Utah State Board of Education | Special Education Services

UTAH STATE SYSTEMIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN (SSIP) EVALUATION PLAN

A UTAH BOARD OF EDUCATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GUIDE

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SSIP INTRODUCTION📒

Utah's State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) describes the state system of postsecondary transition service providers and the efforts to build capacity to assist LEAs to improve outcomes for students with disabilities and then to evaluate the impact of Utah's improvement efforts. These improvement efforts aligned with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The success of the SSIP requires systematic improvement across the Utah State Board of Education (USBE), local education agencies (LEAs), and community partner agencies to leverage existing strengths while simultaneously closing system gaps. These stakeholders need to make the following systems changes to impact the State-identified Measurable Result (SiMR):

- Increase capacity to implement the SSIP
- Align and leverage current postsecondary transition improvement initiatives across stakeholders
- Increase utilization of evidence-based practices (EBPs)
- Improve infrastructure and coordination for delivering effective professional learning (PL) and technical assistance (TA)
- Increase meaningful collaboration of state and local stakeholders around SSIP efforts
- Increase capacity to effectively utilize available national TA resources
- Increase capacity at the local level to implement systems that support effective implementation of postsecondary transition planning
- Increase capacity to implement general supervision systems that support effective implementation of the IDEA and ESSA

These combined efforts will lead to higher quality postsecondary transition planning for students with disabilities which in turn will improve state results in graduation, dropout, and post-school outcomes in employment, further education, and independent living as students with disabilities will have the knowledge and skills they need to achieve postschool success.

The Coordinating Council for People with Disabilities (CCPD) created by Utah statute spent more than a year collaboratively determining that improving postsecondary outcomes for youth with disabilities is a vital need in Utah. This led to Utah's change of SiMR focus to postsecondary transition and creation of the Statewide

Collaborative on Improving Postsecondary Transition Outcomes for Students with Disabilities (STC) to address the CCPD priority. The STC is a working partnership of state agencies and many other organizations that serve youth with disabilities across the state. The STC includes agencies and organizations that are disability-specific and agencies who serve the general population of youth to ensure the state infrastructure analysis thoroughly articulated the needs and resources of youth with disabilities.

The SiMR was selected after a review of Utah Postschool Outcomes Survey (Indicator 14) data over the five previous years, in which a high number of individuals with disabilities reported being unengaged or under-engaged in meaningful postschool activities one year after exiting school. Students continuing with special education services beyond their senior year tend to be those individuals more significantly impacted by their disability and are at the highest risk for under-engagement after leaving the school system. To meet the needs of this population, Utah's SiMR is to reduce the percentage of students ages 19–22 exiting a post-high program who report being unengaged or under-engaged on the Indicator 14 survey by 20 percentage points over a five-year period (from 45.65% in FFY 2020 to 25.65% by FFY 2025).

Utah's SSIP Theory of Action development began with the identification of common concerns and a vision for improvement among the postsecondary transition stakeholders that make up the STC. Those concerns were transformed into three Broad Improvement Strategies, including:

I. Comprehensive postsecondary transition supports for youth and families,
II. Creating a smooth flow of postsecondary transition services with clearly defined definitions and timelines for most effective service delivery, and
III. Coordination of services to replace a system where agencies serve students with disabilities in silos rather than collaboratively.

Utah then reiterated the process to bring the broad continuum of Utah's special education stakeholders to consensus about what specific improvement activities would need to be implemented to achieve the SiMR.

SSIP EVALUATION PLAN

Utah's evaluation plan for the SSIP has two major parts. The first is the SiMR target calculation, which is to reduce the percentage of students ages 19–22 exiting a post-high program who report being unengaged or under-engaged on the Indicator 14 survey by 20 percentage points over a five-year period (from 45.65% in FFY 2020 to 25.65% by FFY 2025). This target is calculated from a subset of the Indicator 14 postschool outcomes survey. This is the data Utah reports to OSEP in the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) online reporting tool.

Data is collected for the first part of the evaluation plan through the Indicator 14 Postschool Outcomes Survey (PSO) data and then a subset is identified based on the age of the student at the time of exit from school. The data is analyzed collaboratively by the USBE Special Education and Data and Statistics teams by comparing current year data to previous trend data and the data for this SiMR target population with all respondents to the PSO survey. Data is not collected on outcomes for students without disabilities so there is no comparison available for this population.

The second part of the evaluation is the evaluation of the components within each of the three Broad Improvement Strategies identified in the Theory of Action including comprehensive supports for youth and families, smooth flow of services, and coordination of services. Utah will evaluate the outcomes of the improvement strategies by:

- Evaluating and adding to the infrastructure improvements needed to better support the implementation of the SSIP
- Comparing the outputs from previous SSIP implementation years with the current year's outputs
- Reviewing activities and progress with stakeholders

To summarize what is required to implement each strategy, common components or considerations of each strategy were turned into improvement activities. These are listed below.

REQUIREMENTS TO IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES

STRATEGY I: COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORTS FOR YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Strategy I addresses equitable access to supports and resources for transition-age youth and their families. It addresses the "who."

1. Professional learning for educators
   a. Improve local education agency (LEA) attendance and participation in the Annual Utah Institute on Postsecondary Transition (TI) for educators (this institute is designed for teams to return year after year to set and complete annual goals to build capacity within their LEA to engage in quality postsecondary transition planning for students with disabilities as mandated in IDEA)
2. Education and opportunities for youth and families (sharing information and improving skills)
   a. Improve attendance and participation in Transition University for youth with disabilities and their families through the Utah Parent Center (UPC)
   b. Improve enrollment in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for students with disabilities through vocational rehabilitation
   c. Improve utilization of the Transition Elevated planning app among students with disabilities as they participate in the development of their own Individualized Education Program (IEP) transition plan
3. Improved access to supports and services for underserved populations
   a. Improve access to and enrollment in Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways for students with disabilities
   b. Improve LEA knowledge and utilization of the Career Development Credential for students with disabilities

STRATEGY II: SMOOTH FLOW OF SERVICES FOR TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH

Strategy II describes the ideal set of secondary transition services and experiences. It addresses the "what."

1. Improve data match across agencies from 80% to 100%

    a. Student-level data sharing agreements in place between USBE, Department of Workforce Services (DWS), and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

    b. Establish a baseline for student-level data match across agencies

2. Tracking services and engagement over time by student
    a. Map services received for a representative sample of 2020 exiters (2021 survey respondents)

3. Create a Portrait of Secondary Transition (POST) for students with disabilities based on students in the exiter sample who are engaged in the community after school (Indicator 14C)
    a. Create a flow of services timeline for students, families, and educators
    b. Compile student success examples to share with students, families, and educators

STRATEGY III: COORDINATION OF SERVICES FOR TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH IN UTAH

Strategy III addresses systemic, intentional, coordination; streamlined referral processes; active collaboration; and educating youth and families. It addresses the "how."

1. Create a systematic referral process to use for referrals across agencies
    a. Create a standardized referral form with release of information for use between agencies
    b. Create a repository with each agency's information to which postsecondary transition stakeholders can refer students and families

2. Improve data sharing system to improve communication and coordination in co-serving youth across agencies
    a. Create an addendum for agency progress reporting forms to track information sharing between agencies
    b. Establish a baseline for the number of LEAs and outside agencies sharing progress data for students being co-served

3. Create a common language to communicate with families about transition without jargon specific to different agencies
    a. Create a universal document with a common vision of postsecondary transition and a glossary of terms
    b. Build a website to house the vision and resources for postsecondary transition in Utah

During the first year of the implementation of the evaluation plan, Utah gathered baseline data on all target activities and outputs identified in the Theory of Action and Logic Model and review activities and progress with stakeholders. Most of Utah's data is related to outputs, as opposed to student outcomes, and the fact that all stakeholders actively contributed to choosing output targets supports Utah's decision to implement these strategies. During the following years of implementation of the evaluation plan, strategy and activity outcomes were compared to the baseline data.

SSIP FFY 2024 EVALUATION RESULTS

SIMR TARGET CALCULATION EVALUATION RESULTS

Utah reported an overall increase of those students reporting as unengaged or under-engaged this year – specifically related to competitive employment outcomes, other education and training, and other employment. This is in line with trends in other states as well. The disability categories of specific learning disability (SLD), autism, other health impairment (OHI), intellectual disability (ID) and multiple disabilities (MD) all saw decreases in competitive employment. Respondents in the SLD category decreased from 51.69% in the 2024 survey year to 48.55% in the 2025 survey year. Respondents in the Autism category decreased from 30.30% in the 2024 survey year to 22.13% in the 2025 survey year. Respondents in the OHI category decreased from 42.09% in the 2024 survey year to 41.16% in the 2025 survey year. Respondents in the ID category decreased from 21.88% in the 2024 survey year to 18.12% in the 2025 survey year. Respondents in the MD category decreased from 6.67% in the 2024 survey year to 2.17% in the 2025 survey year. Students graduating with a regular diploma are competitively employed at three percentage points less than in the 2024 survey year. The largest race/ethnicity category of White respondents also decreased in competitive employment from 41.91% in the 2024 survey year to 40.02% in the 2025 survey year. Hispanic respondents also reported a decrease in competitive employment from 50.56% in 2024 to 42.97% in 2025. Of the respondents from the 2024 survey, 21% had not worked at all since exiting school and this has increased to 24% in the 2025 survey.

Based on Utah's 2025 post school outcomes survey data, the reported reasons given for not being engaged in employment were: 16% reported they were in school, on a mission, or doing something else before employment (down from 20% last survey year) and 31% stated some other health or disability related reason (down from 34% last survey year). In the 2025 survey year, 10% of respondents stated they were unable to find work. This is up from 7% in 2024. In 2025, 7% of respondents stated they lacked the necessary skills and qualifications. This is down from 9% in 2024. According to the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation, while Utah's unemployment rate is lower than the national average, individuals seeking entry-level positions are facing more competition from older workers who are staying in or re-entering the workforce. Additionally, due to economic conditions, more adults are securing secondary employment, which makes it more challenging for high school graduates, especially those with disabilities, to stand out. Due to this influx

of experienced workers in the market, there is a growing expectation by employers for skills and experience, even for entry-level positions.

The SiMR target population (those students exiting between the ages of 19-22) showed an increase in those reporting as unengaged or under-engaged for the first time in three years. The disability categories of specific learning disability (SLD), autism, and other health impairment (OHI), all saw decreases in competitive employment in the target sample. The disability categories of intellectual disability (ID) and multiple disabilities (MD) remained stable but low for competitive employment. Respondents in the SLD category decreased from 50.63% in the 2024 survey year to 32.26% in the 2025 survey year – the most significant drop. Respondents in the Autism category decreased from 16.42% in the 2024 survey year to 12.75% in the 2025 survey year. Respondents in the OHI category decreased from 29.27% in the 2024 survey year to 26.32% in the 2025 survey year. Respondents in the ID category increased slightly from 15.32% in the 2024 survey year to 15.63% in the 2025 survey year. Respondents in the MD category decreased slightly from 2.86% in the 2024 survey year to 2.44% in the 2025 survey year. Students graduating with a regular diploma are competitively employed at three percentage points less than in the 2024 survey year. The sample size for this metric went down from 102 to 66 in 2025. In 2024 it is likely that there were more fifth year seniors as a lingering effect of credit deficiency from COVID.

Based on Utah's 2025 post school outcomes survey data for the SSIP target population, the reported reasons given for not being engaged in employment were: in school, on a mission, or doing something else before employment (3% in 2025 - down from 6% in 2024); some other health or disability related reason (58% in 2025 - down from 59% in 2024); unable to find work (3% in 2025 - the same as 2024); and 11% of respondents stated they lacked the necessary skills and qualifications (down from 12% in 2024). While these numbers are relatively stable for this population, they are significantly less favorable than the total respondent group. This tells us that students who exit sometime after their senior year may not be seeking education and employment opportunities at the same rate as exiters who complete their schooling with their general education cohort. This population is also more vulnerable to the challenging job market than those with less significant support needs so we see its effects most significantly in this group.

Systems change implementation efforts typically take several years before their effects can be seen in the outcome data. Initial efforts may spike positive outcomes due to increased awareness, but lasting change takes time. It was previously asserted that increased interagency collaboration and awareness of available

services related to the SSIP broad improvement strategies and the work of the STC may have had a positive effect on student outcomes. This may still be the case. However, long-term systems change efforts are still in process and have not been fully implemented which could account for some of the fluctuation in the data. Additionally, the sample of respondents in this population changed significantly in 2025. Respondents with SLD typically show the highest rates of competitive employment. The decrease in employment outcomes for this student group paired with a lower representation of this group in this year's sample will effect the data negatively. In addition to the decrease in respondents with SLD, the survey showed an increase in respondents with intellectual disabilities, autism, and multiple disabilities which typically report being unengaged or under-engaged at higher rates. This shift in sample composition and the challenges in the job market may help explain some of the slippage in outcomes. The USBE and the STC are also making changes to the SSIP activities this year in response to this increase in un-engagement and under-engagement in the target group.

Table 1 below shows the target and actual data for SiMR for this reporting period. For 2023-2024, the SiMR was reported with a 40.65% target and 40.74% actual unengaged or under-engaged.

Year	2021– 2022	2022– 2023	2023- 2024	2024- 2025	2025- 2026
Target	45.65%	43.15%	40.65%	35.65%	25.65%
Actual	48.73%	41.18%	40.74%	52.29%	N/A

Table 1: Utah's SiMR Targets and Actual Data

SiMR Broad Improvement Strategies Evaluation Results

To achieve the identified systems changes, the USBE in coordination with the STC implemented the following activities (with their related outcomes) for each Improvement Strategy during this reporting period.

Strategy I: Comprehensive Supports for Youth and Families

The Annual Utah Institute on Postsecondary Transition

The annual TI hosted 365 participants from 40 LEA teams in June 2025. This is an improvement over 2024 that included 363 participants from 36 LEA teams. Thirty-

one LEA teams (77.5%) submitted plans to the USBE Postsecondary transition team for review. Team plan themes included increased career preparation/exploration, graduation rate, collaboration (e.g., vocational rehabilitation (VR); school counseling), college readiness, employment, Indicator 13 compliance, parent engagement, PSO Survey, Pre-ETS, self-determination/self-advocacy, and student-led IEPs. Support is provided to team leaders throughout the year through virtual community of practice sessions providing TA and support for postsecondary transition (PST) team plan implementation; PST-related topics relevant to the team plans; and networking/sharing successes and barriers in PST team planning. The 2025 Institute included a family track for the second year and a youth track for the first time.

The Supports for Youth and Families Workgroup (SYFW) analyzed previous years' feedback from the Institute for patterns that might inform better attendance from youth and families, how to attract new teams while keeping seasoned teams engaged, how to increase participation with CTE, and more effective team planning time. Themes were identified and shared with the Institute planning team for use in planning for 2026.

In response to our decrease in positive outcomes the TI will focus on supporting students with the most complex needs through the postsecondary transition process in 2026. There will also be a new structure to the event with more targeted family engagement. Utah will begin measuring and reporting the number of youth and families participating in the event during the next reporting period.

TRANSITION UNIVERSITY

Six youth with disabilities and 266 family members were trained using the Transition University curriculum between 7/1/24 and 6/30/25. This is a decrease over the last reporting period. The Utah Parent Center has also begun collecting knowledge gain data from their workshops. Only one workshop reported knowledge gain using pre/post measures this reporting period with an eight percentage point increase.

With stakeholder input from the STC, Utah has chosen to focus solely on increasing the number of youth (rather than youth and families) participating in Transition University moving forward.

PRE-ETS

During the 2024–25 school year, 39,291 transition-age youth were served in special education or had 504 Plans in place, making them potentially eligible for Pre-ETS services. From July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025, ~~14~~,541 (37.01%) students accessed Pre-ETS services.

Note: The percentage served continues to be an estimate because the number of potentially eligible students was based on the number of students who have a current IEP or 504 Plan. Therefore, the number of students served in Pre-ETS includes students who have current IEP and 504 Plans as well as students who are eligible for Pre-ETS with a medical diagnosis but do not have an IEP or 504 Plan. Those students who qualify for Pre-ETS without an IEP or 504 Plan could not reliably be excluded from the Pre-ETS data due to current data collection processes. So, the percentage of potentially eligible students receiving Pre-ETS services is likely slightly lower than reported, but this is the best comparison available with current data collection practices and remains consistent with the data collected and reported in the baseline year.

This activity is being removed from the SSIP after this reporting period because Utah met service targets and our VR partners feel they are in a stable place with referrals and Pre-ETS services.

TRANSITION ELEVATED APP UTILIZATION

A total of 2,014 students used the Transition Elevated planning app in the 2024-25 school year to help them prepare to participate in their postsecondary transition IEP. This is stable from the previous year of 2,020 students using the app.

PATTERNS OF CTE PARTICIPATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

In the baseline reporting period, the USBE postsecondary transition team analyzed four years of CTE enrollment data from the 2018 school year through the 2021 school year. Statistical means were established for CTE pathway completers (3.0 credits completed) and CTE pathway concentrators (1.5 credits completed) for students without disabilities and students with disabilities. This analysis was repeated annually. On average, students with disabilities were consistently less likely to concentrate in or complete a CTE pathway than general education students without disabilities. This disparity represents an underrepresentation of students with disabilities in CTE pathways in Utah overall. The same data was then analyzed

by LEA. Seven LEAs (five districts and two charter schools) were identified as exemplars for representation of students with disabilities in CTE pathways consistently over the four years examined. Twelve LEAs (six districts and six charter schools) were found to show consistent underrepresentation of students with disabilities in CTE pathways over the four years examined. The remaining LEAs showed mixed results resulting in average levels of representation.

Using this data, a study was designed to explore the practices of both the schools with consistent representation and those with underrepresentation of students with disabilities in CTE to identify patterns of practices that may inform TA and PL efforts to improve this outcome. This study was completed in the 2024-2025 school year. Three strategic opportunities were identified to improve representation of SWD in CTE in Utah: raise CTE awareness with students and educators, improving CTE access and inclusion through classroom supports and accommodations, and building capacity and collaboration through PL and data-driven decision making. The Utah Postsecondary Transition Team and the STC will begin working on TA documents and PL opportunities for educators to implement these strategies.

STRATEGY II: SMOOTH FLOW OF SERVICES

### IMPROVE DATA MATCH BETWEEN AGENCIES TO 100%

Current data sharing agreements and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between the USBE and other state agencies were reviewed. It was determined that a new data sharing agreement was needed between the USBE, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) to support improved collaboration between agencies in co-serving students with disabilities. A draft outline for the new agreement was produced by the Flow of Services Workgroup (a subcommittee of the STC) in the baseline year. The draft outline produced was reviewed by all participating agencies and it was determined that one broad data sharing agreement would not be able to meet all the desired purposes of the committee. Two types of documents were needed: an interagency MOU and specific local data sharing agreements for the purpose of sharing student-level data to enhance coordination while co-serving students. The STC Agency Collaboration Workgroup reviewed the MOU used by the State of Maryland and has drafted a similar MOU for Utah to include the DWS, the DHHS, and the USBE. This completed draft has been proposed to leadership of the three agencies for review and to begin the formal approval and execution process.

With input from the STC, the USBE has decided to change this activity away from data matching to improving interagency collaboration processes at the state and local levels. This will be measured by the creation of guidance documents for local level teams based on the final MOU, gathering baseline collaboration data based on the new guidance, and tracking this data for improvement over time.

MAP SERVICES AND ENGAGEMENT OVER TIME

Interviews with Indicator 14 respondents to examine service patterns over time for those who reported being engaged in meaningful post school activities and for those who reported being under-engaged or unengaged in meaningful post school activities were postponed allowing time for putting into place a more reliable means to contact possible interviewees and improve sample size for this exploration. A question asking for interest in an interview or focus group and requesting contact information for that purpose was added to the PSO survey. The USBE will collect this information for an additional survey year before performing student interviews/focus groups. The new sample group is intended to be 2023, 2024, and 2025 exiters who complete the survey in 2024, 2025, and 2026.

PORTRAIT OF SECONDARY TRANSITION

In the beginning stage of development for the POST for students with disabilities, a TA request was submitted to the National Technical Assistance Center for Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C) for support in this endeavor. An intensive TA agreement was in place during this reporting period to guide this partnership. Agencies participating in the STC identified the best flow of and timelines for services for their agencies to prepare for the POST. These services were then mapped onto Utah's Portrait of a Graduate competency framework across grade bands along with the Predictors of Postschool Success as the foundation for building the POST. A draft of the POST has been completed – identifying 11 categories of opportunities, experiences, and skills that SWDs need to meet the competencies listed in Utah's Portrait of a Graduate. The 11 categories have been operationally defined and mapped onto the Mastery, Autonomy, and Purpose themes in Portrait of a Graduate. The next steps include drafting the POST timeline by grade band for each of the 11 domains.

STRATEGY III: COORDINATION OF SERVICES

CREATE A SYSTEMATIC REFERRAL PROCESS

The STC Agency Collaboration Workgroup piloted the universal referral form with a few LEAs to use when referring students to services from other providers. This system-wide referral form was created to simplify the process for SWD, their families, and service providers as the first step in coming together as a statewide system of PST stakeholders. The feedback showed a need for implementing a referral process rather than a single form. We have discontinued the form and have begun creating a standardized referral process among participating agencies in line with the draft MOU.

CREATE A COMMON LANGUAGE AND VISION FOR POSTSECONDARY TRANSITION IN UTAH

A one-stop PST website for Utah launched in August 2024, www.utahtransitionelevated.org. The STC Agency Collaboration Workgroup acted as the stakeholder group to ensure content represented the statewide system of PST rather than one or two individual agencies. The website was updated this year to make it accessible and more user-friendly. The website is being promoted via individual outreach to LEAs, parent organizations, and public social media to ensure students, families, and educators are aware of this resource.

CONCLUSION

The strategies reported in this report support systems change as more stakeholders will understand the tenets of postsecondary transition and barriers to services are addressed through deliberate collaboration. These outcomes will continue to lead to SiMR achievement and support efforts to scale-up and create a sustainable long-term improvement effort. Discussions with Utah's stakeholders show the improvement activities currently being implemented along with the adjustments outlined above are appropriate to impact the SiMR and improve post school outcomes for students with disabilities as educators, students, and families get training and support in postsecondary transition planning and services and service providers work together to create a unified system of postsecondary transition in Utah.