
LEA Self-Assessment and Continuous Improvement Process

Guidance Manual

For use with:

The LEA Self-Assessment
The LEA Self-Assessment Update
UPDATED 2/15/2019



Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education | Department of Public Instruction | EC Division

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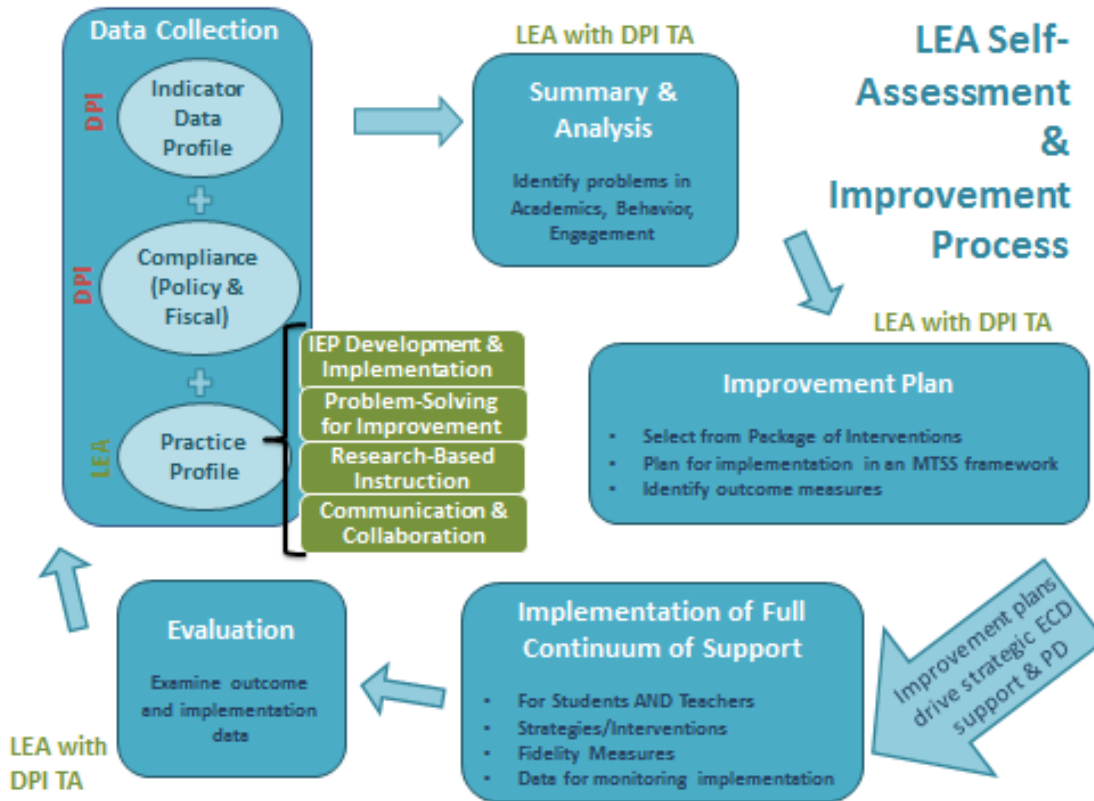
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Purpose

The Local Education Agency (LEA) Self-Assessment and Improvement Process was developed to support Results Driven Accountability (RDA) efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The focus on RDA is not just a state priority, but is also an identified priority for the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

The purpose of this process is to:

- **SUPPORT PROBLEM-SOLVING, IMPROVEMENT PLANNING, AND IMPLEMENTATION:** by providing a structure for collecting data, assessing LEA capacity, and analyzing local processes and outcomes to address the Core Elements of EC provision through the analysis of existing processes and student outcomes.
- **DRIVE DECISION-MAKING AT THE LEA, REGIONAL, AND STATE LEVEL:** by supporting the development of priorities, selection of evidence-based practices, and implementation of achievable improvement plans and assisting the Exceptional Children Division (ECD) in providing universal and tiered supports to LEAs
- **BRIDGE IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS:** by aligning State Board of Education goals, Agency initiatives, OSEP requirements, and EC Division Strategic Vision and Core Elements



The LEA Self-Assessment and Improvement Process is designed to be completed by a team in each LEA. Support from ECD regional and state consultants will be provided as LEAs work through the

assessment and improvement process. While the focus is on the development and improvement of comprehensive exceptional children services, the process acknowledges the critical role of interconnected systems within the LEA by including information about *all* education processes and systems. To collect the best information, LEAs should include representative stakeholders on their team when completing the process. Stakeholders should represent these groups at a minimum:

- Exceptional Children Director or Coordinator
- General Education Leader (e.g., Curriculum and Instruction Director, Department Head, etc.)
- Building Level Administrator
- Parent/Family Member

The team will need members who have skills in these areas:

- Data interpretation
- Knowledge of existing systems and programming
- Problem-solving
- Implementation and systems change

This guidance manual is intended to support and assist LEAs in completing the process by providing instructions, guiding questions, and possible data sources.

For the 2018-19 school year:

- **LEAs that previously completed the LEA Self-Assessment and Improvement Plan during the 2017-18 school year will complete the LEA Self-Assessment Update.**
 - Support in completing the LEA Self-Assessment Update will be available from the NCDPI EC division via multiple virtual resources and requested technical assistance. Regional coordinators are available for technical assistance as needed.
 - **Information specific to the LEA Self-Assessment Update is located on pages 17-23 of this guidance manual.**
- **New charter schools (schools first operating during the 2018-19 school year) will complete an initial submission of the LEA Self-Assessment rather than an update.**

Data Collection

Data Reports

LEA Annual Public Report

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) requires states to report annually to the public on the performance of each local education agency on certain indicators. Each LEA can find their LEA Annual Public Report for Students with Disabilities posted here: <http://www.nccecas.org/apr2016-2017/leareportcards2016-17.html> The LEA Annual Public Report contains OSEP Indicator data required to be reported annually for individual LEAs as well as composite state data.

Supplemental Data

Each LEA will be able to access supplementary data reports via CECAS and CEDARS. These reports will include the most recent data NCDPI can access at the state level. Online access information can be found below.

Data in CECAS

Data in these areas can be found in CECAS or through CECAS analytics:

- 5-year cohort graduation rate
<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/cohortgradrate>
- Graduation by disability category
- Graduation by race and disability category
- Graduation by LRE and disability category

To access this data, visit CECAS. <http://www.nccecas.org/index.html>

Data in CEDARS

These reports will be available on the Table on Contents Dashboard in the Special Education Programs box:

- Proficiency by disability category
- Proficiency by test and disability category
- Proficiency by race and disability category
- Attendance by disability category
- Attendance by race and disability category
- Attendance by gender and disability category
- Attendance by grade and disability category

Accessing CEDARS

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If data have not previously been accessed using CEDARS, it may be necessary for someone from the LEA to register for access. The EC Director or Coordinator will need to first determine if someone in the LEA already has access and/or whether direct access for the EC department is needed. The LEA should consider which role should own the responsibility for accessing the data for the LEA Self-Assessment team in a timely manner (EC Director, EC Coordinator, EC Data Manager, LEA Data Personnel, etc.). It is recommended that the responsibility for accessing the data is given to personnel who will be working on the LEA Self-Assessment team. This will ensure that person is part of the ongoing data conversations and, therefore, has an understanding of the data the team has reviewed as well as what the team might need to look at next.

If it is determined that an additional user will need to request access to CEDARS, the steps for registration are as follows:

- Data managers should sign up for access to CEDARS by going to this link: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/cedars/reporting/registration/>
- Users must have an NCID before registering.
- Click the link under Step 2 to begin the registration process.
- One registration is submitted, an approval process takes place at DPI and once approved, you will be notified via email.

Additional information on accessing and using the CEDARS system can be found at: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/cedars/reporting/documentation/>. Those who already have a CEDARS sign in can proceed to the login page: <https://cedars.ncpublicschools.gov/analytics/>

Questions about Data

Additional data beyond the supplemental reports posted may also be available. Additional data reports may be posted in the Special Education Programs box if requested by LEAs. Questions about accessing data or the CEDARS system should be directed to Kelley Blas. Kelley may be reached at kelly.blas@dpi.nc.gov or 919-807-3967.

Compliance Data

The LEA Self-Assessment and Improvement Planning process is meant to focus on assessing current practice and assisting with planning for future growth, as other mechanisms exist for ensuring compliance. Review of compliance data as part of the self-assessment process is expected to focus on thinking about how compliance practices support student outcomes. To that end, critical components, guiding questions for consideration, and possible data sources have been identified to support LEAs as they consider interplay of compliance and outcomes.

Core Element 1: Policy Compliance and Monitoring

This core element examines how the LEA monitors and ensures compliance with federal and state policies regarding students with disabilities. Because the ECD is federally required to make LEA determinations about LEA policy compliance, this information will be periodically provided to the LEA by NCPDI.

Guiding Questions to Consider

- How does the LEA deliver training to:
 - district and building level administrators;
 - general education staff; and
 - special education service providers?
- How does the LEA determine the scope of training (i.e., specific regulations, process or practices)?
- What is the frequency of internal file reviews?
- How does the LEA verify service delivery?
- How does the LEA address areas of deficiency?
- Is there a need to conduct internal file reviews?
- Are parent resources readily available to the public?
- How does the LEA communicate with the public regarding local level dispute resolution strategies?
- Does the LEA have identified staff members to respond to parent calls at the LEA level?
- Does the LEA provide training on conflict resolution strategies to school administrators, special education service providers, etc.?
- Does the LEA engage in early dispute resolution within the first 20 days of a formal state complaint?
- Is there a pattern within the state complaints filed against the LEA?

Data Sources

1.1

- Interview data from Program Compliance Review
- Corrective Action ordered by DPI
- Review of local PD logs and meeting agendas

1.2

- Student Record Review data from Program Compliance Reviews conducted during the DPI monitoring cycle
- LEA Determination letters
- Monitoring reports

1.3

- Review of LEA website and Parent/Student Handbook
- Review of LEA Resources data and recommendations from Program Compliance Review
- Review of local PD logs/calendars
- Review of state complaints filed and letters of findings

Core Element 2: Fiscal Management

This core element examines how the LEA monitors fiscal resources and ensures compliance with federal and state fiscal policies regarding students with disabilities. Because the ECD is required to make LEA determinations about LEA fiscal compliance, this information will be periodically provided to the LEA by NCDPI. Suggested data sources are listed below and a link to the new Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) has also been provided.

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/fund/reg/edgarReg/edgar.html>

Guiding Questions to Consider

What policies and procedures are in place in the LEA that address fiscal management?

- Did the LEA meet Maintenance of Fiscal Effort?
- Did the LEA receive any Special Project funds to help support children with disabilities?
- Was corrective action required after the LEA IDEA Fiscal Desk Review or IDEA On-site visit?
- Was a Finance and Business Services Title I audit report completed and was any follow up data required?
- Were the IDEA 611 and 619 grant submission timely and accurate?
- Were mid/end of year expenditure reports and EOY updates completed?

Data Sources

2.1

- Local fiscal policies and departmental procedures
- EC IDEA Fiscal Monitoring Self-Assessment/Desk Review data and reports
- EC IDEA on-site visit report
- Finance and Business Services Title I audit report and follow up data
- Special Programs validation visit reports
- Child specific special program application Mid/end of year expenditure reports
- IDEA single audits
- Medicaid reports and data

2.2 All items are completed accurately and submitted by due dates, including:

- Grants,
- Applications/reimbursements,
- Budgets,
- and required amendments/supplements.

2.3 Completion of the IDEA Fiscal Monitoring Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan for identified area(s) of need.

Practice Profile

Practice Profiles are used to operationally define the critical features of an initiative, program, or practice. In this case, the ECD (with significant stakeholder input and rigorous pilot testing) has defined the critical features of the four remaining core elements and has assigned a rubric to implementation variations so that LEAs can assess their progress on implementing the core elements of a comprehensive LEA EC program.

LEAs should complete the Practice Profile by assessing each critical component based on existing data. Brief notes about the data and discussion used to make the determination of rating should be added to the *Documentation and Comments* column to assist readers in understanding the rationale for the rating selected by the LEA. After coming to consensus, the group should select the rating for each item.

To assist LEAs in determining the most appropriate rating based on current practice and think about ways to enhance future work, guiding questions and possible data sources are provided. Numerical scores are only meant to provide a way of assessing current practice and future change.

Core Element 3: IEP Development and Implementation

This core element examines the processes the LEA has in place to ensure the development and implementation of appropriate, high quality IEPs and how the LEA monitors outcomes for students with disabilities.

Guiding Questions to Consider

- What are the outcomes for students with disabilities?
- Are the IEPs in your LEA of high quality that ensures FAPE?
- Are students reaching their IEP goals?
- Does progress monitoring continue after eligibility determination and placement?
- Are students progressing in the general education curriculum?
- Are students making the progress necessary to graduate?
- Once high quality, appropriate IEPs are written, how does your LEA ensure they are implemented as intended?
- How is progress monitoring data used to improve IEPs, implementation, and student outcomes?

Data Sources

3.1: Proficiency for students with disabilities: See Indicator 3c on the [LEA Annual Public Report](#) or the District Report Card at the [NC School Report Cards site](#)

3.2 & 3.3: LEAs should collect this data from a sample of the IEPs in their district (one sampling method is described in the Methodology section of the ECD Program Compliance Review document). It is recommended that LEAs collect this data as they are conducting their internal audits, using the same sampling method and adding an item to the data collection protocol (many LEAs use the [Special Education Student Record Review Protocol](#) developed by the ECD Policy, Monitoring, and Audit Section) where the auditor reviews the progress reports on IEP goals for the record as part of the audit. LEAs could also use data collected in the student outcomes section of the ECD Program Compliance Review to support this item.

3.4: The 5-year cohort graduation rate for students with disabilities is included in the Supplementary Data Report.

3.5: Sources of progress monitoring data; indications in IEPs that if students were not making progress, IEPs were revised, such as changes to frequency or intensity of specially-designed instruction provided.

3.6: Potential data sources include: data collected by LEA compliance monitoring staff during school visits or in the Service Verification section of the ECD Program Compliance Review, walk-throughs conducted by school building administrators, parent concerns logged by the LEA, and complaints that have been filed with the state.

Core Element 4: Problem-Solving for Improvement

This core element examines how the LEA collects and uses data to identify potential problems, works toward solutions, plans to implement changes, and continually improves outcomes for students. Because this element relates to processes in the entire LEA, it will be especially helpful to have someone participating on the team during this part of the process that has a high level of familiarity with not only EC data, but also overall LEA data and problem-solving processes.

Guiding Questions to Consider

- What data does your LEA collect? How often?
- Who looks at the data?
- How is this data used to evaluate current practice?
- Does your data set include both fidelity and outcome data?
- How does your LEA use student and teacher data to inform eligibility determination, instructional decision-making, programming, and delivery of services?
- Does your LEA have a common problem-solving model?
- How are problems identified?
- How are implemented solutions monitored over time to determine effectiveness?
- How is data used to determine when the LEA should stop doing ineffective activities?

Data Sources

4.1: Minutes from IEP team meetings that document problem-solving using data (formative and summative data for academic, behavioral, and functional goals) for individual students; work products from problem-solving process

4.2 & 4.3: LEA Supplementary Data Report

4.4: Meeting minutes that document problem-solving using data (process, fidelity, and outcome data); work products from problem-solving process. Types of data that could be used for problem-solving include:

- Formative and summative assessment data for academic, behavioral, and functional goals;
- Progress monitoring and outcome data for academic, behavioral, and functional goals (including CEIS);
- Data from fidelity measures;
- Meeting minutes from problem-solving teams (PLCs, NCSIP Analyses Team, PBIS team, etc.);
- Documentation of problem-solving process used by LEA (TIPS, etc.);
- Other locally collected data (NCSIP Developmental Reviews, SPP/APR data, class size, teacher licensure and retention data, PBIS data, etc.

Core Element 5: Research-Based Instruction and Practices

This core element examines how the LEA identifies, implements, and monitors research-based instruction and practices.

Guiding Questions to Consider

- How does your LEA evaluate your current instructional practices to identify potential problems? How does your LEA address EC issues in the LEA Strategic Plan?
- When a problem is identified, what information is used to select an appropriate solution/intervention?
- How does your LEA evaluate the options for research-based interventions and practices? How is the research base evaluated for proposed interventions?
- How do you determine whether the potential program/intervention/instructional approach is a good fit for identified student need?
- How does the potential method fit with programs and practices already in place (an [initiative inventory](#) can be a good place to start identifying all of the currently implemented programs and practices).
- Once a new intervention is selected, how does the LEA plan for its success? How are staff members and students selected to participate in the intervention? How are staff members trained and what follow-up support is provided to staff during implementation?
- How is fidelity of implementation assessed? What data are monitored to assess the health of the implementation?
- How has your LEA planned for sustainability of the initiative across stages? What is the capability of the LEA to support and sustain the selected intervention? How will broad capacity be developed over time?
- How does your LEA document the processes, procedures, and practices that support successful implementation?

Data Sources

Types of data that could be used for evaluating research-based interventions and practices:

- Documentation may include the LEA’s procedure for selecting initiatives, practices, and instructional methods (flowcharts, checklists, etc.);
- Methods for evaluating the evidence base for selected initiatives and practices;
- Data about student needs to be addressed (LEA Public Report, Comprehensive Needs Assessment reports, student data about achievement, attendance, behavior, functional performance, transition needs, etc.);
- Implementation Team Rosters;
- [Hexagon Tool](#)
- [Initiative Inventory](#)
- [Communication protocols](#);
- [Implementation/Action Plan](#);
- [Practice Profiles](#);
- [District Capacity Assessment](#);
- Training rosters and coaching logs;
- Program reporting documents (both fidelity and outcome data);
- Fidelity checks;
- Progress monitoring data;
- Outcome Data

Core Element 6: Communication and Collaboration

This core element examines how the LEA ensures effective communication (internally and externally, as well as across all levels) and involves all stakeholders in meaningful ways.

Guiding Questions to Consider

- What procedures does your LEA have in place to ensure communication for successful policy and practice transaction?
- How are decisions communicated across levels from your Superintendent and school board members to Directors to school administrators to staff members and families?
- What mechanisms are in place for families, community partners, and staff to communicate concerns to decision-makers?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure stakeholder concerns are addressed in a timely manner?
- What methods of communication are available?
- How does the LEA encourage stakeholder participation, not only of families, but also of other child-serving agencies and community partners?
- How does your LEA partner with the SEA to improve outcomes for students?
- How does your LEA provide disability awareness, resources, IEP understanding, and information about graduation requirements to families?
- How does your LEA meet stakeholder advisory obligations (NCSIP Steering Committee, Special Education Advisory Council input)?

Data Sources

Data sources for Communication and Collaboration may include:

- Information provided to stakeholders (e.g., newsletters, pamphlets, LEA website/electronic resources);
- LEA Resources section in ECD Program Compliance Review
- Stakeholder meeting invitations, agendas, and rosters;
- Methods for soliciting stakeholder feedback: surveys, forums, hotlines, etc.;
- Training agendas and rosters;
- Indicator 8 survey data on parent involvement;
- MOAs with community agencies;
- Initiative implementation evidence (MOAs, meeting agendas, implementation plans, fidelity checks, outcome data, etc.);
- LEA participation in SEA stakeholder committees;
- Participation in DAC activities at regional level;
- Letters/reports between SEA/LEA (e.g., visits, evaluations, consultations, etc.);
- Attendance/ participation in regional meetings;
- Conference documentation;
- Professional Development agendas and rosters (SEA);
- Special Education Advisory Council roster, agenda, minutes;
- Rosters, agendas, minutes from other district implementation teams or workgroups such as MTSS, NCSIP, PBIS, etc.

Practice Profile Summary

The Practice Profile Summary provides an overview of the ratings selected by the LEA for each of the critical components, and summarizes the scores for each Core Element. The *Total* for each Core Element represents the sum of the points for that Core Element, while the *Percentage* of each Core Element represents the percentage of possible points for that Core Element. For example, if an LEA's total score for Core Element 6: Communication and Collaboration was 4, then the percentage would be 50% (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Sample excerpt from Practice Profile Summary

Core Element 6: Communication and Collaboration	
6.1 LEA has effective vertical and horizontal communication processes in place to support policy and practice.	1
6.2 LEA facilitates meaningful parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities (e.g., rights and procedural safeguards, specific disability information, instructional practices, etc.).	2
6.3 LEA partners with community stakeholders (including preschool, mental health, etc.) to enhance service provision to students and families	0
6.4 LEA collaborates with SEA to support program and initiative improvement	1
<i>Core Element 6 Total</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Core Element 6 Percentage</i>	<i>50%</i>

Scores from the 2015-16 school year (the first year of statewide administration) will serve as baseline data. As the ECD collects these data from LEAs over the next several years, targets for each area may be established. Data will also be used to inform customized ECD support for LEAs.

*The Practice Profile Summary is not available in the Qualtrics version of the LEA Self-Assessment.

Summary and Analysis

Once data have been collected, LEA teams must summarize and analyze results to identify problems and their root cause(s) to ensure effective improvement strategies can be implemented. The LEA must consider all of the data collected: information about student achievement, compliance, processes, problem-solving, implementation, and communication. The Analysis section of the LEA Self-Assessment provides questions to assist LEAs in considering the implications of the data they have collected and synthesized. The goal of the LEA Self-Assessment is identify and prioritize targeted improvement areas across a 3-year timeline. The Summary and Analysis section is completed during the initial submission. The LEA S-A Update completed in Qualtrics will not display summaries from previous years. The LEA must reference its copies of previous submissions in the spreadsheet format.

Improvement Plan

Once the analysis has been completed and the area for improvement has been identified, the LEA will document the planned improvement strategies on the Improvement Plan. The Improvement Plan should be designed to span three years and include intermittent targets for growth. In subsequent years, the LEA will continuously collect and analyze data, submit updates to NCDPI to document progress on action items, and adjust interventions to ensure selected desired outcomes for students with disabilities are met.

The Improvement Plan should include the following:

- A statement of the problem the LEA intends to address that includes (what, when, where, who, why)
- Goal and actions or interventions the LEA intends to take to address the identified problem
- The person/position responsible for that action/intervention
- The timeline for completing the action/intervention
- The method for measuring fidelity of the action/intervention
- The method for measuring the effectiveness of the action/intervention
- Documentation of the outcome of the action/intervention and any next steps

LEA teams should create Improvement Plans with more detailed goals for the first year, as well as goals that the LEA plans to address in the second and third years of implementation. Once

implementation begins in the second year, LEAs will update the Improvement Plan based on their implementation and outcome data. This will allow LEAs to modify action items as needed.

The Qualtrics version of the LEA Self-Assessment available in 2018-2019 provides the format/questions required for submission of the Improvement Plan. Plans will be submitted via completion of the Qualtrics instrument.

LEA Self-Assessment Update

Despite purposeful and careful planning, unexpected implementation hurdles and barriers have the potential to threaten fidelity of implementation and intended outcomes. At the beginning of an improvement process, it is impossible to know everything required for sustained implementation. As a result, the LEASA-U process and tool are intended to guide district level implementation teams through a formal plan, do, study, act (PDSA) improvement cycle.

Regardless of stage of implementation, improvement cycles can be used to make incremental change, define new ways of completing work, inform changes in organizational supports required for implementation, and better align policies to practice.

The sections below provide guiding questions for using the domains of the LEASA-U tool in the continual improvement process.

LEA Self-Assessment Update: Process and Submission Details

LEAs and charter schools who have previously submitted the LEASA and Improvement Plan will submit an update to their LEA Self-Assessment. The update process and tool serves the following primary purposes:

- Assess progress (e.g., difference from baseline) towards the implementation of critical components of the provision of comprehensive special education through year one of the improvement plan
- Engage in a systematic plan, do, study, act improvement cycle
- Communicate successes and barriers to stakeholders
- Support and sustain regional and district teams involved with implementation of the improvement plan

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The 2018-19 LEA Self-Assessment & Improvement Plan Update (LEASA-U) will be submitted via Qualtrics by June 28, 2019. The link will be distributed to districts and charter schools by February 28, 2019. Individual data from the previous years will not be embedded in the link for reference. PDF copies of the instrument will be provided for reference.

LEAs should document their updated information in the following sections:

- 18-19 Policy & Fiscal Compliance
- 18-19 Practice Profile
- 18-19 Improvement Plan
- 18-19 Priority Identification
- 18-19 Stakeholders

LEAs are not expected to submit supporting data or additional documents; however, Qualtrics does allow for documents to be uploaded for each of the core elements. Ensure that any items uploaded with the update are identified with LEANAME.COREELEMENT#.Name of Document (Weldoncity.CE6.Communicationplan)

TIPS for Completing Submission in Qualtrics

- **Prepare working documents ahead of time and be prepared to copy and paste**
- **Saving and returning to partially completed work in Qualtrics is NOT recommended**
- **When ready to submit, download a PDF of the completed update, save, and print hard copy**
- **Individual LEA data and responses from previous years must be referenced at the local level, the information is not available in Qualtrics**

Core Element 1: Policy Compliance and Monitoring

This core element examines how the LEA monitors and ensures compliance with federal and state policies regarding students with disabilities. Because the ECD is federally required to make LEA determinations about LEA policy compliance, this information will be periodically provided to the LEA by NCPDI.

Additional Guiding Questions to Consider for the Update

- If the LEA had been involved with monitoring, how have local policies and practices changed?
- How is the LEA preparing for implementation of SLD policy?
- How does the district synthesize and adjust practice and policy in response to DPI memos and guidance from the Office of Special Education Programs?
- If the LEA was identified with disproportionate representation/significant disproportionality in discipline, identification, or placement describe how policies and practices have changed.

Core Element 2: Fiscal Management

This core element examines how the LEA monitors fiscal resources and ensures compliance with federal and state fiscal policies regarding students with disabilities. Because the ECD is required to make LEA determinations about LEA fiscal compliance, this information will be periodically provided to the LEA by NCDPI. Suggested data sources are listed below and a link to the new Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) has also been provided. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/edgar2008.pdf>

Additional Guiding Questions to Consider for the Update

- If the LEA went through an IDEA fiscal desk review or an IDEA on-site review what was learned? How have policies and practices changed as a result of that process?

Core Element 3: IEP Development and Implementation

This core element examines the processes the LEA has in place to ensure the development and implementation of appropriate, high quality IEPs and how the LEA monitors outcomes for students with disabilities.

Additional Guiding Questions to Consider for the Update

- How has the LEA reviewed and revised local policy and practice in response to the IEP training modules?
 - Are there current practices or policies that are incongruent with the training modules?
- Has there been any change in the outcomes for students with disabilities over the course of the year? How do you know?
- Are IEP goals based on a data rich present levels of performance?
- Are IEP goals written with measurement in mind?
- Have there been any changes in how the progress of students with disabilities is monitored relative to IEP goals? Relative to the standard course of study (including extended content standards)

- What evidence do you have that IEPs were implemented as written over the current school year?

Core Element 4: Problem Solving for Improvement

This core element examines how the LEA collects and uses data to identify potential problems, works toward solutions, plans to implement changes, and continually improves outcomes for students. Because this element relates to processes in the entire LEA, it will be especially helpful to have someone participating on the team during this part of the process that has a high level of familiarity with not only EC data, but also overall LEA data and problem-solving processes.

Additional Guiding Questions to Consider for the Update

- Did the data collection process for you LEA change as a result of the improvement plan?
- What problems have been successfully addressed?
- Are data reported and used by a district level team?
- Were data used to support readiness (e.g., providing a compelling rationale for change)?
- How were barriers to the improvement plan identified and addressed? Are problems related [to organizational, leadership, or competency drivers](#)?
- Have additional problems surfaced since beginning implementation?
- How are implemented solutions monitored over time to determine effectiveness?
- How are data used to determine when the LEA should stop doing ineffective activities?

Core Element 5: Research-Based Instructional Practices

This core element examines how the LEA identifies, implements, and monitors research-based instruction and practices.

Additional Guiding Questions to Consider for the Update

- Was the program/intervention/instructional approach identified through a systematic process (see the Hexagon Tool)?
- Are staff (teachers and administrators) sufficiently ready to implement the program/intervention/instructional approach?
- Does the method fit with programs and practices already in place?
- Do staff understand the rationale for implementation? What resources have required reallocation to support the new practices?
- How were staff members and students selected to participate in the intervention? What follow-up support has been provided to staff during implementation?
- Have teachers received training? Have teachers received job-embedded follow up (e.g., observation of models of best practice, group coaching, and/or individual coaching)?
- How has fidelity of implementation been assessed? Do fidelity assessments reveal the need for modifying training and coaching plans?
- What is the capability of the LEA to support and sustain the selected intervention? How will broad capacity be developed over time?

Core Element 6: Communication and Collaboration

This core element examines how the LEA ensures effective communication (internally and externally, as well as across all levels) and involves all stakeholders in meaningful ways.

Additional Guiding Questions to Consider for the Update

- How have decisions concerning implementation of the improvement plan been communicated across levels from your Superintendent and school board members to Directors to school administrators to staff members and families?
- Are external stakeholders, (including, but not limited to parents), an integral part of the LEASA process?
- What concerns have families, community partners, and staff communicated concerning the implementation of the improvement plan?
- Are the available methods of communication sufficient?
- How have fidelity data been shared with staff and stakeholders?

Improvement Plan Update

LEA teams created Improvement Plans with a higher degree of detail and specificity for the first year of implementation. Now that implementation is progressing, LEAs and charter schools will

update the Improvement Plan based on their implementation data. This will allow LEAs to modify action items as needed.

It is not the intent of the update to rewrite an improvement plan. Instead, the update allows for flexibility in the LEA or charter school to adjust plans based on a systematic review of implementation data. The improvement plan requires LEAs and charter schools to address progress towards goals, as well as barriers that have impeded implementation. As a result of this process, LEAs and charter schools can make needed adjustments to the goals, solution actions, and details of their plan.

Adopting and effectively implementing an improvement plan requires that educators gain confidence, motivation, and new knowledge, skills, and practices. As plans are implemented, it is critical to consider the alignment between the local policies that resulted from plan development and the practices of LEA and charter school staff. Providing annual updates to the plan allows for iterative improvement cycles that can be used to make incremental change, define new ways of completing work, inform changes in organizational supports required for implementation, and better align policies to practice.

Priority Identification

As a component of the LEA Self-Assessment Update, LEAs and charter school will self-identify priorities. These include:

- A narrative explanation of the priority
- Academics, behavior, and transition
- LEA Self-Assessment Critical Element
- Level of Support
- NCDPI supported professional learning that supports the implementation of the improvement plan

Identification of priorities within these frameworks will provide an organizing framework for LEAs to communicate the foundations of the implementation plan and focus evaluation efforts. In addition, it will provide the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Exceptional Children's division with additional data to align infrastructure, provided tiered support, and evaluate the impact of the State Systemic Improvement Plan.

Academics, behavior, and transition were identified through the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) literature review as three domains that serve as protective or risk factors associated with graduation for students with disabilities. While these three domains are inherently connected factors that are associated with graduation, a domain should be selected that is most aligned to the priority area and improvement plan of the LEA or charter school.

The critical elements were co-developed by EC division staff and stakeholders in order to operationalize the complex process of providing comprehensive special education services. Developing these elements provides a tool that allows for the communication and assessment of essential functions. Additionally, it facilitates the development of effective training and coaching by making a complex practice knowable, teachable, and doable. One critical element should be selected that is most aligned to the priority area and improvement plan of the LEA or charter school.

Finally, LEAs and charter schools are asked to self-assess the level of support required to build capacity within the district to support the implementation plan. One level of support should be selected based on the definitions below.

- **Universal:** Universal supports address state-wide priority areas identified by the LEA Self-Assessment. These priority areas include: Specially Designed Instruction within an MTSS, Implementation Planning, Problem Solving, IEP Development and Implementation, and Evidence-Based academic and behavioral practices. Universal supports are provided in face-to-face, blended, and online training modules. Examples of universal supports include Regional Directors' meetings, March Institute, the Exceptional Children's Conference, and Summer Institute.
- **Tailored:** Tailored supports address content that is aligned to common needs of regional participants that are in the process of developing district capacity to sustain and scale the critical components of the LEA Self-Assessment. District teams are utilized to provide job-embedded follow up and coaching. Tailored supports are provided in addition to the universal supports described above by regional teams and sections within NCDPI. Tailored supports are developed and provided via formal professional development requests by districts and in response to common areas of regional need identified in the LEA Self-Assessment.
- **Customized:** Customized supports address content that is specifically designed to meet unique needs of a district. Customized supports are provided in addition to universal and (possibly) tailored supports to develop readiness and begin capacity building or in cases of high urgency needs. NCDPI staff support district staff in the provision of job-embedded follow up to build capacity will carefully selected district staff.

Appendix: Frequently Used Acronyms

CEIS: Coordinated Early Intervening Services

CLEAR: Comprehensive LEA Report (intended to be included in ECATS)

DAC: Directors Advisory Council

ECATS: Every Child Accountability Tracking System (EC data system proposed to replace CECAS)

ECD: Exceptional Children Division

FAPE: Free and Appropriate Public Education

LEA: Local Education Agency

MOA: Memorandum of Agreement

MTSS: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

NCSIP: North Carolina State Improvement Project

NCDPI: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

OSEP: Office of Special Education Programs

PBIS: Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports

PLCs: Professional Learning Communities

RDA: Results Driven Accountability

SEA: State Education Agency

SPP/APR: State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report