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State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

DPI Study/Improve Outcomes for Students
with Disabilities

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This report is submitted to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee to comply with the requirement that North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) shall report on the progress of developing and implementing policy changes on (i) IEP reforms, (ii) transition planning policies, (iii) increased access to Future-Ready Core Course of Study for students with disabilities, and (iv) model programs for use by local school administrative units to improve graduation rates and school performance of students with disabilities.

Part I: Review and Revisions to the North Carolina Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities and related procedural changes.

1. Autism Policy Change

The Exceptional Children Division updated *Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities* on September 5, 2019, with changes to the evaluation requirements for the eligibility category of Autism. On March 22, 2018 the Exceptional Children Division convened a stakeholder group comprised of school psychologists, teachers, outside agency experts in the area of autism and EC Division staff to review current Policy and discuss needed adjustments to evaluation requirements. With recommendations made, the proposed policy was provide for required public comments in May 2018. Notification through email and newspaper postings was provided for the comment period to Local Education Agencies (LEAs), councils, outside public and private agencies, parent advocates, and the general public. Recipients were encouraged to share the proposed policy with constituents, allowing them to provide feedback and comments during the 30-day public comment period. The public comment period included opportunities for face to face and electronic submission of comments.

All received feedback and comments were reviewed, considered and incorporated as appropriate to develop the final draft, with the support of school psychologists and occupational therapists in the fall of 2018. The proposed policy was presented to the NC State Board of Education (SBE) on June 5, 2019. The recommendation from the SBE was to gather additional parent feedback due to concerns received by State Board of Education members. The Exceptional Children Division facilitated eight parent forums across the state from June 20, 2019-July 16, 2019. During these additional sessions, clarification was provided by Exceptional Children Division staff and parents were provided opportunities to provide questions, concerns and give feedback.

Based on information collected across the parent forums, the Exceptional Children Division held an additional stakeholder meeting on August 22, 2019. This stakeholder group was comprised of North Carolina LEAs, parents of students with disabilities, Institutions of Higher Education, NCDPI leadership, NC Post School Alliance, TEACCH, Autism Society of North Carolina, and various family organizations (national and state). They were invited to meet and provide specific concerns around the proposed policy language. The stakeholder group proposed edits that were agreed upon by those in attendance and Exceptional Children staff. These edits were incorporated into the policy presented to the SBE for approval. This proposed policy was approved by the NC State Board of Education on September 5, 2019 with full implementation starting January 1, 2020. Guidance documents are being prepared for school administrators, teachers and parents, to further clarify the policy intent and facilitate the implementation.

Autism Policy Additions:

- Requirement to conduct a motor screening.
- Requirement to conduct a sensory processing evaluation.
- Definition of behavioral assessment related to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Autism Policy Clarifications:

- Include a structured review of early developmental history which explores symptoms in the early developmental period acknowledging that they may not manifest until social demands exceed coping capacities or they may be masked by learned strategies later in life.
- Advise that the yielding of an overall intellectual score is not required and should be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Advise the use of behavior rating tools that yield ratings across environments, and, when available an individually administered instrument that assesses the range of characteristics associated with autism spectrum disorder.
- Defined areas to observe/consider regarding evaluation of social communication and interaction, and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities demonstrated currently or by history.

2. **SESSION LAW 2017-127 HOUSE BILL 149**

The requirements of H.B. 149 continue to be supported through comprehensive professional learning opportunities, resources and information sessions. Information is made available electronically through the Exceptional Children Division website to provide information and resources specific to dyslexia and dyscalculia. This website houses the NC DPI Dyslexia Topic Brief, published November 2015. The Exceptional Children Assistance Center (ECAC) and the Exceptional Children Division finalized the production of two videos for parents on dyslexia. These have been shared statewide and housed on the Exceptional Children Division website. The North Carolina State Improvement Project (NC SIP) works closely with 72 Local Education Agencies and seven Institutes of Higher Education to provide two five-day intensive professional learning courses titles *Reading Research to Classroom Practice (RRtCP)* and *Math Foundations*. These courses equip teachers to work effectively with students with persistent difficulties in reading and math, including those with dyslexia and/or dyscalculia. To date, 40,473 individuals have completed one of these courses and over 400 individuals have completed the rigorous process of becoming a certified instructor. The Exceptional Children Division has also continued to develop dyslexia delegates across the state that provide ongoing training with school staff titled *A Deep Dive into Dyslexia*. This course provides an overview of the science of reading, causes and characteristics of dyslexia, components of word level reading disabilities, and evidence informed instructional and assessment practices. A similar course has been developed for Mathematics, titled *Understanding Specific Learning Disabilities in Mathematics*. These instructors continue to be supported in growing their knowledge base through on-going webinars and coaching as they provide professional learning and coaching in the field

3. **Documentation/Paperwork Reduction: New Data Management System**

The EC Division initiated a revision to the forms used to document a student's individualized education program (IEP), incorporated with the installment of a new NC DPI data management system (Every Child Accountability Tracking System-ECATS) . Emphasis has been placed on following a cohesive process of reviewing data from multiple sources, identifying the student's unique needs, and documenting the progression of the development of goals, accommodations and modifications; and specially designed instruction. Consideration was given for the logical progression of IEP Team meetings relative to particular processes (initial evaluation, reevaluation, etc.) and the need to ensure meaningful parent participation. These

new forms are integrated in the new electronic management system and provide online access with IEP completion, streamlining paperwork for teachers and administrators.

ECATS officially rolled out on July 17, 2019, with statewide implementation. The new data system is provided to all public schools without cost. By implementing a statewide system, transition of students from one school system to another within the state will be much more seamless and eliminate delays in securing student information for the implementation of their IEP. The new system will also allow the Exceptional Children Division to conduct required monitoring without travel and be much more efficient in determining districts who need technical assistance and support regarding their required compliance with federal and state policy requirements.

Intensive training occurred over the summer across the state with local teams. Each Local Education Agency was provided a stipend to send staff based on their Average Daily Membership (ADM) who were provided with training materials and access to a training site that they could share with local staff. The training focused on the use of the platform and walked users through various scenarios they would progress through in the system. In addition to that, the EC division has delivered ongoing communication through a weekly Monday Message, development of training videos, ongoing webinars, an extensive Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document, and ongoing training opportunities at conferences and meetings.

Part II: Transition Planning Policies

1. Continuum of Transitions

A team of stakeholders has been engaged with the development and implementation of practices to support a continuum of transitions (from pre-k through high school). To date, the team has developed and provided professional learning support for a transition tool kit to be used for middle and high school transitions, developed a tool to assist schools in the documentation of transition activities and selection of evidence-based transition practices across all grade levels, and developed training and resources for promising practice activities associated with the development of self-determination.

The most recent Continuum of Transitions (CoT) work has been informed by two sessions seeking stakeholder input. During these meetings, stakeholders identified needs related to a general dearth of resources related to supporting transitions within elementary grades, collecting and documenting data across grade spans, and intervening to positively impact self-determination. Based on this feedback, the CoT workgroup (a workgroup of the SSIP stakeholder team) created an initial professional development session that included the following components:

- A review of the research around post school outcomes for SWD, which included postsecondary education and employment outcomes (WHY)
- An implementation plan (beginning with usability testing) for a promising practice of self-determination “Bell Ringer” activities, which included identifying a diverse group of LEAs across the state as participants (WHO)

- The specific steps of administering the AIR Self-Determination Assessment (which served as pre- and post- measures) and implementing the “Bell Ringer” self-determination activities (HOW)

In addition to these training components, materials were shared that included “Bell Ringer” PowerPoints, with reviewed, scripted self-reflection questions. For the usability testing of the activities, four initial sites were identified that represented geographic and demographic diversity, as well as a willingness to use the

measures across grades. Prior to delivering the “Bell Ringer” lessons, teachers involved in the pilot completed the AIR Self-Determination Assessment for each of the students participating in the activities to gather pre-intervention data. Pilot teachers then implemented the Bell Ringer activities (teachers were asked to complete the activities on a consistent basis, no less than two sessions per week for a full nine weeks). During the activities, students engaged in a discussion around a statement related to self-awareness, disability awareness, and / or self-directed IEPs. Students were asked to consider the statement and respond with their thoughts about how the statements applied to them individually (Did they understand that skill? Did they demonstrate that skill? Did they need to develop that skill?). After nine weeks of providing “Bell Ringers”, teachers again completed the AIR Self-Determination Assessments to gather post-intervention data. The usability testing revealed several findings that will guide implementation of this promising practice next year. Primarily, the effect of the intervention appeared to be larger for elementary students than middle and high school students. Additionally, while there were standardized approaches to delivering the intervention activities (e.g., a minimum of 2 sessions per week for 9 weeks), there was a wide range of sessions (i.e., dosage) that were delivered across the classrooms ($M = 21.31$, $SD = 10.24$). The following resources were created for LEAs to use for transition planning (1) a CoT Tool for documenting student transition activity through their school experience, (2) a CoT LiveBinder, (3) a recommended CoT Plan, (4) links to a multitude of transition activities for all grade levels, and (5) a Guiding Questions Tool that is aligned with the state SSIP goals. Finally, in partnership with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) the team has started conversations concerning the alignment of evidence-based transition practices to the LEASA. This alignment tool is intended to help schools and teachers identify the practices that are most closely aligned to their root causes and improvement plans.

2. Secondary Transition

The EC Division continues to use the Transition Toolkit LiveBinder to support traditional and charter LEAs on tools for completing secondary transition plans. Transition Leads who attended training continue to redeliver information using materials contained in the Transition Toolkit LiveBinder. Transition Leads new to their LEA are provided training during Summer Institutes or through participation in a session offered in a combined regional format. The Secondary Transition topic webinars that were provided live February 2017 through May 2017 on the topics of: Vocational Rehabilitation, Community Colleges, Career Technical Education, Significant Cognitive Disabilities, Visual Impairments, Specific Learning Disabilities, Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Emotional Disabilities, Autism, and Deaf-Blindness have been uploaded in the Transition Toolkit and are located on the Exceptional Children Division website to serve as a resource for LEAs. An additional webinar has been provided on the topic of Age of Majority. The PowerPoint and notes for that session have been added to the resources in the Transition Toolkit. In addition, the LEAs have access to the ECATS Secondary Transition module as another training resource. A new initiative is in the development and will consist of a Secondary Transition training session offered to LEAs the year prior to their Program Compliance Review (PCR). Currently, six LEAs have agreed to participate in a pilot offering of this session during the upcoming 2019-2020 school year.

Part III: Increased Access to Future-Ready Core Course of Study for SWD

1. Extended Content Standards Elective Courses.

The EC Division created and received approval on two new elective courses for students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities. These two new courses are designed to prepare individuals with the tools that allow them to successfully address the demands of adulthood and post-school success. The competencies focus on vocational skills, community involvement, self-advocacy and adaptive skills. This increases the ability for this population of students to have increased opportunities for meaningful post-school employment and successful outcomes. These two courses are required for students entering 9th grade during the school year 2019-20.

To support the implementation of these new courses, the Exceptional Children Division secured an agency to partner with three LEAs to observe and record best practices in implementing the new elective courses. From those observations and data, a day long professional development for teachers was created in relation to the new elective courses. This professional development was delivered seven times throughout North Carolina along with two supporting webinars with over 220 views in 2019.

The Exceptional Children Division also established a stakeholder group to discuss key barriers and outcomes for students with significant cognitive disabilities. These stakeholders include educators, administrators, parents, advocacy groups, and instructors of pre-service special education programs. The group will continue meeting through 2020, to develop guidance and action items to support teachers of students with significant cognitive disabilities.

2. Specially Designed Instruction within an MTSS

This professional learning series was created in response to an identified area of need through the feedback from local special education directors and includes three Canvas courses: Specially Designed Instruction: Leadership Drivers, Foundations of Specially Designed Instruction within a Multi-Tiered System of Support, and Specially Designed Instruction: Design, Delivery, and Decision-Making. The creation of the courses has been a collaboration between the Exceptional Children, Integrated Academic and Behavior Systems and the K-12 Standards, Curriculum and Instruction Divisions. The overall intent of this series is to improve outcomes for students with disabilities through building on current intervention systems and problem-solving at the individual student level.

In Spring of 2018, a pilot of this professional learning series was made available to seven LEAs to participate in the Canvas courses with ongoing support and feedback from NCDPI consultants. This has continued in 2019 with five additional LEAs with the intent of finalizing the course based on feedback and making it available to field in the fall of 2020. The course is unique in that Local Education Agencies can elect to provide the course locally in a virtual, blended, or face-to-face format based on the available resources and preferences. Following successful completion of each course, these LEA teams will then redelivery within their districts. The EC division is expanding

Part IV: Model Programs for Use by Local Administrative Units to Improve Graduation Rates and School Performance of Students with Disabilities

Multiple initiatives and projects will work collectively to support these two focus areas. They have been combined rather than repeat each item.

1. Special Projects Funding.

LEAs complete applications for Special Project funds and budgets funds so students with more significant needs can attend school and better access educational services which in turn improves school performance

and graduation rates. This year, the applications were provided electronically, to allow more efficiency for the LEAs.

2. NC State Improvement Project.

In 2016, the US Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) awarded North Carolina State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) funding for another five-year grant cycle in the total amount of \$7.2 million. This Grant from OSEP continues to support the work of the three previously awarded five-year grants through which Reading Research to Classroom Practice (RRtCP) and Foundations of Mathematics (FoM) courses were developed. Over 40,000 educators have participated in the delivery of this professional learning and research-validated programs across the state of North Carolina. As of fall 2019, over 450 instructors have been certified to continue to build the capacity to offer the courses with fidelity. These courses improve teachers' instructional skills in the delivery of reading and math. The five-year grant spans 2016-2021, and in addition, addresses the following areas: supporting leaders' understanding of implementation science and use of evidence-based practices of instruction, adolescent literacy, co-teaching, and system and instructional coaching. Currently, seven Institutions of Higher Education partners are integrating or beginning to integrate the RRtCP and FoM courses content into their university teacher education programs for pre-service teachers. The high-quality professional development provided by the grant funding will support teachers and their impact on students with disabilities' learning by providing access to best instructional practices and evidence-based interventions.

3. State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) and LEA Self-Assessment.

The EC Division has completed phase III, year three of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). The purpose of the SSIP work in North Carolina is to improve graduation rates for students with disabilities at a rate that closes the gap with non-disabled peers. To this end, the work continues to focus on supporting Local Education Agencies in conducting root cause analysis, infrastructure alignment, and continuing implementation & evaluation of improvement plans. The major activities of the SSIP process to date include:

- The LEA Self-Assessment (LEASA) was developed to support traditional and charter LEAs in their identification of root causes associated with graduation gaps between students with disabilities and non-disabled peers. Subsequently, the tool supports the development and implementation of evidence-informed interventions aligned with identified root causes. For the EC Division, the annual aggregated data served as a tool to inform regional infrastructure alignment and the development of a comprehensive professional learning plan.
- The provision of comprehensive professional learning to support needs identified through the LEASA process. During quarterly regional meetings, the State provided ongoing coaching on the rationale for using the LEASA, presented strategies for analyzing data and selecting priorities, and modeled completion of the LEASA. SEA staff met monthly in Regional data team meetings to review and analyze data from the LEASA to provide LEA staff technical assistance and support as they developed and/or updated local implementation plans.
- The analysis of LEASA data. The EC Division staff reviewed updated LEASAs using a validated rubric to determine an appropriately aligned tiered system of providing technical assistance and professional learning. Using the data from the rubrics, the EC Division grouped identified needs to provide targeted support around particular topics or processes.
- The update of a statewide professional learning calendar. The SSIP Team analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data for updating the previously developed universal professional learning calendar. The calendar was designed by identifying commonly occurring needs reflected in the critical components of

the LEASA and recommendations for support made during the EC Division staff reviews. Thus, supports offered by the EC Division during the 2018-19 school year are a direct result of self-identified root causes at the local level. This same analysis and responses are ongoing for the 2019-20 school year.

The evaluation of the SSIP have thus far yielded indicators of successful implementation. Key highlights of the SSIP evaluation include the following:

Domain	Key Outcome Comparisons to Baseline
Graduation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The students with disabilities (SWD) 5-year cohort graduation rate (CGR) for 2018-19 was 72.5%. This was a slight drop from SY2017-18, but still within the range for all students graduation rate. The gap between the five-year CGR for students with disabilities and non-disabled students has decreased 15.7% since the 2013 baseline year.
Academics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High levels of fidelity for research-based programs in reading and mathematics Significant positive changes from baseline (2014-15) to 2018-19 in reading and mathematics proficiency for students with disabilities
Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent high rates of fidelity of School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) implementation Consistent high rates of fidelity of Social Emotional Foundation of Early Learning (SEFEL) implementation Overall, in-school, and out-of-school (1-10 days) suspensions decreased slightly from baseline to 2018-19.
Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve continuum of transitions and student self-determination Develop Transition Toolkit Established transition network representatives from across NC Community of practice sharing transition resources and strategies Increased state performance on Indicators 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 Increase in student / family engagement as measured by Indicator 8 Increase in AIR Self-Determination scores for students engaging in Bell Ringer activities Increase in student/family engagement – Indicator 8
LEASA and Improvement Planning Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases in mean LEASA total score ratings from 2017-18 Increases in mean Core Element total score ratings from 2017-18 Increases in mean Systems, Practices, and Outcomes domains score ratings from 2017-18

Part V: Implementing Model Programs for use by LEAs

1. The EC Division has initiated “Policy Spotlights”, a series of virtual webinars specifically focused on regulatory and policy changes. This activity provides targeted technical assistance to local education agencies on the implementation of regulatory requirements.
2. EC Process modules have been developed and provided to LEAs. These modules provide virtual training materials to LEAs for use in resolving compliance violations, onboarding new EC staff and providing refreshers to existing staff. The modules highlight regulatory requirements and effective practices for developing and implementing the individualized education program.

3. A Homebound Stakeholder group was initiated in partnership with the Disability Rights North Carolina to explore placement decisions for students with disabilities. As a result, the *Guidance for Homebound and Modified Day Placements* document was created and shared with local education agencies. This document provides a set of essential questions and resources for IEP teams to consider when determining placements for children with medical or significant behavioral issues.
4. Additional Division Activities:
 - Participation in the Results-Based Accountability Collaborative (nationally)
 - Interagency Collaboration with the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) for Due Process Petitions and Appeals
 - Interagency Collaboration: Reviewed and revised Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure educational services are being provided in Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs)
 - Capacity Building/Initiatives: Migrating professional development/training to online platform for fidelity of implementation and to expedite training required as a result of teacher/administrator turn-over
 - Initiatives: Developed a stakeholder group in collaboration with Disability Rights of NC to study the placement of students with disabilities on homebound or modified day
 - Initiative: Continued work on previously developed Educational Sign Language Interpreter and Cued Language Transliterater Coaching Cohort to increase the knowledges, skills, and competencies of these professionals improve outcomes for students who require an interpreted or transliterated education.
 - Initiative: Partnered with the National Center for Systemic Improvement to review and revise General Supervision System with an emphasis on combining program and fiscal monitoring activities