

State Data Use Spotlight: North Carolina

Challenge: How do we support local education agencies in using the results generated from a root-cause analysis to select targeted improvement strategies?

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) is focused on improving the 5-year graduation rates for all students with disabilities. To make progress toward the state-identified measurable result (SIMR), the state recognized that a single evidence-based practice (EBP) would not address the diverse needs of all the local entities across the state. This state spotlight highlights the process the NCDPI Exceptional Children Division (ECD) implemented to support local education agencies (LEAs) in using data to select targeted interventions specific to increasing the 5-year graduation rate for all students with disabilities.

State Context

In 2014, North Carolina included multiple goals in the school board's plan that prioritized increasing graduation rates with a regular diploma for all students. As a result of the root-cause analysis conducted during Phase I of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), it was clear to stakeholders that students with disabilities required additional supports and instruction, which sometimes resulted in extended time needed to meet the requirements for a regular diploma compared with nondisabled peers. Therefore, North Carolina's Part B SIMR focuses on increasing the 5-year graduation rate for students with individualized education programs (IEPs). The SIMR states, "In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2014, the 5-year adjusted cohort graduation rate among students with IEPs was 69.65%. By FFY 2018, NCDPI aims to increase the number of students with disabilities who graduate within 5 years of entering ninth grade to 76.12%." A root-cause analysis also revealed a complex set of influences to the graduation rate that varied as a function of local context. Thus, the state recognized that if it wanted to make progress toward the SIMR, they could not select just one EBP to focus on for the whole state; implementation had to be specific to LEA context.

Public School Facts: North Carolina

Districts: 274
Schools: 2,592
Students: 1,518,444
Students with IEPs: 199,609

Strategies for Success

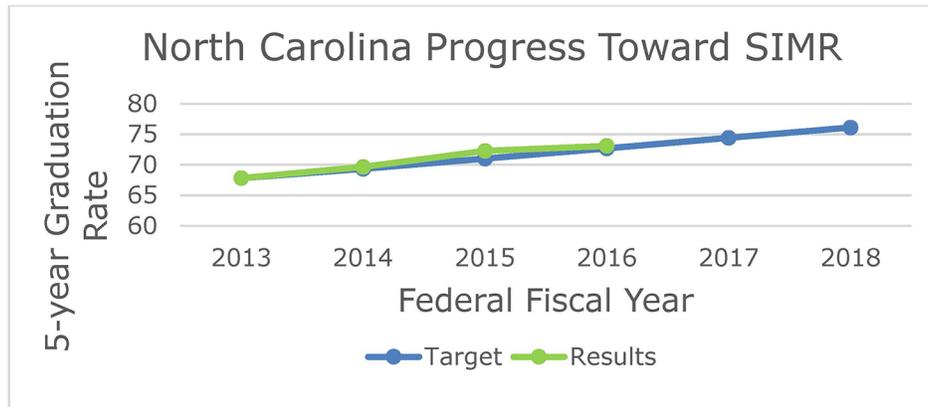
North Carolina implemented the following strategies to improve LEA's capacity to improve local graduation rates for students with disabilities:

- *Developed an LEA self-assessment (LEASA).* The state created the LEASA to engage LEAs with initiatives. For 1.5 years, the state piloted the LEASA and gathered stakeholders' feedback through an iterative process to make changes. The LEASA was administered statewide in fall 2015. It allows LEAs to analyze data, identify potential problem areas, and determine priorities.
- *Offered training and support to LEAs.* During quarterly regional meetings, the state provided coaching on the rationale for using the LEASA, presented strategies for analyzing the data and selecting priorities, and modeled completion of the LEASA. Regional coaches met with LEA staff monthly to review data from the LEASA and to develop implementation local plans.
- *Analyzed LEASA results.* ECD staff reviewed the LEASAs using a standard rubric to determine an appropriate tiered system of providing technical assistance and professional development. ECD provided all LEAs with a universal level of support. Using the data from the rubrics, ECD grouped LEAs to provide targeted support around particular topics or processes, and more intensive support to those LEAs that appeared to have the greatest number of barriers to implementing improvement plans.
- *Built a statewide professional learning calendar.* The SSIP team analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data for development of a universal professional learning calendar. The calendar was designed by identifying commonly occurring needs reflected in the critical components of the LEASA and recommendations for support made during the ECD staff reviews (see table).

Needs Identified by NC LEAs	
Topic	% of LEAs
Progress monitoring	98.17%
Specially designed instruction	93.75%
Implementation planning	92.28%
Problem solving	91.91%
IEP implementation	90.80%
EBPs	88.97%
IEP development	81.32%

Impact of Strategies

The most noticeable impact of using the LEASA has been the shift in mind-set around the use of the tool. LEAs have taken ownership of the self-assessment tool, viewing it as a strategy to acknowledge and communicate the need to increase graduation rates at the local level. The state has reported growth in the 5-year graduation rate that exceeded the expected targets 2 years after the implementation of the LEASA; far sooner than ECD predicted (see graph).



Recommendations for States Facing Similar Challenges

- Engage all stakeholder groups early and continually in the development and implementation of a self-assessment tool.
- Consider the readiness of each LEA to engage with a self-assessment tool and deliver training around the purpose and use.
- Build the trust of LEA staff in the self-assessment process in order to demonstrate that the purpose of the tool is not evaluative but rather a process to provide LEAs with the essential supports they identified.
- Communicate consistent and clear messages to all stakeholders throughout the process regarding the purpose and use of the tool.

Available Resources

- National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI), Technical Assistance State Facilitators (Find your state on the map [here](#))
- NCSI Data Use Team Technical Assistance Support (Contact: Kristin Ruedel at kruedel@air.org)
- North Carolina LEA *Self-Assessment and Continuous Improvement Process Guidance Manual*
- The National Implementation Research Network’s Active Implementation [Hub](#)

About this resource: This resource was developed by members of the NCSI Data Use Service Area Team, including Kristin Ruedel (AIR), Gena Nelson (AIR), Tessie Bailey (AIR), and Katherine Bradley-Black (WestEd), and in collaboration with Matt Hoskins, Data Analyst and Implementation Specialist (NCDPI, ECD), and Bill Hussey, Director (NCDPI, ECD). The content was developed under cooperative agreement number #H326R140006 (NCSI) from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government. Project officers: Perry Williams and Shedeh Hajghassemali.