Topic: Effective IEP Implementation

Discussion Notes for Briefing Paper

<u>**Guiding Question**</u>: How can MSDE ensure the effective implementation of IEPs, including technical assistance, monitoring, and uniform data collection?

Effective IEP Implementation involves almost all topics covered under the scope of the Blueprint Special Education Workgroup. This includes Specially Designed Instruction, IDEA Requirements, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, Teacher Preparation, Funding, and Parent and Community Relationships.

February's Guiding Question, "How can MSDE ensure effective implementation of IEPs?" Thus, goes to the heart of MSDE's overall responsibility to ensure effective implementation of IEPs while maintaining collaborative relationships with LEAs to achieve a proper balance between state and local control.[1]

With such a broad scope, this Guiding Question would benefit from a discussion that is focused primarily on technical assistance, data collection, and monitoring provided by MSDE.

Underlying each, MSDE must set basic minimal statewide standards that are clear, concise, achievable with realistic funding and staff capacity, and allow LEAs flexibility in how the standards can be best achieved.

Central to such standards is an evidence base. An evidence base can be synonymous with a research base, with more explicit guidance on levels of evidence under ESSA.[2] IEP Teams can employ professional judgment to ensure the "I" in IEPs.

Before each of these discussions, MSDE will provide a brief background on the topics of technical assistance, data collection, and monitoring as they relate to IEP implementation in Maryland. This will help the Workgroup better understand current practices and provide feedback that can strengthen MSDE's resources and capacity to bring about improvement.

<u>**Technical Assistance:**</u>

<u>For February's Workgroup discussion, technical assistance can be defined as:</u>

   a. The dissemination of clear, achievable standards
   b. The dissemination of menus of evidence-based best practices[3]
   c. Operational guidelines through bulletins, manuals, and other materials
   d. Sustainable PD ranges from workshops to training the trainers (supported by local instructional coaches)

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[1] For a general discussion, see State General Supervision Responsibilities under IDEA: https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/guidance-on-state-general-supervision-responsibilities-under-parts-b-and-c-of-the-idea-july-24-2023/

[2] https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/essa

[3] See, for example, the Mississippi Department of Education's Specially Designed Instruction Guidance Document. https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/sdi_document.pdf

During small group discussions at our January 30th meeting and in response to the meeting's exit ticket, members made the following specific suggestions about MSDE TA:

- *Content should be accessible to a wide range of users (new, conditionally certified, and experienced teachers, paraprofessionals, special and general educators, and administrators).*
- *Content should be granular and practical (e.g., for teachers of certain grade levels, of subjects, who need intensive interventions for students significantly below grade level).*
- *Guidance could be available through a user-friendly web platform, a clearinghouse of resources, or an online video library.*
- *TA could be provided via direct coaching.*
- *Specific topics mentioned for TA included: accommodations (for gen-ed teachers); using technology as an accommodation; working with interpreters; responding to trauma behavior; EBPs for math; UDL; co-teaching strategies; IEP progress monitoring; data collection and analysis (for IEP coordinators and key central office staff); identifying EBPs including interventions for students with SLD (dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia); how goals align to grade-level standards; creating goals and accommodations (including for students who take the alternate assessment); comprehensive view of student support including paraeducators, related services, etc.*

Reference materials:

1. SEA Technical Assistance Models (developed by New Solutions K12 – attached)

Discussion questions:

1. What additional ideas do you have for Technical Assistance provided by MSDE?

Data Collection:

Effective data collection can help MSDE ensure effective IEP implementation. However, it is essential to ensure that data collection practices are reasonable for both LEA and MSDE while providing the data necessary to measure IEP implementation.

During small group discussions at our January 30th meeting and in response to the meeting's exit ticket, members made the following specific suggestions about data collection:

- *Uniform standards-based assessment*
- *Use of MD Online IEP by all LEAs*
- *Growth measure*
- *Data should be transparent (easily accessible on MSDE's website)*

Discussion questions:

1. In your opinion, what is the "right" data and measurements to ensure effective IEP implementation? What support do school systems and practitioners need to collect that data?
2. Are there instances in your work where too much or too little data is required?

Monitoring:

Monitoring is the key to ensuring effective IEP implementation. In a state system with 24 LEAs, about 1400 schools, and a long history of "local control," monitoring for adherence to best practices (as well as compliance with regulatory laws) is indispensable.

The issue is how to do it right and limited to essentials. This applies to both fidelity of implementation and effective implementation. Effective implementation addresses longstanding criticism that special education is too compliance-oriented, rather than results-oriented. The heart of monitoring should be the improvement of qualitative results for students rather than simply compliance. OSEP's recent guidance calls for a "primary focus on improving educational results and functional outcomes for all children with disabilities."

The recommendation from the Workgroup was that MSDE "Review State monitoring tools and protocols to ensure that IEP goals narrow or close the gap between present levels of achievement and grade-level standard, and that, based upon research and professional judgment, IEP services are reasonably calculated to enable the goals to be achieved." The subject also arose in our discussion of SDI. Other possible examples that boost effective/quality implementation might be progress monitoring, review, and revision of the IEP before the annual review when goals are not being met.

During small group discussions at our January 30th meeting and in response to the meeting's exit ticket, members made the following specific suggestions about monitoring:
- *Include enforcement action/more accountability*
- *Less punitive/more collaborative*
- *Acknowledge that special education is only one component of the instructional program that should be held accountable for student progress*
- *Accountability to determine individual student progress on IEP goals and objectives*
- *Support consistency across all LEAs – ensure that knowledge and the design of programs are in alignment among the LEAs*

Reference material:

- NCSI, Five Questions Answered about Educational Benefit Review[4]
- NCSI, General Supervision Toolkit[5]

Discussion questions:

1. Do you feel there is a clear understanding of monitoring standards and expectations?
2. Do you have ideas for how MSDE monitoring can be improved? Are there aspects of monitoring that you would recommend keeping in place?
3. How do you feel about the "judgments" of monitors? Are there patterns of disagreements over their findings?

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[4] https://ncsi.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/NCSI-Fast-Five-Questions-Answered-About-Educational-Benefit-Review.pdf
[5] https://ncsi.wested.org/resources/general-supervision-toolkit/