

Each **Child**
Means
Each **Child**

**Ohio's Plan to Improve Learning
Experiences and Outcomes for
Students with Disabilities**



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Executive Summary

Each Child Means Each Child: Ohio's Plan to Improve Learning Experiences and Outcomes for Students with Disabilities offers recommendations, tactics and action steps to ensure students with disabilities benefit from the vision and core principles heralded in Ohio's strategic plan for education, [Each Child, Our Future](#).

School and district data show consistent gaps in academic performance and graduation rates of students with disabilities compared to their nondisabled peers:

- Students with disabilities are almost three times less likely to enter kindergarten demonstrating readiness;
- Fewer than one-third of Ohio's students with disabilities are proficient on the third grade English language arts assessment;
- On the state English language arts assessment, 28.9% of students with disabilities scored proficient or better as compared to 64.6% for all students.

Like national trends, Ohio's students with disabilities are more likely to experience exclusionary discipline practices than their peers who do not have disabilities.

Ohio is committed to meeting the needs of the whole child, which is an opportunity to ensure positive and meaningful educational experiences for students with disabilities that will lead to academic and postsecondary success. This plan responds to Ohio's need to address these staggering statistics to ensure each student is successful.

Ohio's Philosophy of Change to Support Students with Disabilities

Thanks to the aspirational vision of *Each Child, Our Future*, Ohio is uniquely positioned to improve the learning experiences and outcomes for each child in Ohio. *Each Child Means Each Child* provides a road map to ensuring students with disabilities will receive the education and services necessary for success. A positive impact on student achievement is attainable when there is a committed focus on each child's individual needs. Every Ohioan, including parents, educators and community members, must believe success for all students is achievable.

Ohio's philosophy of change, as reflected in this plan, evolved from the input of thousands of stakeholders, including parents, students, educators and community members who conveyed a need for a proactive approach to educating students with disabilities. From this input evolved a series of focus areas, recommendations, tactics and action steps. The main recommendations are as follows:

- **Getting to the Problem Early: Development and Implementation of a Statewide Model for an Integrated Multi-Tiered System of Support:** The goal of this conceptualization will be to intervene early to assist students with learning or behavioral needs. Experts at the state and regional levels will collaborate with educators and district leaders to build this model. Districts will be encouraged to adopt the model, which will include reinforcing the development of high-quality core instruction and appropriate preventative methods based on individual student data.
- **Building Educators' and Systemwide Capacity: Promotion of Ongoing Job-Embedded Professional Learning:** Based on the results of a [statewide survey](#) and [follow-up focus groups with educators around the state](#), the Department learned there is a need for educators and district leaders to increase their skills and knowledge in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

- **Educating for Living a Good Life: Advancement of Postsecondary Learning Experiences and Outcomes:** This focus area has an emphasis on postsecondary planning to assist students with disabilities in preparation for postsecondary education, successful employment and independent living. Such an intentional, systematic approach to postsecondary transition planning will help families, communities and districts and identify and provide services and supports for students with disabilities to be successful after high school.

Summary

Ohio is moving ambitiously toward an educational model driven by inclusive leadership, high-quality instruction and intentional postsecondary transition planning. The attainment of this work will require a collective effort by all educators, parents and community members. This proactive approach is expected to improve achievement and learning outcomes for Ohio's students with disabilities.

The time is now for a collective mind shift in Ohio's beliefs and actions regarding students with disabilities that will result in a change in practice reflective of the idea that all students can and are expected to reach higher standards and levels of achievement.

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Introduction

Charged by Ohio's superintendent of public instruction, the Office for Exceptional Children, in collaboration with the offices of Early Learning and School Readiness and Integrated Student Supports and the Center for Teaching and Learning, stakeholders and partner groups developed *Each Child Means Each Child* to effectively promote and realize the vision of *Each Child, Our Future* for Ohio's students with disabilities.

Stakeholders included approximately 7,000 educators who [provided input through an online survey](#) and [virtual focus groups](#). More than 150 parent and family members participated in family town hall meetings facilitated by the Office for Exceptional Children held in various locations throughout the state. Additionally, 33 students with disabilities throughout Ohio provided their experiences through [direct student interviews](#). A [steering committee](#) and subsequent work groups consisting of more than 100 partners from within Ohio's education system further assisted in the development of the recommendations contained in the plan.

Work groups were developed around four central themes:

- Literacy;
- Disproportionality;
- Postsecondary Outcomes and Graduation; and
- Inclusive Leadership and Instructional Practices.

These work groups were facilitated by a national expert in special education. Each work group consisted of educators, disability advocacy organization representatives, parent group members and other key partners with expertise in the education of students with disabilities. These groups examined pertinent research and data, as well as information gathered from the focus groups, family town hall meetings and student interviews.

Each Child Means Each Child: Ohio's Plan to Improve Learning Experiences and Outcomes for Students with Disabilities is the outcome of the collective efforts and reports of all those involved. It offers a set of robust recommendations, tactics and action steps to ensure students with disabilities benefit from the vision and core principles heralded in Ohio's strategic plan for education, *Each Child, Our Future*. This vision states:

In Ohio, each child is *challenged* to discover and learn, *prepared* to pursue a fulfilling post-high school path and *empowered* to become a resilient, lifelong learner who contributes to society.

Interspersed throughout this plan is a story arc that follows two students with disabilities, Sophia and Ben, through their own respective educational experiences.

Both students attended different districts of approximately the same size and type. District A, which Sophia attended, identified 20% of its students as having disabilities. District B, which Ben attended, identified 11% of its students as having disabilities. Their journeys start in kindergarten.

Continue reading to learn about Sophia and Ben's educational experiences.



Three core principles of equity, partnerships and quality schools shaped the vision of *Each Child, Our Future* and mirror the challenges experienced by many of Ohio's students with disabilities:

Sophia's Story

Sophia's struggles with learning began in kindergarten. Her teacher noticed Sophia had a difficult time learning the alphabet and remembering the letter names. The building where Sophia attended did not have a systematic way of referring students for interventions, and Sophia was promoted each year despite not being able to read.



Equity—Ohio's greatest challenge remains equity in educational achievement for each child. The path to equity begins with a deep understanding of the history of discrimination and bias and how it has come to impact current society. While equity issues affect all of Ohio's students, strategies to create equity for students with disabilities need to be specific. This plan's clarity renews Ohio's commitment to creating the learning conditions that ensure each child acquires the necessary knowledge and skills across all four equal learning domains to be successful.



Partnerships—Everyone, not just those in schools, shares the responsibility of preparing children for successful futures. The most important partners are parents and caregivers. For students with disabilities, partnerships often must include specialists familiar with their unique needs. These specialists must be among the critical partners of educators, institutions of higher education, business, philanthropy, employers, libraries, social service organizations, community members, health care providers, behavioral health experts and many more. Partnerships can transform the educational experiences for Ohio's students with disabilities.



Quality Schools—Schools are an important destination where many individuals and factors come together to serve the student, including school leaders, teachers, curriculum, instruction, student supports, data analysis and

more. Research shows that school leaders have the greatest hand in defining a school's culture and climate, which significantly affects student learning.¹ A quality school is one where parents, caregivers, community partners and others interact for the benefit of students. All schools—public and private—play important roles in building Ohio's future. These critical roles are no less true for students with disabilities.

A Promise Left Unfulfilled

Special education in Ohio is a system of mixed results. For some students with disabilities, special education has supported and helped them achieve their goals. For others, special education has been a quagmire of low expectations, lack of educational and extracurricular opportunities, exclusion from their peers and intervention that, at their best, have been haphazardly implemented and, at their worst, not applied at all. These factors have contributed to a system notable for its vast learning and achievement gaps.

With the advent of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* in the 1970s (also known as Public Law 94-14), students with disabilities were afforded a constitutional right to access public education. Parents and advocates for children with disabilities provided a compelling and persuasive argument to the United States Supreme Court that the notion of *equity* found in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) applied to **all** children in the United States, including students with disabilities.

This law and its subsequent revisions were groundbreaking for its time, but they did little to elaborate on the degree of educational opportunity afforded to students with disabilities. Court cases and revisions to special education law over the next two decades sought to strengthen parent and student rights while legislating high standards for students with disabilities. However, these laws have not translated into improved practices or the desired outcome of raising student achievement for students with disabilities nor have they had much of an impact on belief systems relative to the ability of children with disabilities to learn.

Ben's Story

Ben's struggles with learning also began in kindergarten. His school developed a tiered system of supports for students who struggle with academic or behavioral issues. Each year, Ben's teachers met with the school's Intervention Assistance Team, which was comprised of general educators, a reading specialist, speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist and school psychologist, to develop targeted interventions that were tracked, evaluated and reported every six weeks. The building principal facilitated the meetings.

¹ Macneil, A. J., Prater, D. L., & Busch, S. (2009). The effects of school culture and climate on student achievement. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 12(1), 73-84. doi:10.1080/13603120701576241.

Sophia's Story

In first and second grade, Sophia was referred for evaluations by her teachers and, each year, the requests were denied. The school psychologist told Sophia's parents and teachers the district "does not do testing for a learning disability until third grade" and Sophia needed interventions completed first.

The interventions developed for Sophia were more like accommodations, such as repeating directions and preferential seating. These things did little to help Sophia progress. She received Title 1 reading, but the remediation did not help her improve as the reading remediation was not targeted to what she needed.

Consider the following Ohio statistics:

- Students with disabilities are almost three times less likely to enter kindergarten demonstrating readiness.
 - Fewer than one-third of Ohio's students with disabilities are proficient on the third grade English language arts assessment.
 - On the state's English language arts assessment, 28.9% of students with disabilities scored proficient or better compared to 64.6% for all students.
 - On the state's mathematics assessments, 45.5% of students with disabilities scored proficient or better compared to 61% for all students.
 - Students with disabilities experience 46 disciplinary incidences per 100 children compared to 17 for nondisabled children.
 - Sixty-two percent of restraints (3,341 incidents) and 69% of seclusions (1,371 incidents) involve students with disabilities compared to nondisabled students, which is less than 1%.
 - The graduation rate of students with disabilities with regular high school diplomas is 21% compared to 85.3% for all students.
 - Ohio's four-year, on-time graduation rate for the class of 2017 was 84.1%. In comparison, the four year, on-time graduation rate for students with disabilities for that same class was 70.4%. Among the students with disabilities graduating on time, 78.8% met their individualized education program (IEP) goals but were excused from some of Ohio's graduation rate requirements.
 - More than 20% of high school students with disabilities (or just more than 4,300 students) exit high school by dropping out each year.
 - Almost four out of five students with disabilities are excused from graduation requirements by their IEP teams. Ohio ranks 54th out of the 56 states and territories on the percentage of students with disabilities who receive high school diplomas by meeting the same requirements as their nondisabled peers.
- More than 18,500 secondary students with disabilities took part in career-technical education in 2018. While this number provides students with disabilities a chance to enter the workforce prepared, it also represents a drop in students attending career-technical education programs of approximately 1,000 fewer students than Ohio's average over the previous five years.
 - Only 43% of students with specific learning disabilities reported attending two- or four-year college or university programs within the year after high school.²

Except for a very small number, students with disabilities are as cognitively able as their nondisabled peers, yet their rates of success in the education system are significantly lower. Ohio must confront the stark inequity that its education system has allowed. All Ohio citizens must be dedicated to making substantial improvements for students with disabilities and fulfilling the promise of equal access, equal opportunity and comparable outcomes by providing an educational experience that challenges, prepares and empowers each child in Ohio.

Ben's Story

Ben's interventions were targeted to his identified needs, which were based on data. These interventions were specific to the identified reading problems his teachers discovered. Ben received Title 1 services, and his team knew that Title 1 in and of itself was not an intervention. It was what occurred with Title 1 — the specific reading interventions applied — that would make the difference.

In the middle of his second grade year, his teacher and parents met with the Intervention Assistance Team to review Ben's progress. The data showed continued and steady growth, but the gap between him and his peers was widening. The team agreed a comprehensive evaluation was necessary.

² Ohio Longitudinal Transition Study, 2010-2017.

Ohio's Education Landscape for Students with Disabilities

Students who receive special education services are a diverse group of children who look to their families, communities and educators to recognize their strengths, correctly identify their needs, set high expectations and meet them where they are with supports that will help them grow.

Sophia's Story

When Sophia received her evaluation in third grade, the school psychologist met with her parents to obtain their permission for an evaluation. Her parents asked if the meeting could be held after school since they both work but were told, "No, we don't do that here. All school meetings take place during the day."

The school psychologist explained that testing would occur, she would be the chair of the evaluation team, and she would determine what tests and other professionals would be involved in Sophia's evaluation after her tests were completed. When her parents came to review the results, they were greeted by a team of professionals they had never met, including the school nurse, speech-language pathologist and an individual who introduced himself as the "intervention specialist who will be working with Sophia."

More than 270,000 students currently enrolled in public schools have been identified with disabilities in Ohio, which makes them eligible for special education. This constitutes 15.2% of all children ages 3-21 (the national figure is 13.2%). This percentage has been rising steadily over time, varying within one percentage point over the past decade.

Disability Category Distribution: A child is eligible for special education services when his or her disability impacts his or her ability to access the general education curriculum in at least one of 14 categories.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of Ohio's students with disabilities by disability

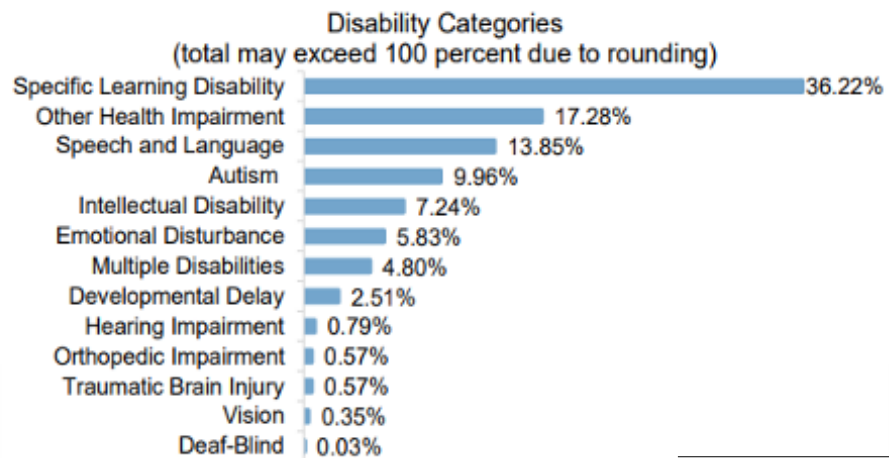


Figure 1: Disability Categories

- Specific Learning Disabilities:** This is the most common disability category. It means a disorder in one or more basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language and may include conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. Nearly 100,000 students in Ohio are identified with specific learning disabilities.
- Other Health Impairment (Minor):** This category is the second most common. The other health impairment category includes conditions due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia and Tourette syndrome. Nearly 45,000 Ohio students are identified with other health impairments.
- Speech-Language Impairment:** The third largest disability category is speech-language impairment, which affects more than 13% of all identified students with disabilities. The speech-language impairment category includes communication disorders such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairments or voice disorders. Nearly 38,000 students in Ohio are identified as having speech or language impairments.
- Autism:** More than 25,000 students are identified as having autism. The rate of students identified as having autism spectrum disorder has increased since 2008-2009, from less than 1% of all Ohio's students to nearly 10% of all identified students with disabilities.

Racial/Ethnic Distribution: Students with disabilities are part of every racial and ethnic group represented in Ohio schools. Sixty-six percent (166,867) of students with disabilities are white and 21.5% (54,250) are Black. Hispanic students account for 5.8% (14,799) of students with disabilities, and students who are multiracial account for 5.4% (13,750). Asian/Pacific Islanders comprise 1.1% of students with disabilities (2,720), and American Indian/Alaskan Natives include 0.1% (349) of all students with disabilities. Approximately 3% (7,870) of students with disabilities are English learners.

This graphic shows the distribution of Ohio’s students with disabilities within racial/ethnic categories.

Percent of Students with Disabilities by Ethnicity

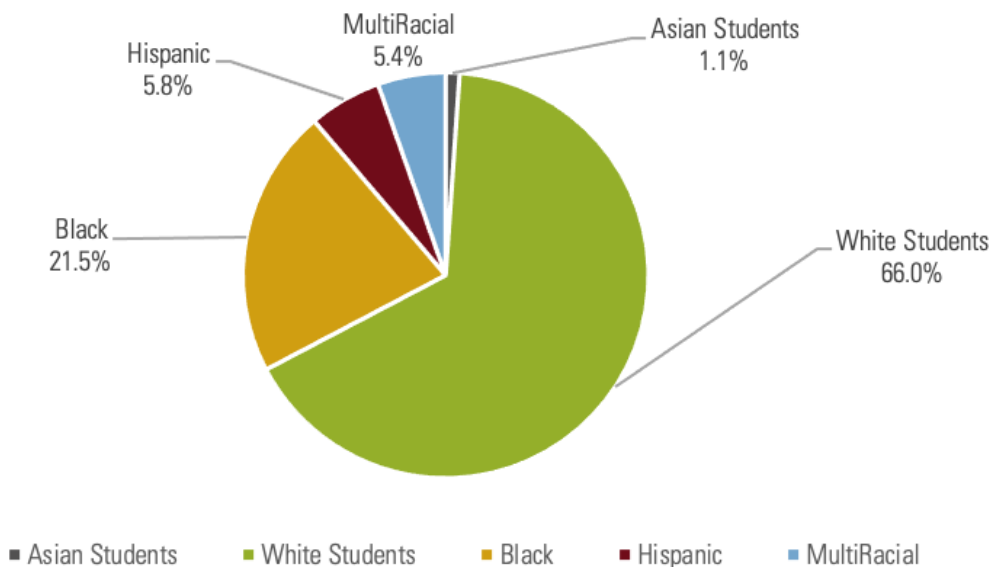


Figure 2: Percent of Students with Disabilities by Ethnicity

Ben’s Story

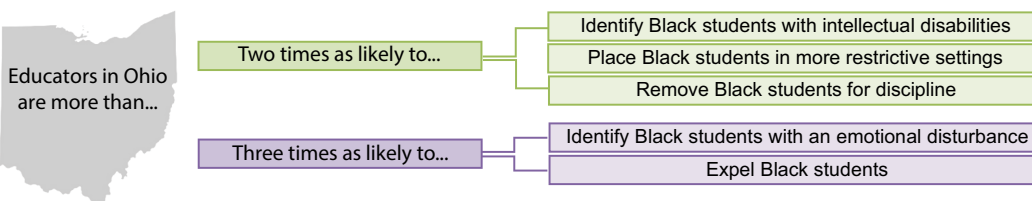
When it was time to review Ben’s intervention results during the middle of his second-grade year, the principal ensured the meeting was held at a mutually convenient time for Ben’s parents and the staff. Because his parents had regular meetings with members of the Intervention Assistance Team, they were familiar with the school psychologist, speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist and other staff members present.

When the team members reviewed Ben’s data, they agreed that they suspected a disability and were recommending an evaluation. Because Ben’s parents knew how hard the team worked on their son’s behalf, they trusted the professionals and were comfortable with the recommendation to evaluate.

The school psychologist explained the testing procedures, and the principal reviewed parental safeguards by explaining each section of *Whose IDEA is This? A Guide to Parent Rights in Special Education*. Each team member took the time to explain any recommendations for the evaluation, and a comprehensive plan was developed.

Disproportionality in Special Education

Disproportionality is an overrepresentation of students from a racial group in identification for special education, including within specific disability categories; placement in more restrictive educational settings; and disciplinary actions, including in- and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. This has the cumulative effect of denying access to the instruction and support students need to succeed and perpetuates a culture of low expectations.



Nationally, the population of Black Americans has remained steady around 13% since 2010, while the percentage of Black students with disabilities continues to hover right around 18%. In Ohio, Black students account for 14.6% of the student population yet represent more than 20% of all students with disabilities. Figure 3 shows the overrepresentation of Black students in special education, specifically in the disability categories of intellectual disability and emotional disturbance. Conversely, educators are less likely to identify Black students with speech and language impairments or autism.

Sophia's Story

Sophia's IEP meeting was held after the school psychologist excused herself from the meeting. The intervention specialist explained that Sophia's general education teacher could not attend as she was in class, and the building principal would "pop in" later if he had time. Sophia's parents were told she would be one of several students attending the resource room for her education.

When Sophia's parents expressed concern she would be missing the instruction occurring in the classroom, the intervention specialist said, "This is how we provide services here." The intervention specialist further explained that, "Because Sophia was so far behind, she needed to be in a room away from all the other distractions that occur in a classroom." The intervention specialist assured Sophia's parents she would receive the same curriculum as the "other children in the general education classroom but with a smaller group of students and at a much slower pace."

Several accommodations and modifications were addressed in Sophia's IEP, and her parents were told this was to "help Sophia so she could pass the state tests."

Percentage of Students with Disabilities, Ages 6-21, by Race and Ethnicity and Disability Category in the United States 2018-2019

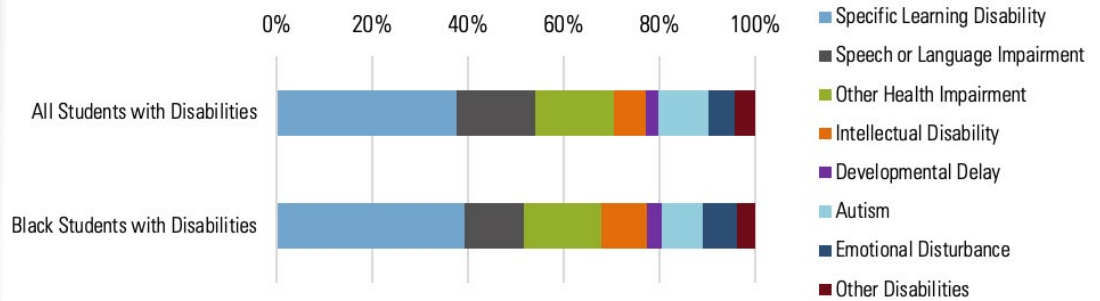


Figure 3: Percentage of Students with Disabilities, Ages 6-21, by Race and Ethnicity and Disability Category in the United States

Ohio mirrors the national data as the population of Black Ohioans is about 17%, while the percentage of Black students with disabilities in Ohio is more than 20%. Figure 4 displays the percentage of enrollment for all students and students with disabilities in Ohio by race or ethnicity.

Percentage of Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity 2018-2019

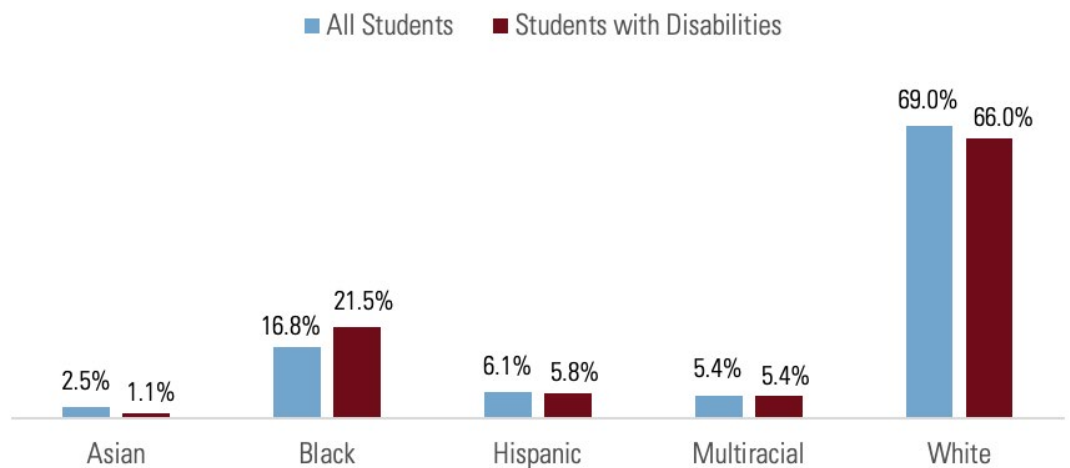


Figure 4: Percentage of Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

While Black students make up nearly 17% of Ohio's population, they receive 44% of out-of-school suspensions. The rate of exclusionary discipline practices for Black students with disabilities is 45.6%. This compares to the rate for all students with disabilities of approximately 32%.

Education Received in the Least Restrictive Environment: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.³ An important part of Ohio's special education landscape is understanding how frequently students are educated in general education classrooms along with their nondisabled peers. Research shows this is the environment in which students with disabilities are most likely to achieve to their fullest potential.

³Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 34 C.F.R. 300.114.

As shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6, Ohio students with disabilities generally are spending more than 60% of their days in general education classrooms. In some cases, for example, students with speech or language impairments, the figure is more than 90%. At the other end of the spectrum are students, for example, with multiple disabilities who are in the regular classroom less than 10% of the day. Overall, the placement rate in general education environments for students with disabilities matches national trends with the exception of those students who have been identified with multiple disabilities, autism or emotional disturbance. Unfortunately, even with the requirement that students be educated in the least restrictive environment, students with disabilities continue to lag behind their nondisabled peers in achievement.

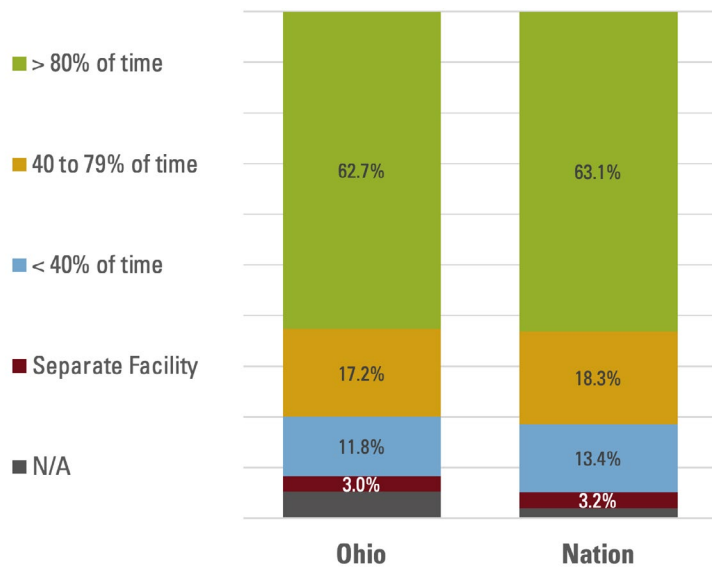


Figure 5: Time Students with Disabilities Spend in General Education Classrooms in School Years 2015-2020

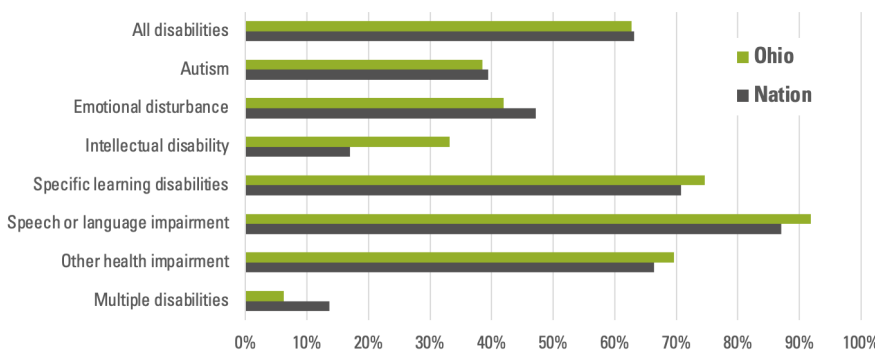


Figure 6: Students Spending at Least 80% of Time in General Education by Disability Category

Ben's Story

When Ben's parents met with the evaluation team, they were familiar with the team members from their previous experiences with the Intervention Assistance Team meetings.

Ben's parents requested a draft of the evaluation team report in advance of the meeting. While not required by federal or state law to do so, the district provided a draft copy of the evaluation results in advance of the meeting. Ben's parents did not fully understand the evaluation results, but they knew the team would explain the results when they met with the team.

When the team met, the draft report was projected on a large computer screen mounted on the wall. Reviewing the results this way helped everyone follow along with the report. Each team member took the time to explain the evaluation results and how those results manifested themselves in Ben's performance relative to the general education curriculum. Given they had received a draft copy of the evaluation report in advance and the depth of the review provided by the evaluation team, Ben's parents understood his learning strengths and challenges. The team used the data from Ben's interventions to further document these strengths and challenges.

The results of the evaluation, in addition to the data from those interventions, led the team to conclude Ben had a specific learning disability in the area of reading, reading comprehension and oral expression. A second meeting was scheduled for the following week to draft Ben's IEP.

Academic Performance: The Ohio School Report Cards show persistent gaps between students with disabilities and their peers who do not have disabilities. These gaps consistently are among the largest gaps in subgroup performance across grade levels and subjects.

Sophia's Story

At the end of Sophia's fourth-grade year, her team became concerned she had not passed any state tests. It wondered if the Alternate Assessment for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities might be more appropriate for her and give her the "chance" to demonstrate knowledge at a higher level.

A meeting was held with Sophia's intervention specialist and her parents to discuss this option. The intervention specialist explained the alternate assessment could help Sophia "show what she knows" rather than taking a state test she would "surely fail." Her parents, wanting the best opportunity for their daughter, agreed to this change.

- Kindergarten Readiness:** Students with disabilities are almost three times *less* likely to enter kindergarten demonstrating readiness. Only 15% of students with disabilities begin kindergarten with the foundational skills and behaviors described in Ohio's Learning Standards.
- Third Grade Reading Guarantee:** Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee provides an exemption for students with disabilities. Fewer than one-third of Ohio's students with disabilities are proficient on the third-grade English language arts assessment. While 87% of *non-exempted* third-graders with disabilities earned the score needed for promotion to grade 4 (on the state assessment or an approved alternative reading test), more than one in five students with disabilities were exempted per their IEPs. In school year 2018-2019, IEP teams exempted 4,308 students with disabilities, or 3.54%, from the consequences of not passing the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. For the 2019-2020 school year, 3,503 students (2.91%) were exempted. In the 2017-2018 school year, only 37% of students with disabilities in grades K-3 were on track for reading, compared to nearly 75% of students without disabilities in those grades. This gap has remained steady over the last three years.
- English and Mathematics Achievement:** The tables below illustrate the substantial gaps that exist in the rates of proficiency on state assessments in English and mathematics. These gaps range from a low of 34 percentage points on the third grade English language arts assessment to 43 percentage points on the seventh grade English language arts assessment. The gaps are even more substantial for some disability subcategories.

Student Group	Tested	Proficient or Better
Peers without Disabilities	886,819	70.1%
All Students with Disabilities	160,566	28.3%
Specific Learning Disabilities	75,157	18.2%
Other Health Impaired (Minor)	31,916	23.5%
Intellectual Disabilities	13,018	46.1%
Autism	12,261	51.7%
Emotional Disturbance	11,206	21.5%
Speech & Language Impairments	7,357	53.9%
Multiple Disabilities	6,152	66.5%
Deafness	1,109	33.7%
Traumatic Brain Injury	886	37.8%
Orthopedic Impairments	662	51.8%
Visual Impairments	505	48.7%
Other Health Impaired (Major)	300	40.0%
*Includes Grades 3-8 English Language Arts and High School English Language Arts I and II		

Figure 7: English Language Arts Proficiency Rates* in Grade 3-High School, School Year 2018

Student Group	Tested	Proficient or Better
Peers without Disabilities	848,498	66.5%
All Students with Disabilities	159,364	27.7%
Specific Learning Disabilities	74,786	20.1%
Other Health Impaired (Minor)	31,603	21.7%
Intellectual Disabilities	12,969	43.9%
Autism	12,135	47.7%
Emotional Disturbance	10,977	17.8%
Speech & Language Impairments	7,195	61.6%
Multiple Disabilities	6,236	48.9%
Deafness	1,089	38.7%
Traumatic Brain Injury	865	34.1%
Orthopedic Impairments	649	43.1%
Visual Impairments	485	43.5%
Other Health Impaired (Major)	291	33.0%

*Includes Grades 3-8 Math and Algebra I, Geometry, High School Math I and II

Figure 8: Mathematics Proficiency Rates* in Grades 3-High School, School Year 2018

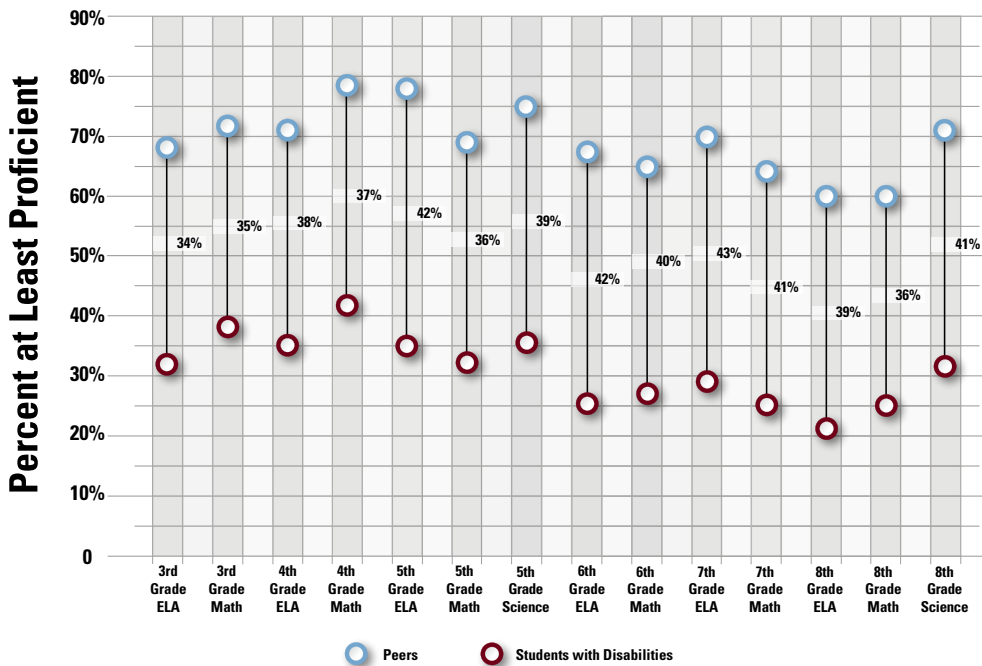


Figure 9: Proficiency Rates Comparison Students with Disabilities and Non-Disabled Peers

Ben's Story

At the IEP meeting, Ben's parents were introduced to his intervention specialist. His parents knew in advance who was going to attend the meeting, which put them at ease. While the parents received a draft copy of the proposed IEP in advance, the intervention specialist took the time to explain each section. It was clear to Ben's parents the goals were a direct result of the evaluation team report they had reviewed the week before.

Since Ben did not need curricular modifications, the IEP team addressed his potential need for accommodations. The team was careful not to provide too many accommodations, as this might interfere with his learning. The team discussed with Ben's parents its recommendations and determined the right number of accommodations needed to help him progress through the curriculum and meet his IEP goals.

When it came time to discuss where the services would occur, the team reviewed the continuum of services offered in the school with Ben's parents. Based on Ben's individual needs, it was determined he would be best served in the general education classroom, with the intervention specialist providing his specialized learning during the language arts block.

- **Alternate Assessment for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities:** State and federal policy recognize it is unreasonable to require students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to be assessed in the same manner as other students. Therefore, states are authorized to administer alternate assessments to these students. In Ohio, these assessments are aligned to Ohio's Learning Standards-Extended and designed to allow students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in an appropriately rigorous [assessment](#).

Sophia's Story

As Sophia fell further behind her peers, she became even more frustrated. Her middle school years were especially difficult, and she began refusing to do her work in class.

Socially, Sophia became more isolated from her peers. She no longer saw the friends she made in third and fourth grade, as she was in a resource room for core subjects most of the day. When she attended general education classes for inclusion in non-core subjects, like social studies, the teachers placed her in the back of the room.

Sophia tried to follow along in her textbook when the teacher was speaking, but she found it challenging to comprehend what she was reading.

Federal regulations limit the number of students who should be assessed statewide with an alternate assessment to 1% of the total number of students tested. Ohio historically has administered the alternate assessment to more students than the federal limit. Approximately 18,000 students with disabilities participate in the alternate assessment each year. In school year 2018-2019, 1.7% of Ohio's students participated in reading alternate assessments, 1.78% participated in mathematics alternate assessments and 1.93% participated in science alternate assessments. This misunderstanding of the intent of the alternate assessment has led to students not being exposed to the general education curriculum and has had the potential to significantly reduce their opportunities to gain the knowledge and skills needed to achieve future success. This ongoing pattern of exclusion from regular state assessments is among the challenges Ohio faces to support students with disabilities by denying access to core instruction, limiting inclusive opportunities, promoting a culture of lowered or minimal expectations and conducting appropriate evaluations to determine eligibility for special education.

Disciplinary Incidents: Ohio's discipline data mirrors a national trend of students with disabilities being more likely to experience exclusionary discipline practices than nondisabled students. In Ohio, while students with disabilities represent 15.2% of the population, they make up a disproportionate percentage of student expulsions (20.3%), out-of-school suspensions (30.4%), in-school suspensions (26.6%), in-school alternate discipline (27.5%) and emergency removals by district personnel (38.5%). The table below shows the specific discipline data and disparities between students with disabilities and their peers. It also illustrates the variation among students in different categories of disability.

Ben's Story

Ben's parents had heard about the Alternate Assessment for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities and wondered if this would be appropriate to consider for Ben. They requested a team meeting to discuss the alternate assessment.

At the meeting, the team explained the alternate assessment was only for those students with the "most significant cognitive disabilities," and Ben's ability level was in the average to high-average range.

The parents left the meeting with a better understanding of the alternate assessment and realized it was not appropriate for their son.

Disproportionality is amplified even further when race is considered. For example, Black students account for 45.6% of exclusionary actions, including suspensions and expulsions, affecting students with disabilities, yet they make up only 20% of the population of Ohio’s students with disabilities.

Sophia’s Story

As Sophia became more frustrated with her inability to read and additional social isolation, it began to show in her behavior. She often refused to complete tasks in class and either sat and daydreamed or “mouthed off” to her teachers. She was sent to the assistant principal’s office for minor behavior infractions, like forgetting to bring a pencil to class, daily.

Over the course of one school year, Sophia missed more than 85 hours of in-class instruction due to in-school suspensions. The assistant principal warned her that if her behavior did not improve, she would be suspended or sent to a school for students with behavioral problems.

on-time graduation rate for students with disabilities for that same class was 70.4%. Among the students with disabilities graduating on time, 78.8% were excused from some of Ohio’s graduation rate requirements. This means four out of five students with disabilities were excused from meeting the same graduation requirements as their peers without disabilities. The majority of Ohio students covered under the federal IDEA do not have disabilities that indicate a need for less challenging coursework. Such a high rate of excusal from graduation requirements contributes to a lack of preparedness for postsecondary education and employment for students with disabilities, which, in turn, limits their post-graduation opportunities.

Additionally, one in five students with disabilities, or approximately 4,000, drop out of school each year. This high dropout rate perpetuates the cycle of underemployed and underutilized citizens. Based on Ohio’s federal Perkins Act reporting, more than 18,500 secondary students with disabilities took part in career-technical education in 2018. This was approximately 1,000 fewer students than Ohio’s average over the previous five years.

Disability Type	Incidents	Incidents per 100 students
Emotional Disturbance	26,702	164
Other Health Impaired (Minor)	31,988	71
Intellectual Disabilities	9,569	48
Specific Learning Disabilities	40,881	41
Traumatic Brain Injury	455	31
Other Health Impaired (Major)	147	25
Autism	3,711	17
Visual Impairments	141	16
Deafness (Hearing Impairments)	330	16
Multiple (other than Deaf-Blind)	1,184	10
Speech and Language Impairments	2,217	7
Orthopedic Impairments	81	6
Developmental Delay	10	<
All Students with Disabilities	117,417	46
Peers	285,671	17

Figure 10: Disability Incidents by Disability Type

Postsecondary Preparation and Outcomes: The students with disabilities subgroup had the highest percentage increase in the Prepared for Success indicator, with 19% more students meeting preparedness benchmarks overall as reported on the [2019-2020 state report card](#). One area that highlights the disparity between students with disabilities and their peers, however, is high school graduation and preparation for postsecondary preparation and engagement. Ohio’s four-year, on-time high school graduation rate for the class of 2017 was 84.1%. In comparison, the four-year

Ben’s Story

Ben had a positive experience with his special education services. He achieved tremendous growth in his reading abilities over the years and, while he still struggled with some aspects of reading, he maintained decent grades and received scores of proficient in all the state tests.

Because he received his services in the general education classroom, students did not know which students had IEPs, as both the teacher and intervention specialist rotated between small groups of students who may need extra support.

Ben’s next evaluation suggested he no longer had a specific learning disability but still qualified for special education services as a student with a language handicap. His parents agreed to the change, and his new disability category was changed to speech-language impairment.

Sophia's Story

The building principal at Sophia's middle school had attempted to implement a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports program in the school to improve the relationships and culture in the building. The teachers did not think it was the time to implement a "new" program.

Although they are required to implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports by law, little effort was put forth to ensure building staff were trained or implementing best practices.

Data from the Ohio Longitudinal Transition Study yields valuable information:

- Graduates with speech-language impairments (61%), orthopedic impairments (58%) or visual impairments (54%) report the highest rates of attending two- or four-year colleges or universities.
- Graduates who have specific learning disabilities (61%), other health impairments (57%) or emotional disturbances (54%) report the highest rates of competitive employment — either full- or part-time.

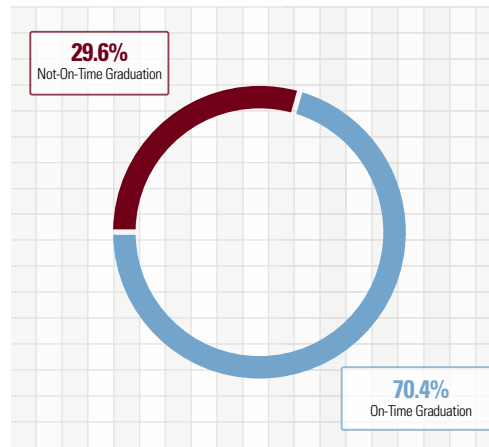


Figure 11: Students with Disabilities Graduating On Time, Class of 2017

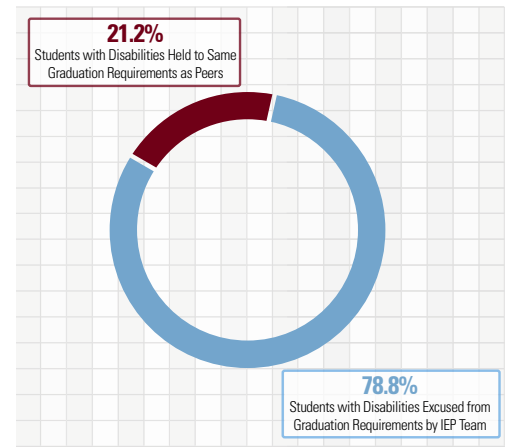


Figure 12: Students with Disabilities Exempt from Graduation Requirements

Ohio collects data regarding postsecondary outcomes through the [Ohio Longitudinal Transition Study](#). The information collected by the study examines the following:

- What are the post-school outcomes of students with disabilities?
- What transition services and programs did students use?
- What transition services and programs predicted positive outcomes?
- Over what time period did these outcomes occur (one, three and five years)?
- What post-school programs and services did different types of students use?
- What do students identify as important factors in their transition?
- How did post-school services contribute to post-school outcomes?
- What post-school and adult services did students use?
- How do Ohio's post-school outcomes compare with national data?
- What policies support transition programs identified as successful?
- What practices and procedures maximize the use of these programs?

Ben's Story

Ben's middle school embarked on a yearlong study of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. The school developed positive, not punitive, guidelines for students. Staff, students, parents and the community were involved in building the plan. Students were given more freedom in school. For example, if they maintained a certain grade point average and had no discipline referrals, they were permitted to sit in a common area and be with their friends rather than attend study hall. Discipline referrals, already low compared to other middle schools, dropped even lower as the students realized staff empathized and cared for their social-emotional needs.

Post-school outcome trends since 2010 provide a further snapshot into what Ohio's students with disabilities are doing one year after graduating from high school. As shown in Figure 13, both full- and part-time engagement in employment remained relatively steady since the end of the recession, with marginal increases starting in 2014. For college, two- and four-year trends began decreasing in 2015 as more students entered the workforce. Decreases were seen in engagement for all areas (work and college) from 2015 to 2016, with little to no improvement for 2017 graduates.

Sophia's Story

Sophia's IEP team began the process of developing her postsecondary transition plan when she was 14 years old. The district did not use an age-appropriate transition assessment and completed the task using what her teachers felt she needed. Her IEP team did not ask about her or her parents' plans for after high school.

Sophia's high school IEP team suggested she continue her high school education beyond her four years so she could continue her reading instruction. Because Sophia did not graduate within four years of starting high school, it affected her district's reported graduation rate and further isolated her from her age-level peers. Even though Sophia continued to receive passing scores on the alternate assessment, the IEP team exempted her from the consequences of not receiving passing scores.

Post-school Outcome Trends

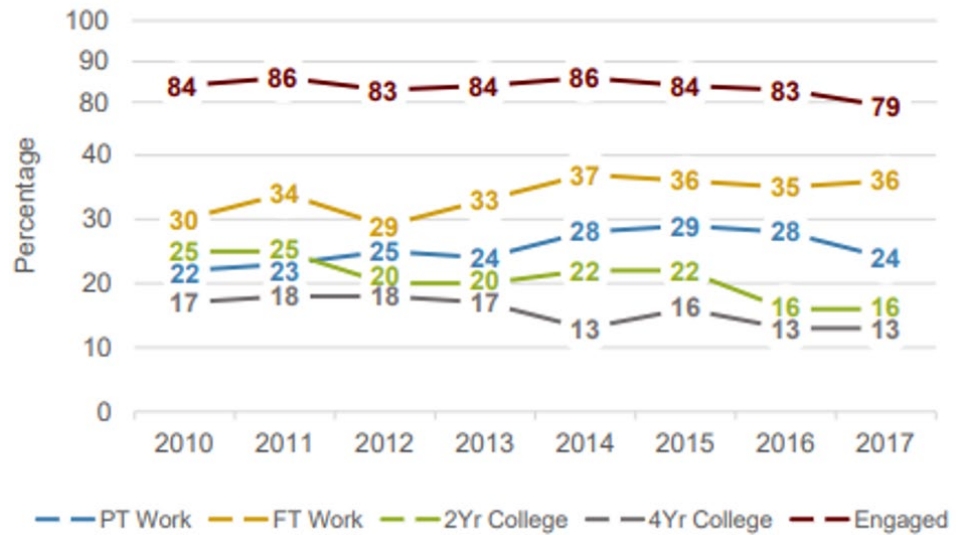


Figure 13: Post-school Outcome Trends

Given these statistics, each school, district and community in Ohio needs to examine how students with disabilities can become successfully engaged in post-school education and employment and whether students with disabilities are being provided with equitable access to opportunities that allow them to be challenged, prepared and empowered for their futures.

Ben's Story

Ben's IEP team began the process of developing his postsecondary transition plan when he was 14 years old. The district used an age-appropriate transition assessment process that involved student and parent interviews and a checklist of employability and college readiness skills.

Ben's IEP team, along with the high school counselor, monitored students' end-of-course examination scores. Ben needed extra support in passing his English Language Arts 2 exam due to his language comprehension problems. The speech-language pathologist provided after-school sessions for this issue for five students, including Ben. All five students received passing scores and remained on track to graduate within four years of starting high school.



Sophia's Story

When Sophia mentioned the possibility of attending college, her high school counselor told her she was not “college material” and should consider attending the career-technical school her district uses. The career-technical program she was interested in joining would not accept Sophia since she had been alternately assessed. The career-technical program administrators suggested a program geared for students with cognitive delays. Sophia made plans to drop out of school.

Ben's Story

Each year, Ben's transition plan indicated his interest in attending college and majoring in a healing field, like physical therapy. His plan included goals such as researching entrance requirements into the field, examining universities with physical therapy programs and learning about potential earnings as a physical therapist. Ben took college prep courses in high school and, with the help of the speech-language pathologist, learned several techniques to assist him with his language comprehension. As a member of the IEP team and service provider for Ben's transition plan, the school counselor connected Ben with the student accessibility services at his chosen university.

A final note on Sophia and Ben:

Sophia's story is far from made up, and Ben's story is far from the exception. Both realities exist in Ohio's schools. A culture of low expectations for students with disabilities persists in many schools, and a lack of shared responsibilities for students with disabilities among general and special education staff perpetuates this cycle.

Yet many schools and districts are changing this trajectory. These districts accept the premise that a student with a disability is EVERYONE'S student and the responsibility for education is a shared responsibility.

Administrators, intervention specialists, related service providers or general education teachers reading through Sophia and Ben's educational experiences may find these stories are similar to their experiences. What steps can educators take to avoid what happened to Sophia? Which district would most educators rather work in?

At the same time, parents reading about Sophia and Ben's experiences may feel like these stories are their realities. Which district would most parent rather have their children attend? What can parents do for their children if Sophia's story rings true?

Students reading these stories may see themselves in Sophia or Ben. Which school district would most students want to attend? What can students do to learn self-advocacy?

Sophia's story continues in [Appendix B](#) and Ben's story continues in [Appendix C](#). Please keep reading to find out the rest of their stories.

Plan Components

Ohio believes everyone in the education community has a responsibility to collaborate toward improving learning experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities. This plan reflects Ohio's partners' advice from the state, regional and local levels of Ohio's education system. The plan is organized with the following components.

Framing Recommendations and Actions: Ohio's aspirational vision for students with disabilities is framed in the following way:

- **Focus Areas:** The three focus areas provide the structure for the recommendations, tactics and action steps.
- **Recommendations:** These are the high-level statements of broad strategies that form the foundation of the plan.
- **Tactics:** These are multi-faceted initiatives aligned to *Each Child, Our Future* that reflect targeted activities requiring collective action.
- **Action Steps:** These are the specific efforts designed to carry out the tactics that will positively impact students with disabilities.

Roles and Responsibilities: The action steps are grouped by three sets of actors and influencers in the education community who reflect state, regional and local influences. Each of these entities will play a vital role in improving learning experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities and are connected and dependent on the other. Collaboration among and between each level of influence will be needed to fulfill the ambitious action steps outlined in this plan.

- **State Influencers — The Ohio Department of Education and its partners** will provide coordination, resources and support for the partnership approach needed to carry out the work outlined in this plan.
- **Regional Influencers — Ohio's Statewide System of Support**, which includes the Department, state support teams, educational service centers, professional associations and organizations will provide a continuum of support to local districts and community schools, early childhood education programs and professionals in their respective spheres of influence throughout Ohio. The Statewide System of Support's operational goal is to improve student learning through inclusive instructional practices that support students' development in the [four equal learning domains](#) outlined in *Each Child, Our Future* (Foundational Knowledge and Skills; Well-rounded Content; Leadership and Reasoning; and Social-Emotional Learning).
- **Local Influencers — Districts, community schools and early childhood education programs** primarily are responsible for providing educational services to students with disabilities. They will partner with the state and regional entities in supporting best practices and integrating approaches with general and special educators, related service providers, community partners and families. This collaboration will ensure the success of students with disabilities.

Plan Outline: The first section of the plan below outlines the **Philosophy of Change** needed to advance the achievement of students with disabilities. This section is followed by a discussion of the specific **Focus Areas** that outline the recommendations, tactics and action steps. The plan also includes an [appendix](#) that honors the contributions of partners involved in preparing this plan to improving learning experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities. Within the appendix, Ohio partners and community members will find additional resources and information that provide a more comprehensive understanding of the work.

Guiding Principles

To create *Each Child Means Each Child*, Ohio built on the solid foundation of *Each Child, Our Future*. Work groups and Ohio's partners identified a need to reinforce a mindset that reflects the following principles:

More than 80% of students with disabilities have the same cognitive abilities to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to achieve success in life as their nondisabled peers.

Equity is upheld when students with disabilities are held to the same high expectations as their nondisabled peers.

The actions, commitment and collaboration among educators and other adults in the life of a student with disabilities is the most impactful contribution to success.

Too often, Ohio's students with disabilities are held to low expectations, even though more than 80% of students with disabilities' cognitive skills are within the average range. With targeted and intensive supports and services for students with disabilities — including those that must be developed or improved upon — Ohio can ensure each student will achieve outcomes that will lead to their future success. The recommendations, tactics and action steps that follow align to and expand upon the promise stated in *Each Child, Our Future* that *each child* will achieve Ohio's vision.

Philosophy of Change to Support Students with Disabilities



Ohio needs to fundamentally change its approach regarding its students with disabilities. This philosophical change will require all Ohioans to work together to improve outcomes for identifying and teaching children with disabilities. Stakeholders, partners and work groups identified the following challenges and solutions to Ohio's current belief system of educating students with disabilities:

- Inclusive and Shared Leadership.** Leadership is one of the keys to ensuring an inclusive learning environment. When leaders create strong school cultures, ensure all students feel safe and valued, and engage in shared decision-making when setting the vision, mission, goals, climate and culture of a school, there is greater teacher efficacy, which has been shown to have a considerably positive effect on student achievement.⁴ The formation of collaborative cross-discipline teams at the district, building and teacher-levels plays an essential part in shared leadership structures. Forming professional learning communities centered around inclusive practices will assist educators in fostering high expectations for students who have been identified as needing special education services.

⁴ Hattie, John (2012). *Visible Learning for Teachers*. London: Routledge.

- **Collective responsibility.** The most common problem identified by stakeholders was the lack of collective responsibility for meeting the needs of students with disabilities. In many cases, general education teachers look primarily to intervention specialists and related service providers to be solely responsible for meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities rather than developing a collaborative approach to teaching and learning.
- **Expectations for students who have been identified as needing special education services.** On average, more than 80% of Ohio students who require special education services have cognitive levels within the average range, yet gaps in achievement remain prevalent. Once a student qualifies for special education services, IEP teams, with the best intentions, determine whether accommodations and modifications are required for students with disabilities to progress through the general education curriculum. Many times, these accommodations and modifications have detrimental effects on student learning by reducing standards and lowering expectations.
- **Implementing evidence-based instruction and intervention.** The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), emphasizes the use of evidence-based instruction and intervention practices. ESSA defines evidence-based interventions as those practices or programs that have research (or evidence) to show they are effective at producing results and improving outcomes.⁵ John Hattie's meta-analyses from 80,000 studies involving 300 million students into what works best in education is an excellent tool to begin one's research into evidence-based practices.⁶ Information on evidence-based strategies for instruction and intervention practices are available in [Ohio's Evidence-Based Clearinghouse](#).
- **Professional development for general education staff and administrators.** General educators often do not receive preservice training or ongoing professional learning in teaching students with disabilities. Principals do not receive enough coursework or education to understand the learning needs of students with disabilities, and many lack the basic understanding of legal protections afforded to students with disabilities.
- **Preparation for postsecondary settings.** Ohio's challenges to prepare students with disabilities for successful postsecondary outcomes are compounded by the number of students with disabilities who do not achieve high school completion each year. Exempting students with disabilities from certain graduation requirements perpetuates the cycle of low expectations and does not prepare those students who could prove successful in two- or four-year colleges or universities or the workforce or military service.
- **Continuous Improvement Processes.** Many Ohio districts struggle to use and understand the data they collect regarding their students, especially students with disabilities. Schools and districts implementing a continuous improvement process can show amazing progress in improving educational outcomes for students. Implementation of a continuous improvement process will assist districts in data analysis. Nowhere will this be more important than determining whether interventions and special education services are making a positive difference for students with disabilities. The Ohio Improvement Process is an example of a continuous improvement process and can be used as an organizational strategy for districts by providing structure and focus for district teams to follow, resulting in intentional actions.
- **Overidentification of students with disabilities.** Districts have long used special education to provide interventions to students instead of developing systems of supports for their struggling students. This misuse of how special education should be implemented means students who need time with, exposure to and experience with the curricula (rather than specially designed instruction) are subjected to years of educational experiences of low expectations and lack of meaningful progress, thereby limiting students' capabilities.

⁵ ESSA, <https://www.ed.gov/essa> (Accessed July 27, 2020).

⁶ Hattie, John. Visible Learning. <http://visible-learning.org>, Sebastian Waack (Accessed July 27, 2020).

Three Focus Areas

The recommendations, tactics and actions are structured around three overarching focus areas:

- A. Getting to the Problem Early — Multi-Tiered System of Support:** Development and implementation of an integrated model for a statewide multi-tiered system of support.
- B. Building Educators' and Systemwide Capacity — Professional Learning:** Promotion of ongoing, job-embedded and sustained professional learning that focuses on meeting the specific needs of students with disabilities.
- C. Educating for Living a Good Life — Postsecondary Readiness and Planning:** Advancement of postsecondary learning experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities.

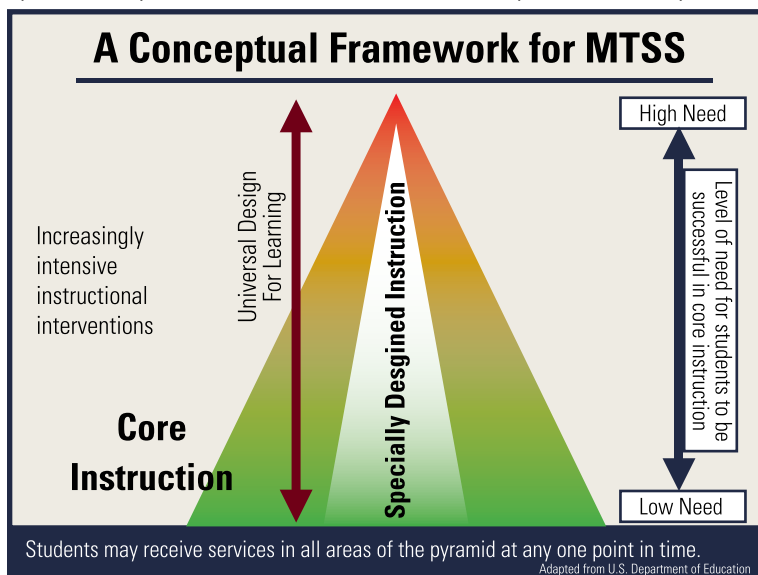
Getting to The Problem Early (Focus A): Development and implementation of an integrated model for a statewide multi-tiered system of support.

All four work groups recommended the Department collaborate with the education community to develop a model of an integrated multi-tiered system of support. Such a model has been shown to give students the best chance to achieve the vision of *Each Child, Our Future*. The proactive approaches of an integrated multi-tiered system of support can help all students while deploying strategies that are highly personalized to meet the needs of an individual student. This can lead to improved student achievement, reduce the need for punitive discipline that removes students from the learning environment and mitigate the likelihood of overidentifying students with disabilities.^{7,8}

The purpose of a tiered model of instructional and social and emotional behavioral supports is to improve age-appropriate, core instruction, thereby setting the foundation for all students to reach their potential. ESSA defines a multi-tiered system of support as:

*"... a comprehensive **continuum** of evidence-based, **systemic** practices to support a **rapid response** to students' needs, with regular **observation** to facilitate data-based instructional decision making."⁹*

Ohio has embedded this definition throughout its [ESSA plan](#). The multi-tiered aspect of the support system provides a structure for addressing students' learning experiences based on their varied and often complex needs. An integrated system means a continuum of evidence-based, systemwide practices with technically sound assessments are used to address students' needs.¹⁰ It also calls for continuous, data-based monitoring to inform decision-making about each student's progress.¹¹ Implementing a system of multi-tiered supports allows teams of professionals, families, students and community members to work together to support the whole child. This system also provides the team with the flexibility needed to respond to each child's needs and progress.



⁷ Freeman, R., Miller, D., & Newcomer, L. (2015). Integration of academic and behavioral MTSS at the district level using implementation science. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal*, 13(1), 59-72.

⁸ Sullivan, A. L., Weeks, M. R., Kulkarni, T., & Goerd, A. (2018). Preventing Disproportionality through Nondiscriminatory Tiered Services. *Equity by Design*. Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center (MAP EAC).

⁹ Title IX, Sec. 8002(33).

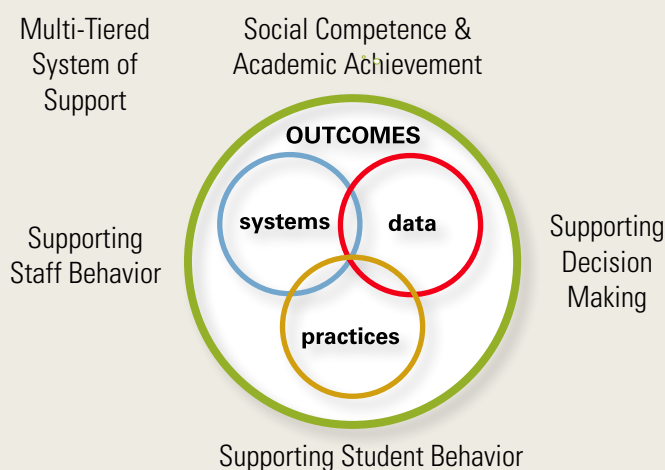
¹⁰ McIntosh, K., & Goodman, S. (2016). *Integrated multi-tiered systems of support: Blending RTI and PBIS*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

¹¹ Sansosti, F. J., & Noltemeyer, A. (2008). Viewing response-to-intervention through an educational change paradigm: What can we learn? *The California School Psychologist*, 13(1), 55-66; Shores, C., & Chester, K. (2008). *Using RTI for school improvement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Under this model, each layer of intervention adds a level of intensity designed to support and accelerate a student's rate of learning and identify and address challenges or obstacles to learning.¹² As a student responds positively to the instruction or intervention, the intensity is recalibrated. The movement within the layers and between the tiers of intervention is fluid and data-based; each tier represents instruction and supports, not categories of students.

- **Tier 1** is the universal supports and instruction available to all students. It is the foundation for the framework and encompasses high-quality, focused instruction, positive interventions and ongoing data analyses of student achievement. It is estimated that 75-90% of all students' needs will be met in this tier.
- **Tier 2** is for students who need more intensive intervention, around 10-25%, and require support beyond Tier 1 instruction. Tier 1 instruction is continued, while Tier 2 might involve greater intensity of instruction for an extended period and the frequency of interventions may be increased. Typically, but not always, Tier 2 interventions and supports are provided to a small group of students at the same time. However, the delivery of the intervention and support is based on the needs of the student.
- **Tier 3** is for students (fewer than 10%) who require support beyond the interventions or supports provided in Tiers 1 and 2. This group of students may need more targeted interventions and supports for even greater intensity or frequency than provided in Tier 2. Typically, this is provided individually, but a student's needs will dictate the delivery of the intervention.

The tiered system of supports allows students to move between the tiers based on their progress and needs, and this movement is based on data. The Department provides an example of a multi-tiered system of support model through [Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement](#) and [Ohio's Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports](#).



Example of a multi-tiered system of support model based on [reading](#) (Multi-Tiered System of Support Needs Assessment for Reading, Ohio's Literacy Initiative, Striving Readers Grant).

Building Educators' and Systemwide Capacity (Focus B): Promotion of ongoing, job-embedded and sustained professional learning that focuses on meeting the specific needs of students with disabilities.

While educator and leadership capacity are fundamental to the successful implementation of a multi-tiered system of support, professional learning becomes an essential component and ongoing need. Based on the statewide survey and focus groups, the Department discovered educators and leaders are eager to increase their skills and knowledge base in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Research in the use of providing high-quality, job-embedded professional learning opportunities for educators has been studied for many years and shown a positive effect on student achievement.^{13, 14} Ohio is committed to strengthening preservice and in-service professional learning by building educator knowledge of evidence-based instructional strategies that directly address the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Ohio has developed [Standards for Professional Development](#) that articulate what the research has found regarding professional learning.

¹² Kilpatrick, D. A. (2015). *Essentials of assessing, preventing, and overcoming reading difficulties*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

¹³ Hattie, John (2012). *Visible Learning for Teachers*. London: Routledge.

¹⁴ Hammond, et. Al. (2017). [Effective teacher professional development](#).

Professional learning must:

- Occur within a collaborative culture in which all share collective responsibility for continuous improvement.
- Be advanced by leaders who prioritize professional learning and develop the capacity and structures to support it.
- Be supported by resources.
- Be data-based and use data for planning, assessment and evaluation.
- Represent best-practice models and theories of adult learning and active engagement.
- Be research-based, using what is known about change to sustain implementation.
- Focus on specific goals and align outcomes with existing educator and student standards.

Professional learning that is job-embedded and improves a district's capacity-building efforts through collective efficacy and data systems, established within a continuous improvement framework, sustained over time and implemented with fidelity will ensure educators are equipped to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Educating for Living a Good Life (Focus C): Advancement of postsecondary learning experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities.

The final focus area involves postsecondary planning. The goal of Ohio's educational system is to prepare all students, including those with disabilities, for successful employment, education and independent living after high school. Ohio's expectation is that all students will graduate and then continue their success by enrolling in post-high school learning experiences, including adult career-technical education programs, apprenticeships or two- or four-year college or university programs; serving in a military branch; earning living wages; or engaging in meaningful, self-sustaining vocations.

The [National Technical Assistance Center on Transition](https://transitionta.org/indicatorb)¹⁵ collects data from every state and U.S. territory regarding transition indicators. Graduation, dropout rates, transition planning, service compliance and post-school outcomes are analyzed and provided to assist district in developing effective postsecondary services and, ultimately, results. The disparity between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers eight years after high school indicates students with disabilities are less likely to:¹⁶

- Take coursework at a postsecondary level;
- Be living independently as adults;
- Be married;
- Have checking accounts;
- Have credit cards.

Nationally, students with disabilities also are found to have lower rates of employment. By providing effective, evidence-based practices¹⁷ in postsecondary transition planning and services, Ohio will ensure its students with disabilities are able to define their futures.

¹⁵ NTACT, <https://transitionta.org/indicatorb>

¹⁶ Cobb, et.al.

¹⁷ [Effective Practices in Secondary Transition](#), 2020

Focus A:

Development and implementation of an integrated model of a statewide multi-tiered system of support.

Through the co-design and co-development of a statewide integrated model of a multi-tiered system of support, Ohio can provide a tool that can readily be adopted by any school district. Further, this tool can be used for all students: those struggling to learn new tasks or concepts, those identified as students with disabilities, or twice exceptional and gifted students.

Recommendation 1: Develop a consistent and clear statewide model of an integrated multi-tiered system of support that all districts, community schools or early childhood education programs may adopt and implement or use as a model in developing their own.

Tactic A: Create a system that supports the development of a model statewide integrated multi-tiered system of support.

Action Steps for the Ohio Department of Education and Partners

- **Develop partnership-based teams for the creation of the statewide multi-tiered system of support:** The Department will create and coordinate partnership-based teams to assist in the design and development of an integrated model of a multi-tiered system of support. Ohio's partnership-based teams will examine other successful, integrated state models to inform their work.
- **Establish non-negotiables:** The partnership-based teams will establish non-negotiables for an integrated model for a multi-tiered system of support. This group will consider and prioritize the following as non-negotiable aspects of the model:
 - High expectations;
 - Evidence-based learning strategies;
 - Universal Design for Learning;
 - Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports;
 - Equity and access for students with disabilities.

The teams will incorporate inclusive and culturally responsive instructional practices that can be implemented to meet individual student needs and are aligned to [Ohio's Early Learning and Development Standards](#), [Ohio's Social and Emotional Learning Standards](#) and [Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement](#). Additionally, the model will promote family and community partnerships as critical components of the system of supports.

One obstacle that influences high expectations in the current law is the exemption for students with disabilities with regard to the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. Because the exemption has been applied liberally for many students with disabilities, some students may never sufficiently reach grade-level literacy proficiency.

"With standards-based reforms and the emphasis on academic assessments and accountability, educators and policymakers recognized the importance of defining what students need to know and be able to do throughout their school years. It was from that work that we saw the evidence of low expectations for students with disabilities. The exclusion of students with disabilities from educational assessments in the early 1990s was one piece of evidence that many students with disabilities were *not expected to learn the same knowledge and skills as their peers without disabilities*." (NCEO Report 413, Quenemoen, R. F., & Thurlow, M. L. 2019).

- **Operationalize a Multi-Tiered System of Support:** The Department and its partners will promote the developed model of an integrated multi-tiered system of support for academic, social and emotional learning using continuous improvement processes. The model will be sustained and implemented through the state's regional system of supports, including state support teams, educational service centers and institutions of higher education.

Action Steps for the Statewide System of Support

- **Support District Implementation of an Integrated Multi-Tiered System of Support:** The Statewide System of Support will provide training and coaching to districts, community schools and early childhood education programs as they implement the developed model within their local contexts. Guidance will be provided in the importance of setting high expectations, the effect of bias and cultural competency and disproportionality in special education identification; instructional decisions; and discipline. The Statewide System of Support will offer professional learning opportunities to help educators and families understand the common characteristics of the different disability categories while emphasizing the unique individual characteristics and needs of students with disabilities.

Action Steps for Districts, Community Schools and Early Childhood Education Programs

- **Engage in Professional Learning Focused on Integrated Multi-Tiered System of Support:** School leaders, educators, related service providers and other district personnel will engage in professional learning, coaching and on-site technical assistance with educational service centers and state support teams using Ohio's model integrated multi-tiered system of support. Professional learning will meet the staff's needs by including a combination of evidence-based and high-leverage practices, special education processes and procedures, and family engagement. Professional learning opportunities for all educators will continue to emphasize consistent and accurate completion of Ohio's required and optional special education forms.
- **Implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support:** Districts, community schools and early childhood education programs will implement an integrated multi-tiered system of support for the four equal learning domains within their local contexts. Local schools and districts will incorporate a systemic focus on the *whole child* using a range of professional learning supports in the areas of evidence-based practices, valid and reliable assessments (for example, screening and progress monitoring tools), data-based decision-making, culturally responsive practices, mitigation of implicit bias and the impact of overidentification and disproportionate discipline in special education.
- **Employ Collaborative Planning Time for Educators:** Districts, community schools and early childhood education programs will develop schedules that allow for collaboration among general educators, special educators, related service providers and paraprofessionals. The local level will provide dedicated time for classroom visits and instructional and peer coaching; a standard, uninterrupted literacy block; and co-planning and tiered interventions that support the implementation of an integrated multi-tiered system of support.
- **Maximize Collaboration and Data-Based Decision-Making:** Districts, community schools and early childhood education programs will optimize collaborative teaching opportunities for educators and related service providers. Educators and service providers will use student assessment data to differentiate instruction and identify appropriate evidence-based practices to meet all learners' needs. This collaborative process will happen within a team structure in which teachers build collective efficacy. These educators also will engage in co-planning instruction and intervention supports to ensure the needs of students with disabilities are met.
- **Extend Resources to the Community:** Educators will engage with families regarding evidence-based practices used by the school and how these can be implemented at homes and in their communities. Districts may want to use [Ohio's Models for Family and Community Engagement](#) as a resource or other appropriate engagement sites, such as the [Ohio Leadership Advisory Council](#).

Focus B:

Promotion of ongoing, job-embedded and sustained professional learning that focuses on meeting the specific needs of students with disabilities.

Each Child, Our Future envisions every child will have access to highly effective school leaders, educators, related service providers and other school personnel. Ohio can accomplish this by providing high-quality, job-embedded professional learning opportunities. By improving preservice and professional learning opportunities, Ohio can ensure its leaders, educators and district personnel will be able to meet all students' needs.

Meeting the needs of students with disabilities in an inclusive environment will require a shift in many educators' professional competencies. While general education teachers have content and grade-level expertise, they want additional knowledge and skills in teaching students with disabilities. While special educators have expertise in specially designed instructional techniques, they desire to gain additional content knowledge of academic areas. By delivering high-quality, job-embedded professional learning opportunities for both groups, Ohio can ensure it can meet the needs of its students with disabilities.

Recommendation 2: Ensure all educators are equipped to deliver evidence-based practices for instructing students with disabilities.

Tactic B: Identify and communicate existing professional learning resources directly to those who need them – teachers, service providers, leaders, regional supports and families.

Action Steps for the Ohio Department of Education and Partners

- **Analysis and Alignment of Professional Learning Opportunities:** Ohio's partners will assist in analyzing and aligning current professional learning opportunities provided by the Department. This group will identify gaps in professional learning and provide recommendations for the future development of resources.
- **Inventory and Expand Current Professional Learning Resources:** The Department's program offices will collaborate to inventory and communicate existing state, regional and local professional learning resources. The Department will explore where these professional learning resources will be housed, such as a dedicated website or by expanding Ohio's Evidence-Based Clearinghouse and Literacy Toolkit. The Department will expand professional learning offerings using its Learning Management System.

Action Steps for the Statewide System of Support

- **Support the Alignment of Resources:** The Statewide System of Support will assist the Department and its partners in aligning and communicating existing regional resources and identifying possible gaps as described above.
- **Advertise Professional Learning Resources:** The Statewide System of Support will advertise the availability of quality professional learning opportunities developed by the Department and others to their member districts, community schools and early childhood programs.

Action Steps for Districts, Community Schools and Early Childhood Education Programs

- **Engage in Feedback Opportunities:** Educators will provide feedback to the Department and Statewide System of Support regarding professional learning opportunities and any redesign of the Department's professional learning websites.

Tactic C: Support teacher preparation programs and in-service professional learning opportunities to address the needs of, and supports for, students with disabilities.

Action Steps for the Ohio Department of Education and Partners

- **Support Educator Preparation Programs:** The Department, Dean's Compact, Ohio Association of Community Colleges and private colleges of teacher education will collaborate to enhance educator preparation programming that equips all preservice educators to deliver evidence-based practices for students with disabilities. Pre-educator programming enhancements may include integrating coursework that encompasses evidence-based practices and interventions; instruction in the science of reading; use of data-based decision-making to inform instruction; cultural competency and culturally responsive practices in teaching; awareness of implicit bias; and understanding the use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.
- **Support In-Service Professional Learning Opportunities:** The Department will collaborate with regional partners to expand professional learning opportunities at the state and regional levels. This content will reflect the model of a multi-tiered system of support and may include, but is not limited to, the topics indicated above in 2.C.2. These learning opportunities will be job-embedded and sustained over time. The Department and regional partners will ensure these topics are integrated into existing resources for training, coaching and implementation supported through a continuous improvement process.
- **Share Evidence-Based Practices:** The Department and partners will identify, sort and categorize evidence-based practices and assessments that have valid and reliable results that address the unique needs of students with disabilities. These practices will be shared via the Department's website or other existing platforms (for example, the Department's e-newsletter, EdConnection).

Action Steps for the Statewide System of Support

- **Host Networked Improvement Communities:** Regional entities will host networked improvement communities to build regional, district and educator knowledge and skills. A networked improvement community is a particular kind of community of practice that supports a continuous improvement process, facilitates engagement by breaking down large work processes into smaller subtasks and can accelerate learning across a diverse group of educators and organizations.¹⁸ Participants in the sessions may include district and school leaders, educators at every grade level and across all disciplines, and related service providers. State support teams may wish to partner with educational service centers or other agencies, such as Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, to offer these sessions.
- **Professional Learning Collaboration:** Regional consultants dedicated to special education will collaborate with the Department by contributing and sharing resources and targeted professional learning opportunities with the districts they serve.

Action Steps for Districts, Community Schools and Early Childhood Education Programs

- **Participate in Professional Learning on Evidence-Based Practices:** Building and classroom staff will participate in professional learning opportunities regarding evidence-based practices. Professional learning opportunities will be based on district data and may include, but are not limited to, those items indicated in **Support Educator Preparation Programs** above.
- **Advance Culturally Responsive Practices:** Districts, community schools and early childhood education programs will connect practices related to cultural competency, culturally responsive practices and implicit bias into existing professional learning.
- **Engage Families in Collaborative Discussions:** Educators and school leaders will engage families and community members in collaborative discussions and learning opportunities regarding evidence-based practices.

¹⁸ Carnegie Foundation. (2020). Why a NIC? Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. <https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/blog/why-a-nic/>

Focus C:

Advancement of Postsecondary Learning Experiences and Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

To guarantee students with disabilities achieve success in postsecondary education or careers, Ohio must take steps to provide the necessary supports and services needed for postsecondary opportunities. These steps will require educators to work with students, families and community members to offer students with disabilities a variety of opportunities for meaningful postsecondary experiences that are focused on students' preferences, interests, needs and strengths and based on an age-appropriate transition assessment, so they may achieve standard diplomas.

Recommendation 3: Communicate and provide access to a variety of opportunities that will lead to a standard diploma and ensure a seamless transition to postsecondary education and employment settings.

Tactic D: Assist districts in establishing or refining the process of postsecondary transition planning for their students with disabilities.

Action Steps for the Ohio Department of Education and Partners

- **Review and Make Recommendations Regarding Best Practices for Transition Planning:** The Department and partners will review best practices and make recommendations to the field regarding the use of age-appropriate transition assessments and transition planning.
- **Provide Postsecondary Transitioning Professional Learning Opportunities for Educators:** With its partners, the Department will develop professional learning opportunities that embed culturally responsive practices, evidence-based predictors and practices for successful postsecondary outcomes.

Action Steps for the Statewide System of Support

- **Assist Districts with Postsecondary Transition Planning:** The Statewide System of Support will assist districts in acquiring knowledge of available resources in their communities. Ongoing coaching of best practices in postsecondary transition assessments with appropriate documentation in the students' individualized education programs also will be provided. State support teams, educational service centers or other state agencies, such as Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, may wish to collaborate on this action step.

Action Steps for Districts and Community Schools

- **Participate in Postsecondary Professional Learning Opportunities:** Educators will participate in professional learning regarding effective family and student engagement, multi-agency postsecondary transition planning, graduation pathways and options for satisfying graduation requirements.
- **Support Educators with Postsecondary Transition Planning Process:** Districts and schools will develop internal monitoring review processes for postsecondary transition to ensure students' age-appropriate transition assessments, supports and services are aligned and documented accurately in the students' individual education programs. This will include appropriate documentation and evidence of collaboration with families, other support agencies (such as county boards of developmental disabilities and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities) and community partners. Districts and community schools will use compliance tools, such as the [National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center's Indicator 13 checklist](#), to assist in documenting postsecondary compliance.
- **Use Data for Postsecondary Transition Planning Decisions:** Building-level teams will review and document data, such as measurements of academic progress, end-of-course exams, progress toward graduation requirements and work-based learning opportunities to ensure students with disabilities are progressing toward graduation pathways.
- **Apply Resources and Intensify Postsecondary Transition Planning:** Districts and community schools will use age-appropriate transition assessments to obtain a clear understanding of students; preferences, interests, needs and strengths and use the results to determine students' intended graduation pathways and postsecondary transition plans.

Tactic E: Provide students with disabilities equitable access to career awareness, preparation, readiness or career-technical education programming.

Action Steps for the Ohio Department of Education and Partners

- **Review and Revise Postsecondary Transition Planning Policies and Practices:** The Department and its partners will review and revise, as necessary, policies the Department provides for *universal supports* regarding postsecondary transition planning (for example, the career advising policy or documentation of services in a student's individual education program).
- **Maintain and Expand Partnerships:** The Department will continue to partner with Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, the Ohio departments of Developmental Disabilities and Job and Family Services to improve career exploration and employment opportunities for students with disabilities. The Department will explore other opportunities to expand its partnerships with state agencies or others involved with postsecondary transition services for students with disabilities.

Action Steps for the Statewide System of Support

- **Provide Support to Districts:** The Statewide System of Support will provide guidance and support to districts and community schools with information regarding career-technical education pathways, college readiness skills, the use of age-appropriate postsecondary transition assessments and best practices in documenting the results within students' individualized education programs.

Action Steps for Districts, Community Schools and Early Childhood Education Programs

- **Embed Career-Focused Learning Opportunities Across the PreK-12 Education Journey:** Districts and community schools will provide career awareness, career preparation and career readiness, beginning with preschool and continuing through grade 12, while linking the activities to curriculum content areas.
- **Offer Schoolwide Postsecondary Opportunities:** District and school leaders will collaborate to provide schoolwide postsecondary and career-focused learning opportunities (for example, job shadowing, industry tours or career fairs) by establishing partnerships with local businesses.
- **Ensure more students with disabilities enroll and succeed in career-technical education programs.** District and school leaders will improve access, enrollment, engagement and performance for all students, with an intentional focus on students with disabilities by engaging with career-technical education and community partners.

Tactic F: Provide resources, training and coaching to students and families concerning pathways to graduation with purposefully designed transition plans for each child.

Action Steps for the Ohio Department of Education and Partners

- **Develop and Refine Resources Regarding Graduation Pathways:** The Department and partners will leverage existing materials and develop additional resources to communicate the multiple pathways to graduation, sharing how the pathways, including the OhioMeansJobs-Readiness Seal, link to college admissions and other postsecondary outcomes. These resources will include interactive tools with accessible infographics and will be written in family-friendly terminology. The resources will connect the alignment to postsecondary transition planning so families and students can make informed decisions about the pathways students may pursue. A system for dissemination will be created to ensure consistent information is available.
- **Continuously Analyze Data Associated with the Graduation Pathways:** The Department and its partners will continue to analyze data using tools, such as the [Ohio Longitudinal Transition Study](#), to determine which pathways to graduation students with disabilities are using and ways to remove barriers that are keeping students with disabilities from pursuing other pathways.
- **Leverage and Enhance Career Advising Policy and Business Advisory Councils:** The Department will take steps to ensure districts implement [career advising](#) and [business advisory council](#) policies. The Department will seek input from its partners as to how these should be monitored. The Department also will develop and provide additional resources, as needed, for students with disabilities as they relate to these policies.
- **Develop Resources for Postsecondary Transition Toolkit Families:** The Department and its partner-based teams will develop a transition toolkit for families. The toolkit will address each stage of the postsecondary transition planning process.

Action Steps for the Statewide System of Support

- **Include Graduation Pathways in Professional Learning:** The Statewide System of Support will provide professional development and ongoing support to districts and community schools regarding the use of appropriate postsecondary transition assessments and graduation pathways. Professional learning opportunities also will address options for satisfying graduation requirements and supporting students with disabilities in their chosen pathways through purposeful postsecondary transition planning. The Statewide System of Support will offer a platform for districts within a region to share resources and information.

Action Steps for Districts and Community Schools

- **Set Expectations for Schools and Districts to Increase the Number and Percent of Students with Disabilities who Achieve Standard Diplomas:** Educators will provide students and families with information in understanding what it means to exit services (for example, accepting a diploma within four years or deferring graduation) and requirements to earn standard diplomas. Schools and districts should ensure more students with disabilities graduate with standard diplomas. ***Schools and districts should ensure more students with disabilities graduate with standard diplomas.***
- **Communicate and Assist Students and Families with Understanding Graduation Pathways:** Districts will provide information to students and families regarding graduation pathways and options for satisfying graduation requirements. Educators will provide instruction and support to students regarding their chosen graduation pathways. Appropriate transition supports and services will be developed and provided to students to fulfill their pathways through purposeful postsecondary transition assessment and planning. Building-level staff will receive professional learning opportunities regarding graduation pathways to better assist students and families in determining postsecondary plans.

Data, Targets and Monitoring

The data included at the beginning of this report paints an honest picture of the current state of the educational outcomes for students with disabilities. IDEA established a series of special education “indicators” to measure each school district’s services and results for students with disabilities. The Department works with stakeholders to set annual targets, or goals, for how districts should perform on these indicators.

Every year, each district receives a [Special Education Profile](#) that shows whether it is meeting its goals, over time, for students with disabilities. The design of the Special Education Profile helps districts use data about services and outcomes for students with disabilities to keep improving special education programs. This data gives schools answers about kindergarten readiness, achievement levels, preparedness for life beyond high school, services for children with disabilities and equitable outcomes.

The primary basis of each district’s 2020-2021 Special Education Profile is the final special education program data that districts submitted through the state’s Education Management Information System (EMIS) for the **2018-2019** and **2019-2020** school years. The Special Education Profile also reflects a district’s performance on each indicator in the three previous years.

The state will engage with a coalition of stakeholders to initiate the action items identified in this plan and monitor the progress against the recommendations in this report and their implementation at the school and district levels in the interest of ensuring improved outcomes for each district’s Special Education Profile.

Partnerships and Resources

The Department partners with many entities, including state support teams, educational service centers, professional organizations, colleges and universities, community schools, early childhood education programs, students, families, community members and other state agencies. Representatives from each of these valued partners helped create this plan and the recommendations, tactics and action steps outlined. Ohio’s partners will assist the Department in using existing resources to build upon the current education system’s strengths.

Challenges exist but, by working together, Ohio will make great strides in its quest to realize the promise of *Each Child, Our Future* for students with disabilities. *Each Child Means Each Child* will require the collective efforts of all systems and programs working together at each level of the education system to make the substantive changes necessary for students.

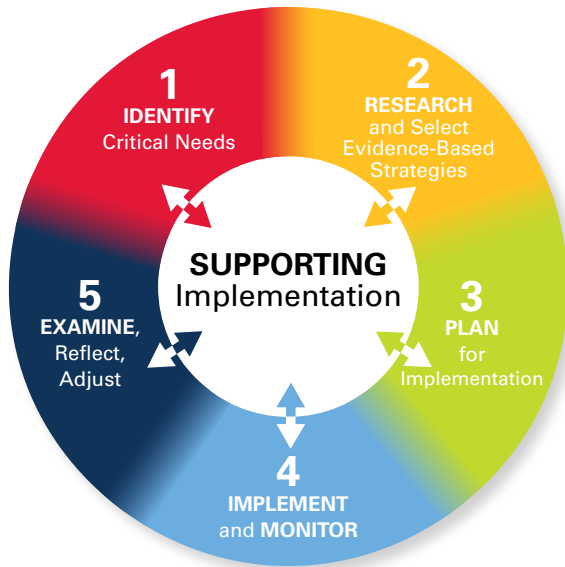
External partners will be critical to ensuring the supports mentioned in this plan are implemented across the educational cycle for students with disabilities. These valued partners include the following:

- Statewide Family Engagement Center at The Ohio State University;
- Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities;
- Ohio Department of Higher Education;
- Institutions of higher education;
- Dean’s Compact;
- Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities;
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities;
- Ohio Department of Job and Family Services;
- OCALI.

This list is not exhaustive and will remain fluid as other agencies and entities may be added throughout the implementation process. An extensive list of partnerships and resources is available in [Appendix A](#).

A Partnership-Based Approach to Implementation of this Plan's Recommendations

The Ohio Improvement Process will steer the implementation of the action steps of this plan.



The Department and implementation teams will:

1. Identify critical needs related to each identified focus area;
2. Research and select evidence-based practices reflecting each focus area;
3. Plan for implementing the tactics and action steps for each focus area;
4. Implement and monitor the progress toward the recommendations;
5. Examine the data and outcomes of progress made during implementation while adjusting or refining any of the actions as needed.

Implementation Structures: Like the stakeholder-driven process used to develop this plan, the implementation process will be comprised of multiple teams co-designing and collaborating through continuous feedback loops. These teams will represent a variety of offices at the Department, its partners, the Statewide System of Support, districts, schools, students, families and community partners. The implementation phase of this work will be guided by a steering committee comprised of representatives with varying roles and responsibilities within Ohio's educational landscape. The steering committee will provide the Department with oversight and help guide the implementation of the recommendations provided in this plan.

Implementation Plan Execution: The Department recognizes the implementation of any recommendations, tactics and action steps in this plan needs to be deliberate to be executed correctly. The implementation process cannot move too quickly or without having the proper professional learning or coaching opportunities in place.¹⁹ A strategic rollout will be required to avoid initiative overload at each educational level. The Department will work with a steering committee to map out a detailed plan that will yield the best results.

To assist with the implementation of *Each Child Means Each Child*, Ohio will use principles from implementation science, most notably the *Active Implementation Frameworks*. These frameworks, developed by the [National Implementation Research Network](#), will be used to guide the Department and its partners in implementing and sustaining the recommendations in this plan. The Active Implementation Frameworks involve the following:

- Usable interventions that need to be teachable, learnable, doable and readily assessed in practice;
- Implementation stages, which occur over time and involve multiple decisions, actions and corrections;
- Competency, organization and leadership drivers so implementation teams can actively work on supporting the change;
- Improvement cycles, such as the Ohio Improvement Process, to study, research, plan, implement and reflect or readjust the course of actions, if needed.

This framework's focus on organizational structures, capacity building and leadership with its emphasis on improvement cycles will assist Ohio and its partners in using the Ohio Improvement Process and moving this initiative forward.²⁰

¹⁹ McIntosh, K., & Goodman, S. (2016). *Integrated multi-tiered systems of support: Blending RTI and PBIS*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

²⁰ *Module 1: An Overview of Active Implementation Frameworks*. (n.d.) National Implementation Research Network: Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. Retrieved February 11, 2020.

Implementation Plan: Ohio will develop an implementation plan that spans multiple years and aligns to the [active implementation stages](#): exploration, installation, initial implementation and full implementation.²¹ These stages will guide the implementation teams and allow them to identify successes at each phase of the process.²² Each stage of implementation will require adequate time to advance the mindsets, conditions, capacities and structures necessary to sustain this work. The stages are not sequential and may overlap. Experience and time may reveal that an earlier stage needs to be revisited.²³ Stakeholders can expect the work to evolve through the following, nonlinear phases:

- **Phase One (Exploration):** The stakeholder-driven process used to develop this plan represents the beginning of the exploration stage. In this phase, the Department, its partners and each work group reviewed data, completed research and developed the focus areas, recommendations, tactics and action steps.
- **Phase Two (Exploration and Installation):** Phase two will be the creation of partnership-based teams. In this phase, teams will explore best practices to address Ohio’s model development of an integrated multi-tiered system of support, professional learning opportunities and postsecondary learning experiences. During this phase, teams will identify implementation requirements, examine research to determine the best approaches for Ohio, address capacity issues and readiness for implementation and describe required resources and supports needed to implement the action steps.²⁴ Teams will consider current initiatives, practices and programs that need to be integrated, removed or added before implementation. This stage does not include actual implementation with districts, community schools or early childhood education programs.
- **Phase Three (Initial Implementation):** At this stage, the Department will pilot the models developed with a select number of districts, community schools and early childhood education programs to ensure adequate resources, time and supports are provided. Continuous feedback loops will be essential to this phase, so the Department can identify the most effective and efficient methods for implementation on a larger scale. This phase will allow for troubleshooting, reflection, evaluation and revision to the systems and approaches.
- **Phase Four (Full Implementation):** After the Department has reviewed and incorporated any necessary changes learned through phase three, the next stage is expanding the work to include more districts, community schools and early childhood education programs. This phase continues to allow for refinement of the models developed.

Districts, community schools and early childhood programs involved in phase three can refine their initial work by revising policies and practices, as well as scaling up implementation and continuing professional learning opportunities. Full implementation will be an ongoing phase, as the partnership-based teams continue expanding and supporting those already involved in the work.

- **Phase Five (Continuous Improvement²⁵):** The Department, districts, community schools and early childhood programs will adhere to the continuous improvement process that will allow for ongoing improvements to any developed models and professional learning opportunities. A focus on continuous improvement will enhance effectiveness and ensure sustainability. For those districts, community schools and early childhood education programs engaged in the work, structures, policies and practices should be well established and supported by ongoing professional learning opportunities, coaching and monitoring.

The focus areas, recommendations, tactics and action steps of *Each Child Means Each Child* will ensure Ohio meets the unique educational needs of the more than 270,000 students identified with disabilities. Partnerships with others will put this plan into action, creating a positive and lasting impact on Ohio’s education system.

²¹ [Framework 2: Implementation Stages](#). (n.d.) National Implementation Research Network: Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. Retrieved February 11, 2020.

²² McIntosh, K., & Goodman, S. (2016). *Integrated multi-tiered systems of support: Blending RTI and PBIS*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

²³ [Framework 2: Implementation Stages](#). (n.d.) National Implementation Research Network: Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. Retrieved February 11, 2020.

²⁴ McIntosh, K., & Goodman, S. (2016). *Integrated multi-tiered systems of support: Blending RTI and PBIS*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

²⁵ McIntosh, K., & Goodman, S. (2016). *Integrated multi-tiered systems of support: Blending RTI and PBIS*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Appendix A

Steering Committee Members

The Steering Committee provided high-level oversight to the plan development.

Facilitator: Mary Watson (National Center for Systemic Improvement)

Name	District/Agency
Mike Bader	Sylvania City Schools
Richard Baird	North Union Local School District
David Baker	Ohio Department of Education
Aaron Bernstein	Wayne County Board of Developmental Disabilities
Jim Chapple	Ashland University
Melanie Cronebach	East Central Ohio Educational Service Center
Jeff Davis	Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities
Paolo DeMaria	Ohio Department of Education
Dennis Evans	Minford Local Schools
Rebecca Furbay	Ohio Department of Education
Wendy Grove	Ohio Department of Education
Geraldine Hayes-Nelson	Kent State University
Shawn Henry	OCALI
Kristen Hildebrandt	Disability Rights Ohio
Catherine Ingram	Ohio House of Representatives
Kevin Jamison	Princeton City Schools
Shannon Komisarek	Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities
Heinrich Leutz	Council for Exceptional Children
Donna McCance	Lancaster City Schools
Ellen McWilliams-Woods	Akron City Schools
Antionette Miranda	State Board of Education
Najma Mohamoud	Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities
Kim Monachino	Ohio Department of Education
Joseph Petrarca	Ohio Department of Education
Trisha Prunty	State Advisory Panel for Exceptional Children
Christy Roshong	Ohio Educational Service Center Association
Stephanie Siddens	Ohio Department of Education
Deb Tully	Ohio Federation of Teachers
Denyse Woods	Columbus City Schools
Lisa Woods	State Board of Education
Shaun Yoder	Ohio Department of Education

Work Groups

The following four work groups, Disproportionality; Inclusive Leadership and Instructional Practices; Literacy; and Postsecondary Outcomes and Graduation, examined pertinent research and data to inform the plan development. These groups offered the recommendations, tactics and action steps presented in this plan.

Disproportionality

Facilitators: Virginia Ressa (Ohio Department of Education), Nancy O'Hara (IDEA Data Center), Christopher Thacker (IDEA Data Center), Caroline Coston (Ohio Department of Education), Shauna Schramke (Ohio Department of Education)

Name	District/Agency
Jamie Angelini	Hamilton Local School District
N'ecole Ast	Woodridge Local School District
Beth Barrow	Toledo City School District
Jennifer Bogenrife	Springfield City School District
Bethany Britt	East Cleveland City School District
Kelly Churchwright	Ohio Department of Education
Kristall Day	Ohio Dominican University
Bridgie Ford	LeBron James Family Foundation College of Education
Terri Freeman	Northwest Local School District (Scioto County)
Laura Groboske	Firelands Local School District
Karen Hall	Springfield City School District
Scott Horstmeier	Mt. Healthy Junior/Senior High School
Elizabeth Kimmel	Shaker Heights City School District
Laurie Langenfeld	State Support Team 9
Jamie Lenzo	The Graham School
Keith Mesmer	Nordonia City School District
Ron Rogers	OCALI
Emma Sacha	Nordonia City School District
Jenine Sansosti	State Support Team 8
Lisa Saylor	Miami Valley Regional Center
Helene Stacho	State Support Team 11
Heidi Stickney	Northwest Local School District (Hamilton County)
Susannah Wayland	Ohio Department of Education
Chris Young	Painesville City Schools

Inclusive Leadership and Instructional Practices

Facilitators: Michelle Elia (State Support Team 5), Jennifer Pierce (American Institutes for Research), Mary Watson (National Center for Systemic Improvement)

Name	District/Agency
Julie Altier	Dover City School District
Michele Angelo	Akron City School District
Jaymi Brumfield	Teays Valley Local School District
Amy Comford	Columbus City Schools
Toni D'Urso	Niles City School District
Earl Focht	Ohio Department of Education
Barb Gentile Green	State Support Team 7
Annie Hostetler	North Ridgeville City School District
Joelle McConnell	Cincinnati City School District
Josh Morris	Portsmouth City School District
Julie Morrison	University of Cincinnati
Jennifer Myree	Cincinnati City School District
Tricia Samuel	Maumee City School District
Kathy Shelton	Ohio Department of Education
Andrea Smith	North Point Educational Service Center
Daniela Stuckey	Kent City School District
Heather Thompson	Western Local School District
Darrell Yater	Northwest Local School District

Literacy

Facilitators: Dr. Mona Burts-Beatty (State Support Team 13), Carolyn Turner (State Support Team 13)

Name	District/Agency
Shawna Benson	OCALI
Miguel Brun	Edison Local School District
Cheryl Byrne	State Support Team 7
Melissa Cardinal	Cardinal Local School District
Caroline Coston	Ohio Department of Education
Jack Cunningham	East Liverpool Local School District
Jamie Davis	Worthington City School District
Argyroula Diamanti	Dayton City School District
Eric Floyd	Rock Hill Local School District
Jen Govender	OCALI
Ashley Hall	Ohio Department of Education
Beth Hess	Ohio Department of Education
Karen Jeffries	Ohio Department of Education
Ellie Johnson	Riverside Elementary
Kristen Jones	Marysville Exempted Village School District
Valerie Kunze	United Preparatory Academy
Rachel Lang-Daniels	Central Ohio Educational Service Center
Becky Malinas	Kirtland Local School District
Greg McClellan	Streetsboro City School District
Alexandra Pavlik	Northridge Local School District
Wendy Strickler	Mount St. Joseph University
Amy Watson-Grace	Brain Body Connections
Blythe Wood	Pickerington Local School District

Postsecondary Outcomes and Graduation

Facilitators: Catherine Fowler (National Technical Assistance Center on Transition), Michael Stoehr (National Technical Assistance Center on Transition), Amy Szymanski (State Support Team 1)

Name	District/Agency
Jeff Berenson	South Euclid Lyndhurst City School District
Krissy Cheslock	Four County Career Center
Alex Corwin	Ohio Department of Education
Al Daviso	University of Akron
Chris Filler	OCALE
Denise Giesecke	South-Western City School District
Glenda Greene	Clermont Northeastern Local School District
Lyndsay Havey	Ohio Department of Education
Patricia Kauffman	Madison-Champaign Educational Service Center
Rachael Knisely	Canton City Schools
Karen Leugers	Mercer County Board of Developmental Disabilities
Drew Milligan	Columbus City School District
Marissa Merk	EHOVE Career Center
Penny Murray	New Lexington City Schools
Alissa Otani-Cole	Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities
Danielle Polk	Meigs Local School District
Jodi Riedel	Trumbull County Career Technical Center
Deb Stroud	Xavier University
Angie Toland	Allen County Educational Service Center
Kati Tomco	Willoughby Eastlake City School District
Lynn White	Fairfield County Educational Service Center

APPENDIX B:

Sophia's Story

Read Sophia's entire story here. The **bold** text explains what should have happened.

Sophia's struggles with learning began in kindergarten. Her teacher noticed Sophia had a difficult time learning the alphabet and remembering the letter names. The building where Sophia attended did not have a systematic way of referring students for interventions, and Sophia was promoted each year despite not being able to read.

- **When districts and school buildings do not implement a system for struggling students, students may get overlooked and "fall through the cracks." Exploring and implementing a multi-tiered system of support helps districts and schools help children who struggle with academics or behavior.**

In first and second grade, Sophia was referred for evaluations by her teachers and, each year, the requests were denied by the school psychologist. The school psychologist told Sophia's parents and teachers the district "does not do testing for a learning disability until third grade" and Sophia needed interventions completed first. The interventions developed for Sophia were more like accommodations, such as repeating directions and preferential seating. These things did little to help Sophia progress. She received Title 1 reading, but the remediation did not help her improve as the reading plan was not targeted to what she needed.

An evaluation is required if someone on the team, including a parent, suspects a disability.

- **Many districts are realizing that markers for learning disabilities can exist in some students even before third grade. Regardless, testing decisions are made by a team, not just one individual, as in Sophia's case.**
- **Interventions are a requirement for special education eligibility and need to be reported in the evaluation team report.**
- **When interventions are developed, they need to align with the identified problem. There should be a criterion tied to the intervention, so the individuals applying the intervention know when the student is successful. Accommodations, which may be helpful, will not help a student overcome a specific reading deficit.**
- **Title 1 is a federally funded program and, in and of itself, is not an intervention.**
- **What occurs during a Title 1 session needs to align with a student's target(s) for improvement.**

When Sophia received her evaluation in third grade, the school psychologist met with her parents to obtain their permission for an evaluation. The parents asked if the meeting could be held after school since they both work but were told no. The school psychologist explained that testing would occur, she would be the chair of the evaluation team, and she would determine the tests and any other professionals who would be involved in Sophia's evaluation after her tests were completed. When her parents came to review the results, they were greeted by a team of professionals they had never met, including the school nurse, speech-language pathologist and an individual who introduced himself as the "intervention specialist who will be working with Sophia."

- **Districts and schools want to foster positive relationships with their parents. When parents feel dismissed or that the educators are more concerned with the rights of the adults rather than the rights of children, relationships can suffer and, ultimately, so can the children's education.**
- **An evaluation is a team decision. While not required, it is best practice to have the evaluation team meeting with members of the team to discuss suspected disabilities, develop an evaluation plan and explain the evaluation process to the parents.**
- **One individual does not determine if an evaluation is needed; this is a team decision.**
- **Districts want to make sure an evaluation, especially an initial evaluation, is comprehensive. This means all aspects of a child's educational functioning are discussed and, if necessary, part of the child's evaluation plan. It is difficult to determine if Sophia's evaluation met this standard.**
- **Parents have a right to know in advance of the meeting who will be in attendance. Having Sophia's parents meet team members in advance could have helped foster positive relationships and build trust.**
- **Having the intervention specialist attend the meeting and introduced as the individual who will be working with Sophia could be construed to mean the district already had determined eligibility for services. Eligibility is always a team decision.**

Sophia's IEP meeting was held after the school psychologist excused herself from the meeting. The intervention specialist explained Sophia's general education teacher could not attend as she was in class, and the building principal would "pop in" later if he had time. Sophia's parents were told she would be one of several students attending the resource room for her education.

When Sophia's parents expressed concern she would be missing the instruction occurring in the classroom, the intervention specialist said, "This is how we provide services here." The intervention specialist further explained that, "Because Sophia was so far behind, she needed to be in a room away from all the other distractions that occur in a classroom." The intervention specialist assured Sophia's parents she would receive the same curriculum as the "other children in the general education classroom but with a smaller group of students and at a much slower pace."

Several accommodations and modifications were addressed in Sophia's IEP, and her parents were told this was to "help Sophia so she could pass the state tests."

- **The general education teacher and district or building administrator are required to attend any student's IEP meeting unless the parents and district agree to excuse their attendance.**
- **A continuum of service delivery options exists for children, and this continuum should have been explained to Sophia's parents. Most children can have their special education needs met in the general education classroom. Some may need to attend class in a resource room that is separate from the general education classroom given their needs. Very few students, by nature of their disabilities, may require their education to be in separate facilities.**
- **Accommodations change how a student learns material. They do not alter or lower the expectations learned. Modifications change what a student is to discover. They often mean a reduction of standards. The purpose of either is to assist children in demonstrating their knowledge, not to pass state assessments.**

At the end of Sophia's fourth-grade year, her team became concerned she had not passed any state tests. Team members wondered if the alternate assessment might be more appropriate for her by giving her a "chance." A meeting was held with Sophia's intervention specialist and her parents to discuss this option. The intervention specialist explained the alternate assessment could help Sophia "show what she knows" rather than taking a state test she would "surely fail." Her parents, wanting the best opportunities for their daughter, agreed to this change.

- **Ohio's Alternate Assessment for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities is only for students with the most significant cognitive delays.**
- **In Sophia's case, despite the teacher's well-meaning intentions, it should not have been considered.**
- **Sophia's IEP team should have looked not only at the data that came from any state tests but also whether her IEP goals were aligned to her most recent evaluation.**
- **In Sophia's case, if she was not making progress, her IEP team or parents should have requested a team meeting to review why she was not making progress.**

As Sophia fell further behind her peers, she became even more frustrated. Her middle school years were especially difficult, and she began refusing to do her work in class.

Socially, Sophia became more isolated from her peers. She no longer saw the friends she made in third and fourth grade, as she was in a resource room for core subjects most of the day. When she attended general education classes for inclusion in non-core subjects, like social studies, the teachers placed her in the back of the room.

Sophia tried to follow along in her textbook when the teacher was speaking, but she found it challenging to comprehend what she was reading.

- **When students are not making progress, IEP teams need to examine why. In Sophia's case, her team should have examined the goals to see if they were aligned with her needs. The team also should have evaluated the goals to see if they were measurable. Finally, the team should have examined the setting and methodology to see if they were appropriate for her.**
- **Sophia's teachers could have tried placing her next to students without disabilities. This may have made her feel less isolated and fostered a learning community within the classroom. The team also could also have explored the use of assistive technology, such as books on tape, to help her with reading comprehension.**

As Sophia became more frustrated with her inability to read and additional social isolation, her behavior began to deteriorate. She often refused to complete tasks in class and either sat and daydreamed or “mouthed off” to her teachers. She was sent to the assistant principal’s office for minor behavior infractions daily, like forgetting to bring a pencil to class.

Over the course of one school year, Sophia missed more than 85 hours of in-class instruction due to in-school suspensions. The assistant principal warned her that if her behavior did not improve, she would be suspended or sent to a school for students with behavioral problems.

- **Sophia’s IEP team could have completed a functional behavioral analysis to determine the purpose behind her acting out. Conducting this type of evaluation would help avoid the trap of sending her to the office.**
- **Sophia’s school may need professional development to learn positive support for students rather than sending students to the office for behavior infractions.**

The building principal at Sophia’s middle school had attempted to implement a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports program in the school to improve the relationships and culture in the building. The teachers did not think it was the time to implement a “new” program. Although they are required to implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports by law, little effort was put forth to ensure building staff were trained or implementing best practices.

- **Ohio’s House Bill 318, [Supporting Alternatives for Fair Education \(SAFE\) Act](#) addresses the requirements for multi-tiered behavioral supports.**
- **PBIS, as a framework, emphasizes teaching students what TO do rather than telling students what NOT to do.**
- **Ohio schools implementing PBIS with fidelity have demonstrated noteworthy reductions in their rates of office discipline referrals, suspensions and expulsions.**
- **Each district is required to provide professional development or continuing education in PBIS to school staff. Districts are also required to report annually to the Ohio Department of Education regarding their level of PBIS implementation.**

Sophia’s IEP team began the process of developing her postsecondary transition plan when she was 14 years old. The district did not use an age-appropriate transition assessment and completed the task using what her teachers felt she needed. Her IEP team did not ask about her plans for after high school. Sophia’s high school IEP team suggested she continue her high school education beyond her four years so she could continue her reading instruction. Because Sophia did not graduate within four years of starting high school, it affected her district’s reported graduation rate and further isolated her from her age-level peers. Even though Sophia continued to receive passing scores on the alternate assessment, the IEP team exempted her from the consequences of not receiving passing scores.

When Sophia mentioned attending college, her high school counselor told her she is not “college material” and should consider attending the career-technical school her district uses. The career-technical program she was interested in joining will not accept Sophia since she had been alternately assessed.

The career-technical program administrators suggested a program geared for students with cognitive delays. Sophia makes plans to drop out of school.

- **There are several types of age-appropriate transition assessments available for districts to use. Many are free and provide IEP teams with the information needed to create transition plans tailored to students’ needs. Using the right tool would have helped Sophia’s IEP team determine her preferences, interests, need and strengths.**

Sophia's scenario is like thousands of others across Ohio. What could have been a tragic statistic of another student with a disability dropping out of school became one of advocacy and acceptance. Below is the alternative story of Sophia.

While Sophia's parents liked and trusted the district, they realized they needed to be the impetus for change. They had Sophia evaluated at the end of her second-grade year by a skilled reading specialist and then shared the results with the district. The district agreed to conduct a comprehensive evaluation that looked at all aspects of Sophia's learning, including language and communication, fine motor skills and visual perception. Because the district had not provided targeted interventions aligned to Sophia's needs, it used the reading specialist's recommendations as a springboard to create interventions implemented by her teacher and Title 1 reading specialist. The results of these interventions helped determine Sophia was a student with a specific learning disability.

When it came time to develop an IEP, Sophia's parents did not accept the one-size-fits-all approach used by the district. They knew Sophia could be successful in the general education classroom with the right interventions and supports. The building principal and district's director of special education agreed to revise the model used and revamped the intervention specialist's schedule so he could provide Sophia with specially designed instruction in her general education classroom.

While this new way of teaching took some time to get used, before long, the teacher and intervention specialist found that collaborating could help other students with and without disabilities succeed in the classroom. Other teachers saw the benefit of this approach, and soon the continuum of services changed from "we do it this way" to "what does each student need?"

When it became apparent Sophia had difficulty passing the required state assessments, her IEP team met to discuss accommodations in light of her IEP goals. It discovered Sophia was successful when she took her classroom tests in small groups. The team applied this accommodation to her state assessments, and Sophia scored proficient in all of them. She received enough points on her end-of-course tests to graduate within four years of starting high school.

Each year, Sophia's parents and IEP team discussed her progress with her reading goals and adjusted her accommodations accordingly. Eventually, Sophia became her own best advocate and would let her team know what accommodations were successful for her, which should be eliminated as she did not use or need them, and which required revisions.

When it came time to develop a transition plan for Sophia, her parents researched and shared several age-appropriate transition assessments. The district reviewed her parents' suggestions and picked one they thought would work for the district's students. In discovering Sophia's preferences, interests, needs and strengths, her high school IEP team realized Sophia was torn between attending a four-year university or participating in a career-technical education program at her local joint vocational school. With the school counselor facilitating the decision with Sophia and her parents, Sophia admitted she wanted to attend a four-year university program and major in finance.

Sophia completed her four-year degree and eventually received her Master's in Business Administration. Today, she is a successful financial planner specializing in helping people with disabilities become financially independent. This was possible because her parents worked with the district, and the district was open to change.

APPENDIX C:

Ben's struggles with learning also began in kindergarten. His school developed a tiered system of supports for students who struggle with academic or behavioral issues. Each year, Ben's teachers met with the schools' Intervention Assistance Team, which was comprised of general educators, a reading specialist, speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist and school psychologist, to develop targeted interventions that were tracked, evaluated and reported every six weeks. The building principal facilitated the meetings.

- **Having developed a multi-tiered system of support helped the school be flexible and agile when assisting students like Ben who are struggling. Like a rapid response team, the school can quickly adjust to what students need. By having a consistent review period, the school can adapt its interventions as students' progress or need more targeted and individualized support.**
- **Using a team of professionals from different areas, this school can leverage team members' expertise to create interventions from many different perspectives.**
- **Having parents attend the intervention meetings helps them gain a picture as to where their children are in relation to peers and solicits their input as to what might work, or not work, for their children. It also builds a rapport built on mutual respect.**

Ben's interventions were targeted to his identified needs, which were based on data. These interventions were specific to the identified reading problems his teachers discovered. Ben received Title 1 services, and his team knew that Title 1 in and of itself was not an intervention. It was what occurred with Title 1 — the specific reading interventions applied — that would make the difference.

In the middle of his second grade year, his teacher and parents met with the Intervention Assistance Team to review Ben's progress. The data showed continued and steady growth, but the gap between him and his peers was widening. The team agreed a comprehensive evaluation was necessary.

The results of the evaluation indicated Ben qualified as a student with a specific learning disability. The data from his interventions was instrumental in determining his disability.

- **Making specific interventions helped the team determine what was working and whether Ben was making progress.**
- **Reviewing data every few weeks helps determine if interventions are making a difference. By comparing Ben's data to his peers, the team could determine if the gap in his learning was narrowing or widening.**
- **By not delaying an evaluation, the school can provide specially designed instruction sooner to prevent further delays in Ben's reading skills.**

When it was time to review Ben's intervention results during the middle of his second-grade year, the principal ensured the meeting was mutually convenient for Ben's parents and the staff. Because his parents had regular meetings with the intervention assistance team members, they were familiar with the school psychologist, speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist and other team members. When the team members reviewed Ben's data, they agreed that they suspected a disability and recommended an evaluation. Because Ben's parents knew how hard the team worked on their son's behalf, they trusted the professionals and were comfortable with the recommendation to evaluate. hard everyone had worked on his behalf, they trusted the professionals and were comfortable with the recommendation.

The school psychologist explained the testing procedures, and the principal reviewed parental safeguards by explaining each section of *Whose IDEA is This? A Guide to Parent Rights in Special Education*. Each team member took the time to explain their recommendations for the evaluation, and a comprehensive plan was developed.

- **Because this school has a relationship built on respect and trust, staff can discuss their suspicion of a disability openly and honestly.**
- **Explaining the process of evaluation helps parents understand what will occur. Reviewing their rights in detail is part of the requirement for informed consent.**
- **Having each team member explain what testing they will conduct and why it is recommended is not only part of informed consent but also provides parents with a deeper understanding of what will occur.**

Ben's Story

Read Ben's entire story here and discover why the **bold** text may be considered best practices.

When Ben's parents met with the evaluation team, they were familiar with the team members from their previous experiences with the Intervention Assistance Team meetings. Ben's parents had requested a draft of the evaluation team report in advance of the meeting. While not required by federal or state law to do so, the district provided a draft copy of the evaluation results in advance of the meeting. Ben's parents did not fully understand the evaluation results, but they knew the team would explain the results when they met with the team.

When the team met, the draft report was projected on a large computer screen, which was mounted on the wall. Reviewing the results this way helped everyone follow along with the report. Each team member took the time to explain the evaluation results and how they manifested themselves in Ben's performance in the general education curriculum. Given they had received a draft copy of the evaluation report in advance and the depth of the review provided by the evaluation team, Ben's parents understood his learning strengths and challenges. The team used the data from Ben's interventions to further document these strengths and challenges.

The results of the evaluation, in addition to the data from those interventions, led the team to conclude that Ben had a specific learning disability in reading, reading comprehension and oral expression. A second meeting was scheduled for the following week to draft Ben's IEP.

- **Having met with the team previously helped Ben's parents feel like they were part of the evaluation process.**
- **Having received a copy of the draft report in advance (except for the eligibility section, as that part is completed during the meeting as a team) helped his parents understand the results.**
- **Scheduling a separate IEP meeting after determining eligibility allows the parents to digest the information. It also avoids the notion of predetermining a disability.**

At the IEP meeting, Ben's parents were introduced to his intervention specialist. The parents knew in advance who was going to attend the meeting, which put them at ease. While the parents received a draft copy of the proposed IEP in advance, the intervention specialist took the time to explain each section. It was clear to the parents that the goals were a direct result of the evaluation team report they had reviewed the week before. Since Ben did not need curricular modifications, the IEP team addressed his potential need for accommodations. The team was careful not to provide too many accommodations, as this might interfere with his learning. The team discussed with the parents their recommendations and determined the right amount to help him progress through the curriculum and meet his IEP goals. When it came time to discuss where the services would occur, the team reviewed the continuum of services offered in the school with the parents.

Based on Ben's individual needs, it was determined he would be best served in the general education classroom, with the intervention specialist providing his specialized learning during the language arts block.

- **Parents have a right to know who is attending a meeting about their children. Knowing this in advance continues to build trust and form positive relationships.**
- **IEP meetings can be overwhelming. Having a draft copy in advance for parents to review before the meeting helped Ben's parents prepare. Taking the time to explain each section of the IEP and what it means is not only a best practice but helps parents fully understand what their children's IEPs entail.**
- **Making sure services are aligned with Ben's needs assures his individual needs are being considered.**
- **By carefully considering the type and number of accommodations, the IEP team makes sure it does not over- or underaccommodate Ben.**

Ben's parents had heard about the alternate assessment for students with disabilities and wondered if this would be appropriate to consider for Ben. They requested a team meeting to discuss the alternate assessment. At the meeting, the team explained the alternate assessment was only for students with the "most significant cognitive disabilities," and Ben's ability level was in the average to high average range. The parents left the meeting with a better understanding of the alternate assessment and realized this was inappropriate for their son.

- **Any member of the team can request an IEP meeting. Ben's parents felt comfortable enough to request this meeting and discuss their concerns. They left with a better understanding of state testing requirements.**

Ben had a positive experience with his special education services. He achieved tremendous growth in his reading abilities over the years and, while he still struggled with some aspects of reading, he maintained decent grades and received scores of proficient in all the state tests.

Because he received his services in the general education classroom, students did not know which students had IEPs, as both the teacher and intervention specialist rotated between small groups of students who may need extra support.

Ben's next evaluation suggested he no longer had a specific learning disability but still qualified for special education services as a student with a language handicap. His parents agreed to the change, and his new disability category was changed to speech-language impairment.

- **Ben's successful interventions helped him overcome what could have been a significant reading disability if the district did not have the right conditions or support.**
- **While he continues to have a disability in language comprehension, his parents and the evaluation and IEP teams felt the data supported a change in disability categories from a specific learning disability to speech-language impairment.**

Ben's middle school embarked on a year-long study of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

It developed positive, not punitive, guidelines for students. The school involved staff, students, parents and the community in building its plan. Students were given more freedom in school. For example, if they maintained a certain grade point average and had no discipline referrals, they were permitted to sit in a common area and be with their friends rather than attend study hall. Discipline referrals, already low compared to other middle schools, dropped even lower as the students realized staff empathized and cared for their social-emotional needs.

- **Ben's middle school studied the benefits of implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.**
- **By establishing a program of respect, the staff members show their students they trust them.**
- **The students know too that the staff care about them and will be quick to intervene if needed.**

Ben's IEP team began the process of developing his postsecondary transition plan when he was 14 years old. The district used an age-appropriate transition assessment process that involved student and parent interviews and a checklist of employability and college readiness skills.

Ben's IEP team, along with the high school counselor, monitored students' end-of-course examination scores. Ben needed extra support in passing his English Language Arts 2 exam due to his language comprehension problems. The speech-language pathologist provided after-school sessions for this issue for five students, including Ben. All five students received passing scores and remained on track to graduate within four years of starting high school.

- **Using a standard age-appropriate transition assessment, Ben's IEP teams can track his responses over multiple years. Tracking his responses helps them to establish and revise his preferences, interests, needs, and strengths.**
- **By realizing that Ben and several other students may need further supports and interventions, this school can develop a program that addresses their needs.**

Each year, Ben's transition plan indicated his interest in attending college and majoring in a healing field, like physical therapy. His plan included goals such as researching entrance requirements into the field, examining universities with physical therapy programs and learning about potential earnings as a physical therapist. Ben took college prep courses in high school and, with the help of the speech-language pathologist, learned several techniques to assist him with his language comprehension. As a member of the IEP team and service provider for Ben's transition plan, the school counselor connected Ben with the student accessibility services at his chosen university.

- **Because Ben's IEP teams kept track of his preferences, interests, needs and strengths over the years, they were able to support his vision and future.**

Ben's experiences in his district are not unique or an anomaly. Districts across Ohio are adopting the procedures and processes described in his story. By building a positive working relationship built on trust and respect, Ben's IEP teams and parents worked together to make sure he is successful.

What happened to Ben? Did he go to college to become a physical therapist? Read the rest of the story to find out.

During Ben's sophomore year in high school, he met with the school counselor to discuss his plans for college. During this time, Ben admitted that, while he liked helping others, he liked repairing cars more. He shared with the counselor his pride in successfully rebuilding an engine with his father and the satisfaction he felt in having completed this difficult task. Ben also admitted he was not sure he wanted to attend college and was afraid to share this with his parents.

The school counselor suggested to Ben that he would be willing to facilitate this discussion between Ben and his parents and asked if he would like anyone else to attend. Ben asked that the speech-language pathologist participate in the meeting since she would be the individual assisting in drafting his IEP's transition plan. During the meeting, Ben discussed his uncertainty about attending a four-year college, not because he could not do the work, but because he was more interested in automotive repair. Ben's parents felt proud of their son for picking a field he would like. Ben attended his career-technical education program at the local joint vocational school and graduated with honors.

Ben eventually was able to open an automotive repair shop. He has a thriving business and a loyal following of customers as others see him as honest and trustworthy.

Appendix D Plan on a Page

This is a quick guide to the plan and contains the recommendations, tactics and action steps.

Focus Area: Development and implementation of an integrated model of a statewide multi-tiered system of support.

Tactic A: Create the infrastructure to support the development of an integrated model of a multi-tiered system of support through a common set of resources, professional learning, coaching, collaborative opportunities and scheduling. Supports should be provided at all levels of the education system, including during preservice education.

Action Steps for Ohio Department of Education and Partners	Action Steps for Region	Action Steps for Districts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish non-negotiables 2. Operationalize multi-tiered system of support 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support district implementation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage in professional learning on multi-tiered system of support 2. Implement multi-tiered system of support to promote equity 3. Employ collaborative planning time for educators 4. Maximize collaboration and data-based decision-making 5. Extend resources to the community

Focus Area: Promotion of ongoing, job-embedded and sustained professional learning that focuses on meeting the specific needs of students with disabilities.

Tactic B: Identify and communicate existing professional learning resources directly to those who need them – teachers, service providers, leaders, regional supports and families.

Action Steps for Ohio Department of Education and Partners	Action Steps for Region	Action Steps for Districts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analysis and alignment of professional learning opportunities 2. Inventory and expand current professional learning resources 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Host networked improvement communities 2. Advertise professional learning resources 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage in feedback opportunities

Tactic C: Support teacher preparation programs and in-service professional learning opportunities to address the needs of and supports for students with disabilities.

Action Steps for Ohio Department of Education and Partners	Action Steps for Region	Action Steps for Districts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support educator preparation programs 2. Support in-service professional learning opportunities 3. Share evidence-based practices 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Host networked improvement communities 2. Professional learning collaboration 3. Service ratio work groups 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participate in professional learning on evidence-based practices 2. Advance culturally responsive practices 3. Engage families in collaborative discussions

Focus Area: Advancement of postsecondary learning experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities.

Tactic D: Assist districts in establishing or refining the process of postsecondary transition planning for their students with disabilities.

Action Steps for Ohio Department of Education and Partners	Action Steps for Region	Action Steps for Districts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review and make recommendations regarding best practices for transition planning 2. Provide postsecondary transitioning professional learning opportunities for educators 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assist districts with postsecondary transition planning 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participate in postsecondary professional learning opportunities 2. Support educators with postsecondary transition planning processes 3. Use data for postsecondary transition planning decisions 4. Apply resources and intensify postsecondary transition planning

Tactic E: Provide students with disabilities equitable access to career awareness, preparation, readiness or career-technical education programming.

Action Steps for Ohio Department of Education and Partners	Action Steps for Region	Action Steps for Districts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review and revise postsecondary transition planning policies and practices 2. Maintain and expand partnerships 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide support to districts 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Embed career-focused learning opportunities across the preK-12 education journey

Tactic F: Provide resources, training and coaching to students and families concerning pathways to graduation with purposefully designed transition plans for each child.

Action Steps for Ohio Department of Education and Partners	Action Steps for Region	Action Steps for Districts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and refine resources regarding graduation pathways 2. Continuously analyze data associated with the graduation pathways 3. Leverage and enhance career advising policies and business advisory councils 4. Develop resources for a postsecondary transition toolkit for families 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Include graduation pathways in professional learning 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offer guidance on achieving a standard diploma 2. Communicate and assist students and families with understanding graduation pathways