

# Puerto Rico

## Monitoring and Support Visit Summary and Next Steps

March 14-17, 2017

**DMS Area: Results and SSIP**

**DMS Designation: Intensive**

**Background:**

On October 19, 2016 the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) issued Puerto Rico (PR) a Differentiated Monitoring and Support (DMS) notice that specified the monitoring and support activities that OSEP would conduct with the State across five areas: results, compliance, State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), correctional education, and fiscal. Under results, OSEP gave PR a designation of intensive engagement due to the percentage of children with disabilities that dropped-out and percentage of children with disabilities that graduated with a regular high school diploma based on PR’s FFY 2014 State Performance Plan /Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) data. The SSIP was also designated as an area for intensive engagement based on information specific to evidence-based practices and the evaluation plan included in the Phase II SSIP submitted to OSEP on April 1, 2016. Based on intensive designations in multiple areas, as well as recent changes in leadership within the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE), OSEP leadership determined that a site visit would be an effective engagement activity to support the efforts of PRDE’s special education program to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities.

**Visit Summary**

OSEP met with representatives of the Commonwealth to discuss PRDE’s activities to implement and evaluate the coherent improvement strategies outlined in the SSIP that are necessary for improving educational outcomes for children with disabilities.

**Data Reviewed**

During the on-site visit, OSEP reviewed PRDE’s draft of the SSIP Phase III, Year 1, submission, which was due on April 3, 2017. An OSEP staff member representing the Performance Accountability Implementation Team provided verbal and written feedback to PRDE. PRDE staff was given an opportunity to ask questions and provide clarifying information regarding its submission of Phase III of its SSIP. Phase III of the SSIP included updates on PR’s infrastructure, improvement activities, evidence-based practices specific to math proficiency, and a revised State-identified Measurable Result (SiMR).

**Topics Discussed:**

**Revisions to the State-identified Measurable Result (SiMR)**

PRDE has revised the SiMR based on several factors, including restructuring of school districts on the island and stakeholder input. The revised SiMR is: “To increase the percentage of special education [students] in 5<sup>th</sup> grade who score proficient or advanced on the regular assessment for math in the selected schools in Yubucoa School District.” The State’s revisions were logical and supported by district data and information gleaned from the implementation and evaluation of Phase II strategies. The revised SiMR, baseline and annual targets through FFY 2018 met the required measurement and instructions for indicator B-17 of the FFY 2015 SPP/APR.

**Evidence-Based Practices**

PRDE implemented a coaching model with contract service providers, Red de Apoyo Diferenciado (“RAD” by its acronym in Spanish), responsible for school transformation. RADs were assigned to work

with targeted schools within the Yabucoa district in the Humacao region where intervention strategies were implemented and data were collected to evaluate the impact on participating students' math proficiency. The Commonwealth was encouraged to provide additional information in its final SSIP submission, including the number of students receiving the intervention, the specific evidence-based practices or instructional techniques for which coaching was provided, as well as intermediate measures of progress toward the SiMR. The SSIP also included references to general instructional strategies and practices to be implemented throughout PRDE schools. For both general and math-specific evidence-based practices, PRDE was encouraged to explain how it will assess the use of practices as intended and the translation from knowledge to teaching behaviors in schools and classrooms by practitioners. Fidelity measures were not discussed in the draft SSIP and the Commonwealth was encouraged to elaborate on how fidelity data is collected and used to inform decision-making for SSIP strategies and activities. In addition, the SSIP indicated that the development of a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) was a long-term objective for PRDE and considered a state-wide evidence-based practice for PRDE. However, limited information was provided as to how the MTSS work aligns with the SSIP, including achievement of the SiMR or sustaining the use of selected evidence-based practices over time.

### **Evaluation Plan**

The SSIP included a revised logic model with evaluation questions and measures identified. There were multiple references in the logic model to professional development activities and learning communities for teachers and practitioners. The Commonwealth was encouraged to describe in greater detail how these are measured, how coaches were selected and supported for each evidence-base practice; and how often fidelity of implementation will be measured. The SSIP included multiple data sources to explain the progress of the Commonwealth implementing activities outlined in Phase II and their relationship to the SiMR. PR was encouraged to elaborate on how data was collected and analyzed (e.g. measures, number of respondents, statistical methods utilized) and how data informed decision-making specific to the SSIP.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

The SSIP included multiple references to stakeholder groups and their input into the SSIP's revisions from Phase II. The Commonwealth was encouraged to describe the mechanisms for dissemination of SSIP activities to different stakeholders, eliciting stakeholder input for decision-making and different stakeholder roles and responsibilities in the implementation and evaluation of the SSIP's activities throughout Phase III.

### **Challenges and Barriers**

Fiscal constraints and the economic needs of Puerto Rico are on-going barriers to implementing the SSIP's improvement strategies and sustaining efforts over time. Although the SSIP activities are specific to the Yabucoa school district, PR intends to eventually implement effective interventions across all school districts. If scale-up is to be achieved and sustained, PRDE will need to identify fiscal resources to fund intervention efforts and support their long-term use. PRDE also identified a culture of bureaucracy as a barrier to SSIP activities and identified streamlining processes and facilitating a service-oriented culture as a strategy to address this barrier.

### **Outcome of Engagement Activity**

OSEP provided PRDE input on its final SSIP submission, which was due on April 3, 2017.

### **Use of Technical Assistance and Professional Development Resources**

NCSI and IDEA Data Center (IDC) technical assistance providers work regularly with PRDE to refine implement and evaluate activities and strategies in the SSIP.

## Next Steps

OSEP and PR will continue to use regular TA calls to discuss resources for improving educational outcomes for children with disabilities and support PR's infrastructure improvement strategies and evidence-based practices implemented for the SSIP. In addition, OSEP will share TA resources and materials with PR that may be most helpful for improving graduation and drop-out rates for children with disabilities.

PRDE submitted its final SSIP on April 3, 2017. OSEP reviewed PRDE's submission and scheduled a call to discuss its feedback this summer. However, due to scheduling conflicts and the hurricane emergency, this call was indefinitely postponed. OSEP is prepared to reschedule the call when PRDE is available.