

# Leveraging General Supervision Systems to Improve Student Outcomes:

## A Process Guide for IDEA Part B



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# State systems of general supervision

This process guide is intended to help states and stakeholders consider ways to leverage their general supervision systems to improve outcomes for students with disabilities and their families while ensuring compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). States have adopted systems of general supervision<sup>1</sup> to oversee implementation of IDEA, which requires states to ensure that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

According to *Developing and Implementing an Effective System of General Supervision: Part B*, a technical assistance document developed collaboratively by

multiple technical assistance centers, state organizations, OSEP, and other stakeholders,<sup>2</sup> there are eight components of a state's general supervision system:

1. State Performance Plan
2. Policies, Procedures, and Effective Practices
3. Effective Dispute Resolution
4. Data on Processes and Results
5. Integrated Monitoring Activities
6. Targeted Technical Assistance and Professional Development
7. Improvement, Correction, Incentives, and Sanctions
8. Fiscal Management and Accountability

At its core, a general supervision system consists of the mechanisms by which states ensure that students with disabilities are provided FAPE by their local schools and districts. However, while these general supervision systems have enabled states to report high rates of compliance with IDEA requirements for a number of years, many states have not reported improvement in actual student outcomes, including academic achievement, graduation rates, and post-school outcomes.



# Results-driven accountability

## **On June 24, 2014, a U.S. Department of Education**

press release announced “a major shift in the way it oversees the effectiveness of states’ special education programs to improve the educational outcomes of America’s 6.5 million children and youth with disabilities.”<sup>3</sup> The press release explained:

**“Until now, the Department’s primary focus was to determine whether states were meeting procedural requirements such as timelines for evaluations, due process hearings and transitioning children into preschool services. While these compliance indicators remain important to children and families, under the new framework known as Results-Driven Accountability (RDA), the Department will also include educational results and outcomes for students with disabilities in making each state’s annual determination under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).”**

The announcement also highlighted that “IDEA requires the primary focus of federal and state monitoring to be on improving educational results and functional outcomes for all children with disabilities and ensuring that each state meets the program requirements under IDEA” and that the law “places an emphasis on those requirements that are the most closely related to improving educational and early intervention results for children with disabilities.”

Many states have made or are making changes to their systems of general supervision in an effort to focus energy, resources, and attention on the goal of improving outcomes for students with disabilities in addition to ensuring compliance with IDEA. Additionally, states are looking to make those changes in order to align work with other results-driven initiatives required by federal and state programs.

This guide is intended to help states and stakeholders with shifting to more of an outcomes focus by leveraging their general supervision systems to improve outcomes for students with disabilities while ensuring compliance with IDEA.

To guide states in focusing more on educational results and functional outcomes while continuing to ensure compliance, OSEP has:

- Added the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) to the State Performance Plan (SPP),
- Implemented a Differentiated Monitoring System (DMS), and
- Used SPP results indicators as a factor in state educational agency determinations

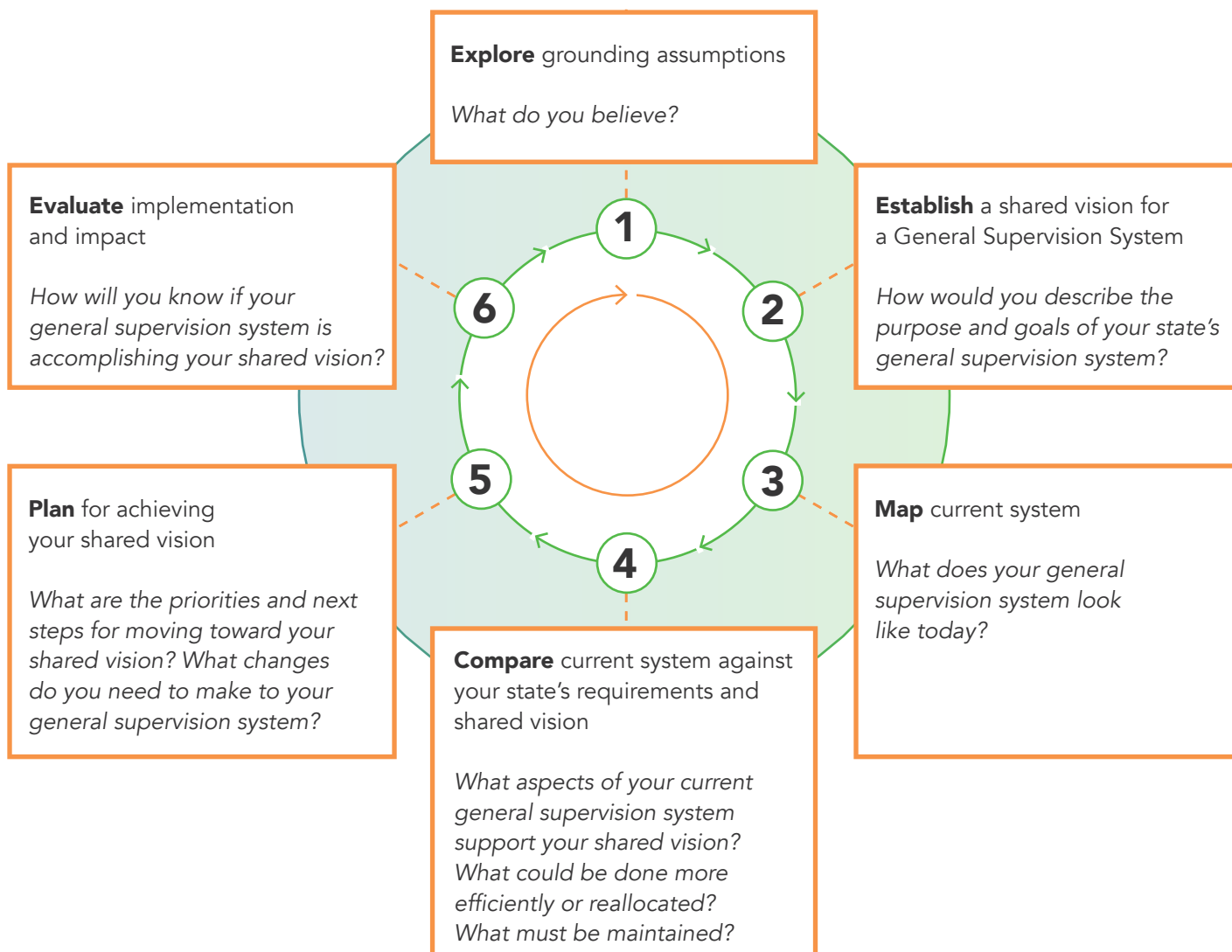


# How to use this guide

**The guide includes six steps designed to structure reflection and dialogue among state staff** who are responsible for general supervision and with stakeholders, both those who work within the state educational agency as well as external stakeholders. The guide is meant to be used by a group who uses the guiding questions to reflect on the state's general supervision system and consider potential

changes to the system. Guiding questions focus on the goals of the state's general supervision system (including improved results and compliance), the extent to which the current system (i.e., policies, procedures, practices, and behaviors) supports those goals, and where changes can be made to further align the general supervision system with those goals. The guide also encourages discussion around how to evaluate changes made to a general supervision system.

The six steps are presented in sequence; however, you may find that moving among the steps in a different order works more efficiently for your organization. As the work evolves, you may also find that you want to return to some steps or aspects of them to add or change details.



# 1. Explore grounding assumptions

*What do you believe?*



Consider who should participate in a conversation about the state's general supervision system. Which stakeholders and what perspectives would be valuable to include? Gather those stakeholders to discuss the questions in this guide.

To provide context for reflecting on and considering adjustments to your state's general supervision system, please examine the state's and each participant's grounding assumptions about each of the following:

- What are your ultimate goal(s) for students with disabilities?
- What language best describes those goals (e.g., "improving results," "outcomes," or perhaps something else)?

- What are the roles and responsibilities of the state educational agency (SEA) in implementing a system of general supervision that provides an infrastructure for achieving those goals?
- How does compliance leverage results?
- Why might more action, work, or change be needed?

What grounding assumptions can the group agree on?

## 2. Establish a shared vision for a general supervision system

*How would you describe the purpose and goals of your state's general supervision system?*



- Review the grounding assumptions discussed in Step 1.
- Synthesize the grounding assumptions into a statement(s) that captures the state's shared vision for the purpose and goals of its general supervision system.



### 3. Map current system

*What does your general supervision system look like today?*

# 3

Describe all aspects of your state's current general supervision system. Consider the eight components of State Systems of General Supervision (State Performance Plan; Policies, Procedures, and Effective Practices; Effective Dispute Resolution; Data on Processes and Results; Integrated Monitoring Activities; Targeted Technical Assistance and Professional Development; Improvement, Correction, Incentives, and Sanctions; Fiscal Management and Accountability) as well as the following:

- Local educational agency (LEA) determinations process and criteria.
- State educational agency staffing structure, staff members, roles/responsibilities.
- Annual calendar of general supervision and monitoring activities.

For each component of the general supervision system, describe:

- What happens, when it happens, and what resources are used (inputs).
- The data generated (if any) by the component and the quality of those data (outputs).
- The component's connection to each of the other general supervision components.
- Written policy or procedures about the component.



## 4. Evaluate current system against your state's requirements and shared vision

*What aspects of your current general supervision system support your shared vision?*

*What could be done more efficiently or reallocated?*

*What must be maintained?*



**For all of the components and within each component mapped in Step 3, consider:**

- How is it connected to the shared vision as defined in Step 2?
    - Which has the greatest and least relationship to the state's shared vision for the purposes and goals of its general supervision system.
  - What is the value of the component to the state?
  - What is the essential work?
    - What must be done to meet the requirements of IDEA, state regulations, etc.?
    - Why must this work be done?
  - Does the component align with current state capacities?
- Are resources allocated to achieve the outcomes of your shared vision?
    - Are there resources that could be leveraged differently in light of the shared vision?
    - What resources are needed to maintain essential work?
  - Is there a better way to accomplish what is necessary than how it is done now?
    - Does the benefit match the effort?
    - Are there activities that could be repurposed? Be done more efficiently? Be differentiated?
    - Is there someone else or some other entity — internal or external to the SEA — that could or should accomplish the necessary work? What role could LEAs play?
  - What data are we getting from or about this component?



## 5. Plan for achieving your shared vision

*What are the priorities and next steps for moving toward your shared vision? What changes do you need to make to your general supervision system system?*

# 5

Based on Steps 3 and 4, what is needed to move from the current system to a system that achieves the shared vision generated in Step 2? Consider the following when developing an action plan that includes meaningful, manageable, and measurable steps, timelines, and resources:

- To what extent does the system currently monitor for results, and how can it better reflect the elements of RDA?<sup>4</sup>
- Who else in the SEA is doing similar results-focused work? How can collaboration increase the impact of results-focused work?
- How are internal and external stakeholders going to be leveraged to support this work?
- Is there political will for this work? Do state- and local-level administrators support this work? If not, how can support be increased by relating this work to administrators' existing priorities?
- How can the system stay nimble enough to respond to emerging issues or unanticipated requirements?
- What is the rollout plan for any changes? How will changes be promoted?

## 6. Evaluate implementation and impact

*How will you know if your general supervision system is accomplishing your shared vision?*

# 6

- How will the state evaluate its general supervision system, or the changes made? Should there be different levels of evaluation?
- What data or measures will indicate that the system is improving results? What will indicate that it is ensuring compliance with IDEA?
- How and when will the state collect impact data? Are there interim measures or benchmarks that should be used?
- How and when will the state conduct the evaluation?
- How will data from your evaluation inform your continuous improvement process?

**The National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI)** created this guide and has technical assistance facilitators available to assist states in using this guide. NCSI facilitators can provide planning and facilitation support, documenting the conversations and decisions made around each step, and can help with implementing and evaluating any agreed-upon systems changes.

Please visit <https://ncsi-resources.wested.org> to find the NCSI technical assistance facilitator for your state.

## Endnotes:

- 1 20 USC 1412: §612 “In order to qualify for assistance under this part in any fiscal year, a State shall demonstrate to the Commissioner that the following conditions are met:… (6) The State educational agency shall be responsible for assuring that the requirements of this part are carried out and that all educational programs for handicapped children within the State, including all such programs administered by any other State or local agency, will be under the **general supervision** of the persons responsible for educational programs for handicapped children in the State educational agency and shall meet education standards of the State educational agency” (emphasis added, 1975, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-89/pdf/STATUTE-89-Pg773.pdf>).
  - 2 National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring. (2007). *Developing and Implementing an Effective System of General Supervision: Part B*. New Orleans, LA: Author. Retrieved from [https://www.hdc.lsuhs.edu/tiers/resources/Effective%20General%20Supervision%20Paper\\_Part%20B.pdf](https://www.hdc.lsuhs.edu/tiers/resources/Effective%20General%20Supervision%20Paper_Part%20B.pdf). The paper was prepared in collaboration with the six regional resource centers, OSEP, the Federal Regional Resource Center, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, and representatives from state agencies, the National Association of Directors of Special Education, and the IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association.
  - 3 The press release is available at <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/new-accountability-framework-raises-bar-state-special-education-programs>.
  - 4 Thompson, A. L. (2015, November). *Ten desired elements of monitoring for results*. Guidance Session III at the Results-Based Accountability Cross State Learning Collaborative, Houston, TX.
- Part B, Subpart B, §300.149
- (a) The SEA is responsible for ensuring—
- (1) That the requirements of this part are carried out; and
  - (2) That each educational program for children with disabilities administered within the State, including each program administered by any other State or local agency (but not including elementary schools and secondary schools for Indian children operated or funded by the Secretary of the Interior)—
- (i) Is under the **general supervision** of the persons responsible for educational programs for children with disabilities in the SEA; and
- (ii) Meets the educational standards of the SEA (including the requirements of this part).
- (emphasis added, 2005, <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/b/300.149>).