



Wisconsin  
Evaluation  
Collaborative

August 2022

# Statewide System of Support Evaluation Summary

*for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Year 1*



# About the Authors



## Jessica Arrigoni

Jessica Arrigoni is a qualitative researcher and program evaluator with the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative. She holds a master's degree in Political Science from Indiana State University.

## Carmen Bartley

Carmen Bartley is a researcher and program evaluator with the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative. She received her PhD in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

## Bradley Carl

Bradley Carl is Co-Director of the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative. He received his PhD in Sociology-Urban Studies from Michigan State University.

## Lisa Geraghty

Lisa Geraghty is a qualitative researcher and program evaluator with the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative. She holds a Master's Degree in Public Policy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, La Follette School of Public Affairs.

## Steve Kimball

Steve Kimball is co-Director of the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative and the Principal Investigator for the Region 10 Comprehensive Center (R10CC) for Wisconsin and Minnesota.

## Daniel Marlin

Daniel Marlin is an Associate Researcher with the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative. He holds a Master's Degree in Public Affairs from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, La Follette School of Public Affairs.



## Contact

Lisa Geraghty

[elisabeth.geraghty@wisc.edu](mailto:elisabeth.geraghty@wisc.edu)



## About the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative

The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) is housed at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. WEC's team of evaluators supports youth-serving organizations and initiatives through culturally responsive and rigorous program evaluation. Learn more at <http://www.wec.wceruw.org>.



## About the Region 10 Comprehensive Center (R10CC) for Wisconsin and Minnesota

The Region 10 Comprehensive Center (R10CC) for Wisconsin and Minnesota provides high quality and intensive capacity-building services to the Minnesota Department of Education and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, as well as local education agencies and organizations. It is operated by three organizations: the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative within the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, and Education Analytics.

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# Contents

**6 Executive Summary**

**9 Introduction**

**11 Evaluation Support**

**23 Technical Assistance**

**26 Key findings and Suggested  
Recommendations**

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## Section I

# Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of evaluation and technical assistance activities conducted during 2021-22 related to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's Statewide System of Support (SSoS) for districts and schools identified as in need of improvement under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This report captures a snapshot in time and was accurate when collected and analyzed. Some information in this report may have evolved or changed.

The activities were led by a team of researchers from the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and supported by the Region 10 Comprehensive Center (R10CC) for Wisconsin and Minnesota. The evaluation activities were guided by the overarching evaluation question: "How can DPI enhance its support of identified schools and districts in a manner that builds both local (district and school) and internal (within DPI) capacity, incorporates family and community engagement in an authentic and ongoing manner, and promotes improved achievement for students?" This summary highlights key findings from the evaluation and technical assistance activities presented in the full report.

Researchers conducted four main evaluation and two technical assistance activities to address the evaluation question and support the SSoS team, including:

## Evaluation Activities

- 1 Case studies on the Research to Practice Inclusive Communities (RPIC) project and Technical Assistance Network (TAN).
- 2 Analysis of relevant Wisconsin Educator Development, Support, and Retention survey (WEDSR) responses.
- 3 Focus groups with DPI consultants whose work involves supporting identified districts and schools.
- 4 Technical assistance to select DPI workgroups including Decision Support Data System (DSDS), Level 2/3 implementation, Level 2 improvement, and Level 3 implementation, and the team working to develop new recommendations for how DPI supports and interacts with Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).

## Technical Assistance Activities

- 1 Development of a strategy for involving families and communities in the SSoS evaluation creation, implementation, and findings.
- 2 Facilitated conversations between DPI and Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) staff regarding current and effective practices for supporting districts and schools identified for improvement.

Key findings related to each of the activities are provided here:

### Case Studies

- Districts involved with the TAN and RPIC projects appreciated the support and guidance from their CESAs. The districts that were able to more fully embrace and align the work built upon previously-developed skills and systems. In addition, rural districts often had needs that were unique and might require additional support.

### WEDSR

- WEDSR survey data were limited due to low response rates, particularly the large urban districts other than MPS.
- The data provided general themes around areas where schools and districts are focusing their continuous improvement efforts; measures they use to assess progress; DPI and CESA supports they utilize and how useful they find the support; barriers they face when engaging families; and supports they need to address opportunity gaps.
- The RtI Center was identified as the most frequently accessed support, and all respondents reported it to be either "somewhat helpful" or "helpful."
- The most frequently identified barrier to improvement work was staff shortages.

### DPI Staff Feedback

- In focus groups, staff working on the SSoS identified both challenges and successes they faced when conducting their work. Challenges included siloed efforts; lack of data management and analysis skills; communications within DPI and with external partners; and the need for more direct input from districts when developing tools for their use. Successes included the development and use of common templates and language across teams and a strengthened relationship between the leadership of the Title I and Special Education teams.

### Workgroup Support

- Participating in the workgroups helped better inform evaluation-related work as well as WEC's ability to support DPI in its efforts to support identified districts and schools.

### Family/Community Engagement

- Cross-functional conversations about family engagement are happening with DPI teams and workgroups in order to build capacity to effectively involve family, youth, and community voice in the evaluation process.

### MDE-DPI Conversations

- The development of the cross-state community of practice was appreciated by both agencies, and each found the collaborative time to learn together and from each other meaningful.

The full report provides additional details about the activities and findings and links to separate evaluation reports referenced in this summary.

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## Section 2

# Introduction

# Introduction

The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) and the Region 10 Comprehensive Center (R10CC) for Wisconsin and Minnesota partners with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to provide evaluation support and technical assistance related to DPI's support for districts and schools identified for improvement, support, and monitoring under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

WEC and DPI collaboratively developed a [5-year evaluation plan](#) for this work, guided by the following evaluation question:

“How can DPI enhance its support of identified schools and districts in a manner that builds both local (district and school) and internal (within DPI) capacity, incorporates family and community engagement in an authentic and ongoing manner, and promotes improved achievement for students?”

In addition to evaluation activities, WEC and the R10CC have provided technical assistance to help inform the development of DPI's Statewide System of Support (SSoS), the agency's supports for identified districts and schools. This report highlights the first-year evaluation and technical assistance activities conducted during 2020-21 and builds on the following previous reports:

- [June 2021 Preliminary Analysis](#)
- [Year I: Mid-Year Report](#)

In the following sections, we present summaries of the following:

- Research to Practice Inclusive Communities (RPIC) and Technical Assistance Network (TAN) case studies
- Analysis of Wisconsin Educator Development, Support, and Retention (WEDSR) survey questions
- Feedback from the DPI focus groups
- Technical assistance provided to DPI workgroups
- Support in developing a strategy for involving families and communities
- Conversations between DPI and Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) staff

This report captures a snapshot in time and was accurate when collected and analyzed. Some information in this report may have evolved or changed.

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## Section 3

# Evaluation Support

# Evaluation Support

## Case Study Analysis

WEC researchers conducted case studies on two targeted support efforts offered to districts, the [Research to Practice Inclusive Communities \(RPIC\) project](#) and the [Technical Assistance Network \(TAN\)](#). These case studies sought to understand how districts are accessing support provided through these projects, how useful the districts believe the supports are, and how DPI can improve the assistance offered. The full case studies are available in the links above. Here, we highlight a few of the similar and unique findings of the two programs.

The RPIC project is offered as a Level 2, targeted support to identified districts. Currently there are eight participating districts. The RPIC is a five-year grant with three objectives:

1. Districts will implement collaborative linked teaming structures, supported by coaching, to ensure a consistent approach for collaborative decision making that will lead to improved outcomes for each and every student.
2. Districts will ensure that educational environments are accessible, inclusive, and equitable for each and every student, by implementing sustainable teacher teams leading to improved outcomes for every student and accelerated improvement for students of color and students with IEPs.
3. Key student outcomes including inclusion, agency, voice, participation, attendance, engagement, discipline, graduation rates, and achievement improve for students with IEPs and students who are systematically marginalized.

The TAN is also offered as a Level 2 support for identified districts. The TAN theory of action states that:

If DPI invests in and leverages regional capacity to provide ongoing and embedded continuous improvement supports to Targeted Supports (Level 2) identified districts/schools, and the district/school teams access the regional supports intended to improve the selection, implementation, and sustained use of evidence-based improvement strategies (EBIS) aligned to the ESSA tiers of evidence, then districts/schools will better understand and apply continuous improvement processes that sustain systems change and effective adult practice so that all student outcomes improve, with acceleration for students of color and students with IEPs.

RPIC and TAN are structured in a way that allows DPI developed processes and materials to be facilitated and supported locally by CESAs with their districts. Educators who were involved in both initiatives reported being appreciative of the support they received from their CESAs and found the support to be useful. For example, one RPIC participant shared that their CESAs coach helped to keep them on the “right track,” and one district staff who had engaged with the TAN reported that they “have a good relationship with [CESA]. And they know us and they understand our population and our staff.” Relatedly, those districts that reported being deeply invested in the work also reported that they had developed trusting relationships with their CESAs.

Another similarity between the two programs is districts’ readiness to engage in the work. Some districts embraced the work and were able to align program elements and tools to district continuous improvement efforts. Others struggled with either the pre-work necessary to successfully implement programs and fully utilize tools or did not see connections to larger improvement efforts and completed the work in isolation. Finally, another takeaway from the two case studies is that rural districts, and particularly rural and remote districts, had experiences with both RPIC and TAN that were unique, meaning that they often needed additional supports and relied more heavily on their CESAs.

Unique to the RPIC project, we learned that the district and school level teams involved in the grant were highly supportive of the work, but in some instances staff, school board members, and community members not involved in the project either pushed back on it or did not fully understand the goals. One of the questions the evaluation team posed to DPI program leads is **how can DPI provide guidance on communicating with, and on strategies for challenging conversations with, community members, school board members, and staff who are not readily supportive of the work?**

Unique to the TAN, CESAs reported that they appreciated the tools and guidance created by DPI for their use with districts. They also reported that districts were more willing to engage in the Continuous Improvement Process (CIP) self-assessment than the resource inequity audit, because the districts see the CIP self-assessment as more directly connected to their improvement efforts. For reflection on this finding, the evaluation team posed the question **how can the TA Network better connect improvement efforts for districts, and how can DPI support such efforts by TAN?**

The full case studies (linked above) discuss in greater detail the programs’ successes, challenges, and perceived impacts, as well as suggestions by the participants for program improvements.

## Wisconsin Educator Development, Support, and Retention Survey

WEC worked with DPI staff and the Office of Socially Responsible Evaluation in Education (SREed) at UW-Milwaukee to include items within the administrator version of the Spring 2022 Wisconsin Educator Development, Support, and Retention (WEDSR) Survey. These items asked administrators about their schools’ focus on continuous improvement, data they use to monitor progress, barriers to improvement efforts, supports they receive, and the perceived effectiveness and quality of those supports.

A total of 454 administrators responded to the Spring 2022 WEDSR survey. These respondents included 31 who worked in identified schools outside of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and 73 from MPS.<sup>1</sup> Responses from both are summarized in the tables below to help DPI understand current continuous improvement efforts and needed supports from the school leaders who participated in the survey.

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of this report, data from the WEDSR were not available at a level that would allow us to specify the identifications of each school respondent.

Table I displays the topic areas schools are focusing on for their continuous improvement efforts. Respondents were allowed to select all areas that applied. In addition, some topic areas may have crossed over with others; for example, when respondents selected achievement gaps and literacy, it may have been the same focus. Although the data indicate that schools were working on a number of different issues, this list may help DPI identify topic areas for additional support. Interestingly, community engagement is low on this list, but we have learned from interviews with school

and district leaders (RPIC and TAN interviews) that it is often an area of struggle. This finding may indicate that if additional support was provided, schools and districts may feel empowered to address this area of focus. Another takeaway could be that although community engagement is important, schools and districts were often more focused on academics and behavior in the 2021-22 post-COVID school year, and thus community engagement was not a top priority.

**Table I: Which of the following is your school focused on regarding continuous improvement work? (Check all that apply)**

AREA OF FOCUS	COUNT
Literacy	392
Achievement gaps	359
Mathematics	317
Academic achievement	300
Student engagement	271
School culture	238
Student behavior	231
Professional collaboration	211
Culturally responsive practices	207
Family engagement	195
Student attendance	192
College/Career readiness	179
Community engagement	132
Other (please indicate)*:	17

\*Other responses included: Universal design for learning (3), wellbeing (3), equity/anti-racist practices (2), socio-emotional learning (2), instructional practices (2), standards (1), professional behavior (1), professional learning communities/integrated support (1), STEAM, computer science, environmental literacy (1), "we exceed expectations every year" (1).

Table 2 includes the main data sources schools use to monitor their continuous improvement efforts. Respondents were given a list of possible data sources to select and were again allowed to select all that applied. Student assessments was the most frequently identified measure. When combined, staff surveys (258) and the WEDSR survey (67), which is an example of a staff survey, represented the second highest source (325 combined responses). Professional practice data and student/school learning objectives were the third and fourth most frequently identified measures. Follow-up interviews would allow for additional information about which student assessments are being used, how schools are using the data for progress monitoring, and if the identified data are the most appropriate data for measurement.

**Table 2: What data are you using to monitor progress related to the work?**

(Check all that apply)

DATA	COUNT
Student assessments	387
Professional practice data	283
Student/School Learning Objectives	271
Staff survey	258
Student work	218
Student survey	182
Community survey	107
Wisconsin Educator Development, Support, and Retention Survey Data	67
Other data (please specify)	30
Other educator data (please specify)*	27

\*Other responses included local assessments (13), walkthrough /observations (8), state assessments (5), PLCs (4), and attendance data (2).

Survey respondents were asked to identify the barriers they encountered when trying to implement improvement efforts. As shown in Table 3, staff shortages was the top barrier identified. Staffing issues were particularly heightened during 2021-22 as a result of ongoing COVID-19 related issues. Competing district priorities was the second most frequently identified barrier. DPI may want to consider how it can support districts with staffing shortages through educator pipeline resources (e.g., supply and demand report updates; compensation and loan forgiveness options), and identification of promising staffing strategies (e.g., mentoring, Grow Your Own programs, instructional coaching). Other areas of support could focus on how districts can create coherence through strategic planning. This list of barriers may inform additional areas in which DPI could provide support.

**Table 3: Which of the following barriers do you encounter when trying to implement your improvement efforts?**

BARRIERS	COUNT
Staff shortages	282
Competing district priorities	191
Limited internal coaching support	177
Limited funding	176
Staff acceptance of targeted strategies	161
Limited external coaching support	107
Professional development unavailable for targeted strategies	97
Lack of adult practice data relevant to targeted strategies	81
School board/community acceptance of targeted strategies	45
Family/caregiver acceptance of targeted strategies	38
Other (please describe)	63

The largest share of “Other” responses focused on time in general (17), local policy constraints or school board interference (15), and adequate time for professional learning (12). Next, there were reported COVID-related complications (5). Educator Effectiveness process changes and perceived burden posed challenges to some (3). Funding, class sizes, and central office each had one mention. Four respondents reported that they did not face any barriers. Five reported no barriers or were unsure.

Table 4 shows which CESA or DPI supports and tools respondents were utilizing and their perceptions of the supports and tools. As shown in Table 4, the Wisconsin RtI Center was the most frequently cited support, and those respondents further shared that the support was “somewhat helpful” or “helpful;” no one indicated that it was “not at all” helpful.

**Table 4: Which CESA or DPI supports and tools are you accessing to support your continuous improvement efforts and how helpful have they been?**

SUPPORTS/TOOLS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ACCESSED	COUNT	NOT AT ALL HELPFUL	SOMEWHAT HELPFUL	HELPFUL
Wisconsin RtI Center	243	2	110	127
WISEdash Data Inquiry Journal	123	4	62	57
WISEgrants support	118	1	63	54
DPI Continuous Improvement Process Criteria and Rubric	107	0	57	48
Comprehensive School Improvement Monitoring	68	1	36	29
None	62			
Technical Assistance Network (TAN)	33	0	12	19
Early Childhood Program Support (EC PST)	30	0	15	15
Other (please share)*	30			
Transition Improvement Grant (TIG)	29	0	17	12
Joint Federal Notification Bookings/Technical Assistance calls with DPI staff	23	1	12	8
Comprehensive School Improvement budgeting help	19	0	7	9
Comprehensive School Improvement Live	18	0	5	12
Research to Practice Inclusive Communities (RPIC)	15	0	11	5
Wisconsin State Parent Educator Initiative (WSPEI)	12	0	6	5

\*\*“Other” responses included CESAs (7), SAIL (5), and various DPI teams (3). Six respondents were “not sure.”

Of the 454 survey respondents, 138 answered the question about barriers related to family involvement in school improvement efforts. Table 5 presents the main themes that emerged from respondents and quotes that help to illustrate each theme.

**Table 5: What are the main barriers you encounter when trying to involve families in school improvement efforts?**

THEME	COUNT	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES
Getting families to meaningfully engage	55	<p>"Families don't seem to care or have the knowledge of what we are trying to do no matter how much it is communicated. They only show up if you feed them and for our district, it's not economical."</p> <p>"Family lack of willingness to be involved, even when it would be valuable to them."</p>
Scheduling conflicts	30	<p>"Families try, but their time is limited. People are busy trying to earn a living and keep things going."</p> <p>"Coordinating times – educators are available during the day, families are available in the evening."</p>
Lack of time for staff to plan/coordinate efforts	24	<p>"Teachers don't have time for effective outreach efforts toward families."</p> <p>"Limited capacity of staff time/energy to add more family events throughout the year"</p>
Communication barriers	19	<p>"How to communicate effectively without over communicating."</p> <p>"Social media shares inaccurate information regarding student concerns, CTR, LGBTQ unfounded concerns."</p>
Covid protocols/related barriers	18	<p>"The pandemic has impacted the way we communicate and interact with parents. The building site has been closed for parents and visitors."</p> <p>"With the pandemic and the virus, it has been very difficult getting family engagement and involvement into the schools period."</p>
Representative participation	18	<p>"Some families are involved and invested, while others are non-responsive."</p> <p>"Getting a good cross section in and actively involved."</p>
Perceived lack of family understanding about needs	12	<p>"It is challenging to build a depth of understanding in families in regards to our school improvement process and initiatives. It takes a lot of 'teacher talk' to help parents understand."</p> <p>"Lack of knowledge of how our school system works, purposes of goals, and education lingo."</p>
Finding ways to compromise on family/teacher interests	6	<p>"If parent/family do not value educational performance it can be difficult to secure support to increase literacy."</p> <p>"The most challenging piece are the families that do not agree with the district vision or direction."</p>

Trust (5), language barriers (4), and transportation (3) were mentioned by a handful of respondents. Lack of purpose/vision, poverty, and more funding to support efforts (and food at events) were each mentioned once. Three respondents said they did not experience barriers in getting families involved.

The next two questions (supports needed for closing disability opportunity gaps and for closing racial opportunity gaps) were randomly assigned to respondents, such that each respondent only received one prompt in order to limit survey burden. Eighty-one administrators responded to the question asking about supports needed to close disability opportunity gaps and 84 administrators responded to the question asking about supports needed to close racial opportunity gaps. In both instances, staff training was identified as the number one support needed, followed by adequate staffing levels.

**Table 6: What supports do you need to close disability opportunity gaps in your school or district?**

THEME	COUNT	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES
Adequate training for staff	23	"More training for special education teachers on what specialized instruction looks like and what is 'special' about special education." "It's a multi-year support plan to provide short bursts of PD – that doesn't mean sit and get, but it means having conversations with an outside facilitator that has expertise in the topic, has worked with other districts. That helps build trust because people see it isn't just district leadership trying to force the flavor of the month on people."
Adequate staffing levels	20	"Additional trained staff to implement instructions and staff to support behaviors to allow classroom teachers to continue providing universal instruction" "Available and willing staff."
More targeted supports for students	14	"A stronger RtI paradigm, especially at the elementary level, to help identify students earlier and begin the work of preparing them for the expectations of secondary school."
Increased funding	12	"Funding support for Spec. Ed. increased." "Much greater reimbursement for categorical aids in Special Education."
Support/guidance from district leadership	9	"A supportive and understanding Board and community." "High quality professional learning for all staff – including district leaders."
Dedicated co-planning time	9	"Increase the effectiveness of the adult practices. Dedicated common planning time for grade level teams and dedicated time for co-planning with the special education team." "Standardized curriculums, time to work to develop strategies to meet student needs."

Support from CESAs (3), mental health support for teachers (2), help with RtI (2), and community support (2) were also mentioned. Three participants responded that they did not know what supports were needed.

Additional themes included recruitment and retention of staff of color (3), more multicultural engagement (3), greater accessibility to data (3), time (3), and mandatory training sessions (2). Seventeen participants responded with "Nothing/NA."

**Table 7: What supports do you need to close racial opportunity gaps in your school or district?**

THEME	COUNT	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES
Adequate training for staff	19	<p>"We need to really discuss best practice in closing the gaps. We have studied why they exist and have data analyzed often, but what are those critical action steps that change practice and close gaps. We did a building book study of Culturally Responsive teaching and the brain, which is the best thing I can find on actionable steps for educators."</p> <p>"Time for professional development and coaching support for new and young staff around best practices in Universal Design, PLC, Instructional Delivery, Differentiation, and RTI."</p>
Adequate staffing levels	17	<p>"More staff targeted specifically for addressing the opportunity gap."</p> <p>"Staffing shortages in key academic areas have been a unique challenge this year."</p>
Systems that are more inclusive	9	<p>"Continued efforts for inclusive belief systems and systems that are fully inclusive. Sometimes we say we are but our practices don't match what we say."</p> <p>"The data at the high school level to see how they are doing and then find targeted supports as a system, not just a class or an intervention but a systemic tool."</p>
Education around equity, cultural sensitivity	8	<p>"Additional education around equity and continuous review of systems through an equity lens."</p> <p>"District mandated race and cultural relevancy PD for teachers."</p>
Adequate funding	8	<p>"Time, Money, and the recognition that our system does not financially/opportunistically support giving a fighting chance to minorities that other dominant cultures enjoy without effort."</p> <p>"Funding and mandated dates for professional development led by school to focus on individualized support for all staff including paraprofessionals."</p>
Adequate cooperative planning time	6	<p>"Allowable time during the teacher 8 hour work day to meet with staff. Allowable time during the teacher 8 hour work day to provide staff PD, grade level meetings, collaboration cross grade level. This time is needed after the student day not during the student instructional time. Our highly qualified teachers are needed during the instructional day to teach."</p> <p>"Adequate staffing and time for teachers to collaborate and address classroom data."</p>
Community support	6	<p>"Community Culture in a rural district is my biggest challenge."</p> <p>"Family/community acknowledgement of the necessity of attendance and behavior."</p>
Ways to educate the community	6	<p>"Our team is partnering with others to find more community supports for behavior and mental health."</p> <p>"Cultural relevancy experiences for our staff and community."</p>

## DPI Workgroup Feedback

DPI staff shared their perceptions during focus group discussions about the first year of SSoS implementation. WEC facilitated three focus groups that included both DPI and CESA staff who provide support to schools and districts under the SSoS umbrella. Focus groups were held with the Level 2/3 Implementation, Level 3 Implementation, and DSDS workgroups. In addition, a Google form was circulated among participants so that they could provide anonymous responses and elaborate on points made during the focus groups. Across the focus groups, 26 individuals participated.

In general, staff saw a lot of potential for improvement in theory. There was general agreement that silos need to be broken down and that strategies to better communicate across teams and workgroups need to be implemented. Some respondents mentioned that they were starting to see evidence of a “coordinated system of supports” as the workgroup teams were installed, but that work now feels “stalled” or “paused.” For some workgroups, identifying specific deliverables and timelines was helpful in prioritizing the work and moving it forward. Many expressed hope that consistency across projects would be addressed (as far as communication and facilitation). While there was some evidence that consistency has improved, there were concerns about lack of support in some critical areas, such as data support and effectively collaborating across the main DPI teams (Special Education and Title I).

DPI staff also discussed positive developments related to the installation of the SSoS. One example was having a tangible model from another state for a comprehensive system. A conversation with staff from Kentucky about the system they have installed was “validating,” according to DPI respondents. Perceived improvements, such as common templates for meetings and protocols for JFN calls, were starting to “ripple out” to other discretionary grant projects. Having a common language across projects improved language and messaging, according to some project leads, and helped with breaking down perceived silos that exist within the agency. A final perceived improvement was a greater awareness among discretionary grant project staff about data they are collecting and what they are trying to measure.

While some progress has been made with the creation of focused workgroups, staff shared that work related to the installation of the SSoS included some “stops and starts”. One participant stated that “as gaps or holes are identified, they have to stop their work or pivot to address the problems.” Others mentioned that they were not aware of any significant changes that “demonstrate evidence of consistency or coherence.” Somewhat understandably, the installation has not been a linear process, according to another respondent. There was concern that the stops, starts, and redirections would erode buy-in among internal staff.

Capacity problems were noted by some, particularly in the area of data management and analysis. Projects are reluctant to ask grant participants to provide a large amount of data when DPI is not able to process and return the data in a format that is helpful to grant participants. Communication, both between internal DPI groups and externally (with participants such as the TA Network), was also mentioned as needing to be streamlined and improved. And while many praised the installation of SSoS-related workgroups, some expressed concern that “...time spent in workgroups takes away from time actually spent strategizing about specific groups of schools or districts.”

Several participants mentioned a lack of outreach to stakeholders beyond DPI workgroups. Involving districts in co-creation of the system at some level, as well as conducting a needs assessment to better understand where supports are needed, were mentioned as lacking. As relates to identifications, participants agreed that more needs to be done to highlight areas where IDEA and ESSA identifications intersect, since their perception is that the installment of SSoS so far “lacks a coherent picture” of how the identifications relate to each other. In addition, staff suggested more explicit identification of structures and supports so they could know the extent to which their work will be supported.

A final key challenge identified by participants was a lack of engagement at the cabinet and executive level, resulting, for example, in a failed attempt to get the SSoS advisory group off the ground. In contrast, participants recognized strengthened relationships between Title I and Special Education at the director level.

Participants were also asked specifically about supports in place to help DPI staff do their work. Use of a common language was referenced again as a small but helpful step towards greater alignment and a common vision. Connecting with other states, especially through ongoing conversations with counterparts at the Minnesota Department of Education and presentations by similar staff in Kentucky and Massachusetts, was mentioned as helping improve internal capacity among DPI staff. While staff praised the creation of specific workgroups, they noted that communication *between* workgroups needs to be improved, and some dedicated collaborative time across groups would be helpful to facilitate problem-solving. Finally, staff expressed appreciation for the wealth of training opportunities available, including access to fellow DPI colleagues.

## Family/Community Engagement

DPI and the WEC team identified community and family outreach as important elements of the evaluation. To support this work, the WEC team expanded to include family and community engagement experts. As outreach efforts began to be planned, it was discovered that similar efforts were already happening within other DPI teams. In order to utilize combined expertise, and to not “over-ask” families and community members for their feedback and review, it was decided to combine with the other existing outreach efforts happening at DPI. The team also began collaborating with pre-existing family, youth, and community engagement (FYCE) teams working within DPI. These connections with various DPI FYCE teams and workgroups provided the WEC team the opportunity to connect with ongoing DPI FYCE efforts on a regular basis. Members and leaders of FYCE teams began attending the monthly SSoS evaluation meetings to provide updates on their work and suggest ways the SSoS evaluation team could engage with and support those processes. These partnerships afford the SSoS evaluation team the opportunity to be apprised of ongoing FYCE work and upcoming opportunities to engage families, youth, and community members in the evaluation process.

Upcoming initiatives within family, youth, and community engagement include:

- Launching a community of practice for FYCE practitioners working in Wisconsin K-12 schools
- Bringing library contacts (DPI and external) into the FYCE groups to serve as hubs of community and family engagement, and as anchor partners
- Preparations to reconvene DPI cross-agency family engagement group
- Re-envisioning the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) and possible connection to youth advisory council work
- Working towards a statewide common model for family engagement

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## Section 4

# Technical Assistance

# Technical Assistance

## WEC Support of DPI Workgroups

WEC staff have provided technical support and thought partnership for several SSoS workgroups over the past year, including the Level II, Level III, Data Support (DSDS), and overall SSoS implementation workgroups. Interactions with two of these workgroups will be highlighted in this report. The first is the Level III workgroup comprised of DPI staff from the Title I and Special Education teams, which has been meeting regularly to review and improve the agency's process for monitoring and supporting districts and schools identified for improvement under DPI's Joint Improvement Monitoring initiative. A particular focus of this group's work has been on supports provided to CSI (Comprehensive Support and Improvement) Schools identified under ESSA, most of which are located within MPS. Specific topics the workgroup has discussed include criteria for exiting CSI status based on the DPI Continuous Improvement rubric, the current (and ideal) frequency with which DPI staff interact with district and school-level staff around monitoring, and strategies used by other state education agencies for monitoring and support, such as how the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has engaged with external vendors in their work.

The second workgroup is the MPS-DPI Comprehensive Improvement Plan working group, comprised of some of the same DPI staff as the Level III workgroup and charged by DPI cabinet with developing new recommendations for how DPI supports and interacts with MPS. This group met regularly for the first half of calendar year 2022 to review DPI's recent history of support for MPS, grounded in the reality that extensive investments have not translated into improved outcomes for MPS students. Accordingly, DPI has proposed several changes in its supports for MPS, including a significant increase in DPI staff working with MPS in a monitoring capacity, an increase in financial investment from DPI to MPS, and creation of a new cabinet-level DPI liaison with MPS. The workgroup also reviewed and provided feedback on a memo outlining DPI's expectations of MPS as relates to improvement activities during the upcoming (2022-23) school year. After a year of involvement in SSoS workgroups, the WEC team felt that involvement in the workgroups helped better inform our work and ability to support DPI in their efforts to support identified districts and schools.

## MDE-DPI Conversations

WEC has convened a cross-state community of practice involving key staff from DPI and the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to discuss and reflect on how the two State Education Agencies (SEAs) support identified districts and schools. This group met five times (January 2021, June 2021, October 2021, February 2022, and June 2022), with a core group of six to eight regular participants (including Title I/School Support and Special Education) discussing their respective approaches to supporting district and school improvement efforts. While there are many similarities in terms of how the two SEAs have structured their work in the past, there are also several key differences, such as MDE's greater reliance on regional entities (Regional Centers of Excellence) to help support rural districts. The cross-state community of practice also reviewed together how the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has utilized an outside vendor for this work. Topics of interest identified by the cross-state group for future discussions include how to differentiate supports for re-identified schools, how SEAs can help collect better information on student voice, and which promising practices are emerging as relates to recruiting and retaining more educators of color.

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## Section 5

# Key findings and Suggested Recommendations

# Key Findings and Recommendations

This section includes key findings related to each of our activities and related recommendations for next steps. Pending further conversation with DPI cabinet and team members, we can decide together which of these to apply in future years of the evaluation.

## | Key Finding: Case Studies

- Districts involved with the TAN and RPIC projects appreciated the support and guidance from CESAs. The districts that were able to more fully embrace and align the work built upon previously developed skills and systems. In addition, rural districts often had needs that were unique and might require additional support.

### • Recommendations

1. Consider how DPI can provide differentiated support to identified schools and districts in order to meet them where they are and help them to build skills, so that they can be more successful when they participate in programs like RPIC or better align improvement efforts when working with the TAN.
2. Conduct follow-up case studies with the RPIC grant districts and TAN leads. The TAN implemented a new set of deliverables in 2021-22; a follow-up study could further document successes and challenges TAN Leads and districts experience when implementing activities. A follow-up study on RPIC could document any changes to the program made by DPI as a result of evaluation findings and how they have impacted district implementation.

## | Key Findings: WEDSR

- The data were limited due to the low response among identified schools and districts, particularly the large urban districts other than MPS.
- The data provided general themes around areas where schools and districts are focusing their continuous improvement efforts; measures they use to assess progress; DPI and CESA supports they utilize and how useful they find the support; barriers they face when engaging families; and supports they need to address opportunity gaps.
- The RtI Center was identified as the most frequently accessed support, and all respondents reported it to be either "somewhat helpful" or "helpful."
- The most frequently identified barrier to improvement work was staff shortages.

### • Recommendations

1. Work with SREed and the LEAD team to improve response rate among identified schools.
2. Conduct follow-up interviews or focus groups in order to gather additional and more specific information to inform possible supports.
3. Identify lessons that can be learned from the RtI Center structure and supports that can be carried over to other programs that support schools.

### Key Finding: DPI Staff Feedback

- In focus groups, staff working on the SSoS identified both challenges and successes they faced when conducting their work. Challenges included siloed efforts; lack of data management and analysis skills; communications within DPI and with external partners; and the need for more direct input from districts when developing tools for their use. Successes included the development and use of common templates and language across teams and a strengthened relationship between the leadership of the Title I and Special Education teams.

- **Recommendations**

1. Create opportunities to gather district and school level feedback when developing tools for their use and related to the overall SSoS.
2. Provide opportunities for staff to build their capacity in the areas of data management and analysis.
3. Continue to highlight for DPI, CESA, and districts areas where IDEA and ESSA identifications intersect.

### Key Finding: Family/Community Engagement

- Cross-functional conversations about family engagement are happening with DPI teams and workgroups in order to build capacity to effectively involve family, youth, and community voice in the evaluation process.

- **Recommendations**

1. Members of the SSoS evaluation team should continue to stay apprised of the evolving FYCE efforts at DPI to be able to “plug into” opportunities for family and youth feedback.
2. Continue to use existing data collection opportunities (e.g., case studies) to gather information on FYCE efforts at the CESA and district level.
3. As DPI develops guidance for family and youth engagement, use the WEC team to build on findings from this evaluation and conduct district level case studies on family engagement to learn how districts are engaging with families, what is working, challenges they face, and resources they need.

### Key Finding: Workgroup Support

- Participating in the workgroups helped better inform evaluation-related work as well as WEC's ability to support DPI in its efforts to support identified districts and schools.

- **Recommendation**

1. As the DPI workgroups evolve to support the SSoS, enlist WEC to continue to provide evaluation support where necessary and gather feedback from the workgroups to inform the continuous improvement efforts of the SSoS.

### Key Finding: MDE-DPI Conversations

- The development of the cross-state community of practice was appreciated by both agencies, and each found the collaborative time to learn together and from each other meaningful.

- **Recommendation**

1. Continue to facilitate the cross-state community of practice and organize meetings around the topics the two agencies identified: how to differentiate supports for re-identified schools, how SEAs can help collect better information on student voice, and which promising practices are emerging as relates to recruiting and retaining more educators of color.

**WEC**

