

## **Technical Assistance System:**

**The mechanisms that the State has in place to ensure the timely delivery of high quality, evidence-based technical assistance and support to LEAs.**

### **The New Jersey Office of Special Education**

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), Office of Special Education (OSE) provides professional development, technical assistance, coaching opportunities, resources and instructional materials to families of students with disabilities and the educational professionals who serve them. Special Education Consultants, Specialists, and other staff from the NJDOE are based at four Learning Resource Centers strategically located in the Northern, Central, and Southern regions of the state to provide services to local school districts, service providers, and families. The NJDOE collaborates with organizations such as the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network, Rutgers University, and The College of New Jersey to provide training and technical assistance to LEAs.

### **An Integrated System of Support**

Technical Assistance from the OSE is designed to support the NJDOE's mission of supporting schools, educators, and districts to ensure all of New Jersey's 1.4 million students have equitable access to high quality education and academic excellence. The OSE initiatives are aligned with State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) priority areas and indicators. The New Jersey Office of Comprehensive Support (OCS) includes field support teams that provide direct, individualized support to persistently struggling schools identified as targeted or comprehensive in close alignment with program offices, county offices, and in accordance with the implementation of New Jersey's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan. OSE coordinates with OCS efforts, using data from school performance reports, walkthroughs, and annual school plans with a goal of reducing the achievement gap between general and special education students.

The OSE continues to promote the initiatives likely to improve overall achievement for students with disabilities including, but not limited to: Universal Design for Learning, Positive Behavioral Supports in Schools, New Jersey Tiered System of Supports (SPDG funding), the NJIP, the NJPIEP, and community-based instruction. OSE and the OCS seek to promote technical assistance and coaching strategies for districts and schools to increase capacity and sustainability of evidence-based interventions and best practices. Disproportionality and chronic absenteeism are both prominent concerns addressed through the collaboration of the OSE, OCS and the County Offices of the NJDOE under the ESSA state plan.

The OSE is within the NJDOE's Division of Educational Services. Other offices in the division coordinate the implementation of health (including mental health) services, interventions for struggling learners, services for Multilingual Learners, services for migrant and homeless students, school culture and climate; and grants under ESSA. The offices within this division take a collaborative and unified approach to technical assistance by designing technical assistance and professional development initiatives that address the needs of all student groups, including students with disabilities.

With a goal of gathering stakeholder input regarding professional development and technical assistance efforts, the OSE conducts monthly meetings with the State Special Education Advisory Council (NJ-SSEAC) which represents families, school districts and other entities that serve or advocate on behalf of people

with disabilities. The NJ-SSEAC discusses data from the APR and other sources and offers input regarding technical assistance and professional development initiatives.

Additionally, OSE collaborates with other divisions across the Department (i.e.: the Division of Field Support and Services and the Division of Early Childhood Services) to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities in all NJDOE initiatives. The Department, as noted in our ESSA state plan, has made a great effort to make sure that all stakeholders and all relevant staff from the Department are at the table in the planning phase of initiatives and projects to be assured the interests of students with disabilities are included at all stages of implementation.

### **A Tiered System of Differentiated Support**

When identifying technical assistance needs, data from the following sources are analyzed: the NJSMART system; the Student Safety Data System (SSDS); School Performance Reports, Annual SPP/APR data, and monitoring data.

The OSE has continued to provide a tiered technical assistance model designed to strategically assist schools and districts according to their level of need. Data are analyzed with input from other offices within the Department and the NJ-SSEAC to determine which districts and schools are targeted for assistance and the intensity of services needed.

**Level I – Topical Strategies, Resources, and Information** (Target group: All districts, schools, parents, and relevant stakeholders) The OSE makes available to educators and families information on new policies, regulations (state and federal) and effective practices through the OSE web site, documents disseminated through the weekly NJDOE broadcast and through one- or two-day training sessions. Resources relevant to students with disabilities, supporting parents of students with disabilities, mental health supports for students, families and educators, and links to other state agencies are continually posted and updated by OSE staff members. The following activities are examples of Level I Technical Assistance practices and strategies:

- Monthly meetings with the County Special Education Specialists were initiated ([see stakeholder attachment](#)) to respond to immediate needs of LEAs across the state. Virtual collaborative county information sessions were conducted to speak directly to Directors of Special Education to address the most frequently asked questions of the NJDOE County Offices.
- In August 2022, a Technical Assistance request form was released as part of the website migration. This form continues to be monitored weekly and establishes an opportunity for LEAs and schools to directly request support and professional development from the OSE. Requests are reviewed by a committee, referred to the appropriate TA provider, and documented to provide useful data to the OSE. Over the course of FY23, the OSE reported direct technical assistance to 40 LEAs across the state based on specific topic areas determined by the requesting party.
- The OSE continues to update and expand the resources available on the NJDOE OSE website, which includes over 46 landing pages with primary navigation tools that include webpages specific to policy and procedures, data and monitoring, parental engagement, programmatic supports and interventions, as well as professional development, technical assistance, and engagement opportunities. These resource pages maintain resources, guidance, and promising practices from the perspective of the district, the school, the professionals, the parents and the students. Those primary navigation tools also included the release of over two dozen tertiary support pages that include the IEP development toolkit, dispute resolution, transition toolkit, and more. Additionally, the OSE has continued to integrate website navigation training into

statewide training sessions and facilitated outreach to specific stakeholder groups, counties, and across-various agencies. (URL: <https://nj.gov/education/specialed/index.shtml>)

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the OSE discovered innovative ways to reach the universal population through establishing an eLearning platform. The specialists are actively curating prerecorded webinars, with closed captioning, that are released monthly for the public to access and learn at their leisure. (URL: <https://nj.gov/education/specialed/learningopportunities.shtml>) This platform will continue to expand in more engaging and innovative directions during FY24 as OSE seeks to contract with a Learning Management System (LMS) provider in the coming months.
- The OSE hosted the 2024 Summer Learning Institute with forty-one (41) training and professional development opportunities. A majority of the attendees (78-89%), rated the sessions “very informative” and “very useful”.
- The OSE is currently supporting five ongoing Communities of Practice with educators from around the state:
  - Community of Practice for Teachers and Professionals of Students with Autism
  - Community of Practice for Teachers & Professionals of Preschool Students with Disabilities
  - Statewide Work Group for Improving Transition Services for Students with Disabilities
  - Speech and Language Community of Practice
  - Community of Practice for Educators Who Work in Programs for 18-21 Year Olds
  - Community of Practice for Early Literacy Teachers and Coaches
  - Community of Practice for Leaders Supporting Special Education Programs and Services
  - Community of Practice for Teachers to Enhance Family Engagement and Family-School Partnerships
  - Community of Practice for Teachers to Enhance Strategies for Inclusive Instructional Practices Across Content Areas
  - Community of Practice for Leaders Preparing School to Implement Evidence-Based Practices
  - Community of Practice for Teachers Supporting Emotional and Behavioral Programs
- The CoPs sponsor events and regular meetings bringing diverse educators together in a working relationship around a common interest in and to share information and improve instructional practices. Additional CoPs are being proposed for next year on topics such as early literacy, data-based decision making and least restrictive environment practices.
- CoP opportunities also continue to be provided by NJDOE TA partners. The Community-based Instruction (CBI) project holds quarterly communities of practice along with the Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC), NJPBSIS, NJIP, and NJPIEP.
- The NJDOE continues to partner with the State Implementation and Scaling Up of Evidence Based Practices (SISEP) Center to learn and apply the framework of Implementation Science to address the needs of selected districts in the area of early literacy. The OSE has begun providing universal training in Implementation Science to educators and educational leaders.

**Level II – Moderate Intensity Interventions** (Target group: Priority and Focus Schools and Districts - identified based on data analysis) Districts or schools demonstrating a need for targeted support are given opportunities to participate in multi-day professional development with onsite coaching. During the COVID-19 pandemic, LRC consultants, OSE specialists, and contracted TA providers all pivoted to remote

delivery of Level II technical assistance. During FFY2023, in-person, remote, and hybrid options were available to districts.

**Level III – High Intensity Interventions –** (Target group: Districts with schools identified for comprehensive support and multiple schools for targeted intervention.) Districts or schools with pervasive and persistent difficulties are provided with more long-term and intensive support which includes training and onsite coaching. Level III TA was provided via videoconference and/or in-person.

In summary, technical assistance, through a system integrated with NJDOE initiatives, facilitates implementation of the practices, strategies, and interventions necessary for students with disabilities to achieve the goals established for all students. OSE collaborates and coordinates efforts with other offices within the Division of Educational Services, other divisions within the NJDOE, and other state agencies to facilitate positive school outcomes and post-school outcomes for all New Jersey students with disabilities.