impacted selection of improvement strategies. Given all the data and analysis to date, stakeholders used a collaborative problem solving approach to brainstorm possible implementation methods of the plan that would support positive outcomes on the measurable result.