

# **Alabama State Department of Education's State Personnel Development Grant**

**“Alabama Literacy Interventions  
and Support for Transition”  
(AL L.I.S.T.)**

**CFDA #: 84.323A**



**July 22, 2022**

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Superintendent of Education  
Alabama State Department of Education**

## Alabama State Personnel Development Grant Proposal Summary

In response to a request for proposals from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the U.S. Department of Education, the Alabama State Department of Education Special Education Services (ALSDE-SES) is submitting a proposal to provide professional learning on reading as applied to a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) in AL-MTSS schools, improve the reading achievement of students in grades 4-8, and expand transition services for toddlers and elementary, middle, and high school students. The proposed work is a collaboration with the ALSDE Division of Support Services (AL-MTSS), the Part C program at the Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS), the Alabama Parent Education Center (APEC), and Auburn University.

SPDG funding is designed to support professional learning to improve results for students with disabilities. Specifically, proposed SPDG professional learning activities are designed to improve instruction and supports for students with disabilities so they will be prepared for each level of education. The two AL SPDG goals are:

Goal 1: To increase reading achievement results for students with disabilities in grades 4-8 through professional learning on implementing MTSS supports to teachers and leaders in selected AL-MTSS cohort districts and schools.

Goal 2: To improve Part C to Part B, elementary, middle school, and high school transition outcomes for toddlers and students with disabilities through training, coaching, and resources for early intervention providers, teachers, administrators, and families of students with disabilities.

For Goal 1, the SPDG will partner with AL-MTSS to provide training, coaching, and supports for educators around the application of reading in an MTSS framework. Three cohorts of at least five districts will be selected over the five-year period to achieve Goal 1 outcomes through intensive reading supports for students in the middle grades. For Goal 2, the SPDG will offer professional learning to improve transitions from each education level. In addition to the collaborative partnership with the Part C program and the University of Alabama to work with families of infants and toddlers with disabilities, the goal will also address early secondary transition planning at the elementary level. Three cohorts of at least nine middle and high schools will be selected to improve transition programming within their schools.

For all initiatives, data analysis and reporting will inform and improve services. Expected outcomes include:

- Greater collaboration among partners and families supporting instruction and transition services for students with disabilities.
- Improved capacity among teachers to provide high-quality reading instruction.
- Greater implementation of reading supports for students using an MTSS framework.
- Increased reading achievement for students with disabilities in grades 4-8.
- Enhanced Part C supports for families to better prepare them for Part C to B transitions.
- Improved capacity among teachers and leaders to implement secondary transition services.
- Higher participation rates among students with disabilities in their IEP meetings.
- Improved post-school outcomes for students with disabilities in cohort districts.

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## LIST OF PRIORITY REQUIREMENTS

| PAGE #   | REQUIREMENTS  |
|--|---|
| <b>Absolute Priority 1</b>   |   |
| 1-2; 8; 13; 16-21;<br>23; 26-31; 37-38   | Use evidence-based (as defined in this notice) professional development practices that will increase implementation of evidence-based practices and result in improved outcomes for children with disabilities.   |
| 8-10; 13; 18-21;<br>23-25; 26-31; 35   | Provide ongoing assistance to personnel receiving SPDG-supported PD that supports the implementation of evidence-based practices with fidelity (as defined in this notice).   |
| 2; 9; 16; 19; 22;<br>24; 44-45   | Use technology to more efficiently and effectively provide ongoing PD to personnel, including to personnel in rural areas and to other populations, such as personnel in urban or high-need local educational agencies (LEAs) (as defined in this notice).                |
| <b>Absolute Priority 2</b>   |   |
| 2-8; 16-21; 26-31;<br>33-35; 65  | State Personnel Development Plan that identifies and addresses the state and local needs for the personnel preparation and professional development of personnel as well as individuals who provide direct supplementary aids and services to children with disabilities. |
| 2; 12; 35-37; 39;<br>45-47; 52-53;<br>Letters of Support                                   | Establishes a partnership with LEAs and other state agencies involved in, or concerned with, the education of children with disabilities.   |
| 35-37; 38-40; 52-53;<br>Letters of Support   | Works in partnership with other persons and organizations involved in, and concerned with, the education of children with disabilities.   |
| <b>Competitive Preference Priority</b>   |   |
| 2; 14; 23-24; 32;<br>34-37; 46; 49; 52;<br>Budget; Budget Narrative;<br>Letters of Support |   |
| 40-41  | (a) Projects funded under this notice must make positive efforts to employ and advance in employment qualified individuals with disabilities in project activities.   |
| 3; 5; 7; 18; 21;<br>24-25; 27-28; 30;  | (b) Applicants and grant recipients funded under this notice must involve individuals with disabilities or parents of individuals with disabilities ages  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 46; 52-53; 58-64  | birth through 26 in planning, implementing, and evaluating the projects.  |
| 44-45; GEPA statement (Form 427)                                  | (c) Applicants must describe steps to ensure equitable access to, and participation in, its program for students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries with special needs. (See Section 427, GEPA)   |
| Budget; Budget Narrative  | (d) Projects funded under these priorities must budget for a three-day Project's Directors' meeting in Washington, D.C. during each year of the project.  |
|   | The applicant must budget \$4,000 annually for support of the State Personnel Develop Grants Program Website ( <a href="http://www.signetwork.org">www.signetwork.org</a> ).  |
| 44-45; GEPA statement (Form 427)                                  | If a project receiving assistance under this program authority maintains a website, the applicant must describe how they will include relevant information and documents in a form that meets a government or industry-recognized standard for accessibility. |
| 36-37; 46-47; 52-53; Budget; Budget Narrative; Letters of Support | Must award contracts or subgrants to LEAs, institutions of higher education, parent training and information centers, or community parent resource centers, as appropriate to carry out the State Personnel Development Plan.                                 |
| 49; Budget; Budget Narrative                                      | An SEA that receives a grant under this program must use not less than 90 percent of the funds the SEA receives under the grant for any fiscal year for the Professional Development Activities.  |

## **I: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT**

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In response to a request for proposals from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the U.S. Department of Education, the Alabama State Department of Education Special Education Services (ALSDE-SES) is submitting a proposal to provide professional learning (PL) on 1) Reading in a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, and 2) Preparation for Part C to Part B transition and secondary transition from elementary through high school. The ALSDE-SES seeks to improve the reading achievement of students in grades 4-8 and expand and improve transition services for toddlers and elementary, middle, and high school students.

The proposed work is a collaboration within the ALSDE, particularly with the ALSDE Instructional Services Section, Alabama Multi-Tiered System of Supports (AL-MTSS), and Career and Technical Education. Other key collaborators include the Alabama Early Intervention System (Part C) program at the Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS); Alabama Parent Education Center (APEC) [Alabama's Parent, Training, and Information (PTI) Center]; Local Education Agencies (LEAs); and Auburn University. The project partners with several national centers to provide the most current evidence-based practices for Alabama educators, early intervention (EI) providers, and families of students with disabilities.

As required by Absolute Priority 1, the Alabama State Personnel Development Grant (ALSPDG) proposal emphasizes the use of evidence-based professional learning. To meet this priority, the project includes two goals:

- Goal 1 strives to improve reading achievement among students with disabilities in grades 4-8 through professional learning on reading in an MTSS framework.
- Goal 2 aims to improve Part C to Part B, elementary, middle school, and high school transition outcomes through professional learning on transition and supports to families.

Data, including fidelity of implementation, student outcome, and other evaluation data will be collected to inform program improvement. Technology is integrated through virtual training, coaching, website, and data tracking systems to ensure equitable access to professional learning.

The proposed AL SPDG meets Priority 2 through its linkages to the state's Every Student Succeeds Act plan, State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), State Performance Plan, and Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR), and Alabama Achieves 2020 strategic plan. Additionally, the proposal considers the 2019 Alabama Literacy Act affecting kindergarten through third-grade reading achievement and promotion, as well as the AL-MTSS initiative, starting in districts in 2022.

The proposed project is **consistent with the criteria for the Competitive Preference Priority** through its second goal, which addresses Alabama's use of Routines-Based Model (RBM), a component of the state's Part C Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) Plan. The evidence-based RBM is embedded in two of the state's three CSPD components: Family Involvement and Personnel Development. Through training and coaching to early-intervention providers in coordination with AL's Part C and the University of Alabama, families will have better preparation and planning as they transition into Part B services.

**A. The extent to which specific gaps or weaknesses in services, infrastructure, or opportunities have been identified and will be addressed by the proposed project, including the nature and magnitude of those gaps or weaknesses. [Sig. (i)]**

Proposed Goal 1 activities, to address reading in an MTSS framework, is new for the AL SPDG. Beginning in 2019, the ALSDE, in collaboration with the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI), created a state-level MTSS framework. Although COVID-19 initially affected the state's ability to implement the framework, a pilot of five districts began

implementing the framework in 2021. The AL-MTSS initiative has selected 21 districts for Cohort 1 beginning in 2022-2023, and while the initiative has trainers and coaches to support the initial development of an MTSS framework in schools and behavior and social-emotional supports, there is a need for more intensive training and coaching for academic supports, particularly reading. While the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) focuses on providing reading supports for kindergarten through third-grade teachers, there is a gap in the middle grades, where students with disabilities are often receiving more intensive Tier III intervention supports. Through the proposed AL SPDG, trainers and coaches will provide professional learning on reading interventions and strategies using an MTSS framework, focusing on grades 4-8.

The transition supports in the proposed Goal 2 expands on the state's 2017 SPDG project. The current SPDG includes a goal focusing on secondary transition preparation. Through this work, the project assisted 46 schools in 22 districts, and within those schools, 84% of teachers were able to implement an evidence-based transition curriculum with fidelity. Participating project schools also improved both graduation rates among students with disabilities to 66%, increased parents' capacity to support transition, and improved Indicator 14b post-school outcomes in participating districts by 9%. Although the transition activities have been successful and laid the foundation for the current proposal, the state recognizes the need to expand the work, including transition services for younger students with disabilities.

When identifying the needs for the AL SPDG objectives, the ALSDE-SES considered state and federal plans; various data, and feedback from stakeholders, including a series of family focus groups; project participants; and partner input. Through its examination of its gaps and weaknesses in services, the ALSDE-SES identified five primary needs: 1) Reading achievement; 2) Early and comprehensive transition supports; 3) Post-school outcomes; 4) Family



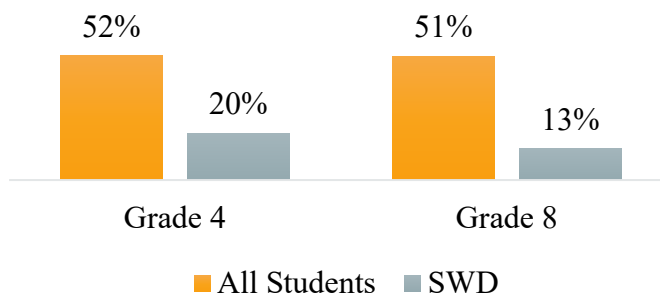
engagement; and 5) Structures to align, support, and sustain implementation.

**Reading Achievement.** Due to the 2019 Alabama Literacy Act requiring students to read on grade level by the end of third grade or risk grade retention, there has been an urgent need to address early reading. While ARI is providing support for K-3 reading, there is a gap for those students who cannot read on grade level after third grade and need more intensive interventions, particularly for students with disabilities. In 2022, 22% of AL third graders (11,725 students) were not reading on grade level.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the average 2019 reading score for Alabama fourth-grade students was lower than those in 45 other states or jurisdictions, and only 29% were NAEP “proficient” or “advanced” (Institute of Education Sciences, 2020). By eighth grade, only 24% were NAEP “proficient” or “advanced,” and reading scores trended downward between 2017 and 2019.

English/Language Arts (ELA) data from the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP), the state assessment, confirmed the NAEP results. As seen in Figure 1, ELA proficiency in fourth grade for all students was 52% in 2021, and 20%

**Fig. 1: 2021 ELA Proficiency by Grade**



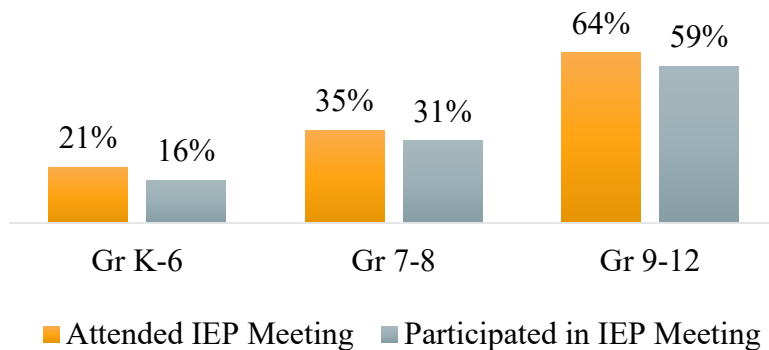
for students with disabilities (32% lower). While the proficiency data for “all” students fluctuated by grade, the proficiency data for students with disabilities trended downward. By eighth grade, 51% of all students were proficient on the ACAP’s ELA assessment, whereas only 13% of students with disabilities were, representing a 38% gap. The overall low scores of both

groups demonstrate a need to provide intensive and preventative reading supports in the middle grades, which will be accomplished through Goal 1. Evidence-based reading interventions, specially designed instruction (SDI), and progress monitoring, including data-based individualization (DBI) at Tier III, will support students with disabilities.

**Transition Preparation.** ALSDE data support a need to concentrate efforts on better preparing students with disabilities to transition from school to adult life. Data from 2021 ALSDE-SES Transition Family Focus Groups suggest early transition planning is one strategy to improve transition services. Furthermore, only 61% of families of students with disabilities were satisfied with the transition services their children had received, suggesting more efforts are needed to improve overall transition programming and services.

One strategy for improving transition outcomes is student-focused planning, including student participation in IEP meetings (Test, Fowler, White, Richter, & Walker, 2009).

**Fig. 2: Participated in IEP Meetings (2021)**



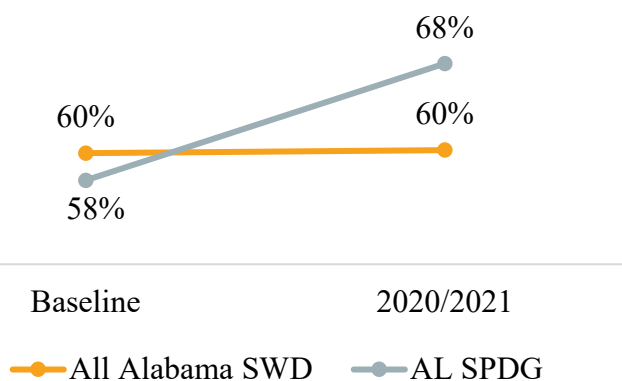
Active participation in the IEP meeting fosters self-determination and has been shown to improve academic achievement (Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger, 2010). However, 28% of AL parents reported their child participated in his or her IEP meeting during the 2020-2021 school year (SPP/APR Indicator 8 AL Parent Survey, 2021). While most students who attend their IEP meetings participated in the meeting (Figure 2), the overall participation percentages range between 16% in kindergarten through sixth grade to 59% in grades nine through 12. The proposed SPDG will specifically

address IEP participation in the larger context of student-focused planning.

Another transition measure, college and career readiness (CCR), suggests more work is needed to improve post-school readiness for students with disabilities. ALSDE Report Card data from 2020-2021 reported the CCR rating for students with disabilities was 41%, which was 35% lower than “all” students. Through the proposed AL SPDG Goal 2, training will be provided to educators and families on post-school education and employment for students with disabilities.

**Post-School Outcomes.** The AL State Identified Measurable Result (SiMR) for the state’s SSIP is SPP/APR Indicator 14b, or enrollment in college or competitive employment. Therefore, the ALSDE-SES aims to improve the Indicator 14b results. While the Indicator 14b results in 2022 were 64.75%, meeting the state’s 63.78% target, AL had not met its target the prior year (60.29%). While a focus on intensive reading supports in an MTSS framework for grades 4-8 (Goal 1) should impact Indicator 14b results in several years, the secondary transition supports (Goal 2) are expected to impact college enrollment and competitive employment.

**Fig. 3: Indicator 14b for AL vs. AL SPDG**



While Goal 2 is an expansion of the 2017 SPDG, data from the state’s prior activities with transition cohort districts and schools has been shown to positively improve Indicator 14b results. As seen in Figure 3, while Indicator 14b baseline data for the

state remained 60% between baseline (2016-2017 and 2017-2018), in the same timeframe, districts participating in the AL SPDG increased by 10%. These data suggest the transition curriculum, services, and programming in the AL SPDG may have impacted college enrollment

and competitive employment. In the proposed AL SPDG, these services will be expanded in high schools and more concentrated efforts will be offered at earlier educational levels.

**Family Engagement.** One of the most effective means of increasing the chances of academic success is to engage families in their children’s education. The AL SPP/APR Indicator 8 (Parent Involvement) data support a need for more parent and family engagement. Data reported in 2022 showed 72.29% of parents reported involvement, which was 4.7% below the state target. In addition, the survey questions with the lowest average ratings pertained to parent training and information sent from schools to parents (both 74%).

According to the 2021 AL Transition Resources Survey, less than two-thirds of respondents (62%) were satisfied with the communication from his or her child’s school or district regarding transition. Additionally, participants in the Transition Family Focus Groups expressed they had to seek out transition resources on their own and lead the transition process themselves, rather than having school personnel seeking to engage them. Both parent training and information will be addressed through Goals 1 and 2.

**Structures to Align, Support, and Sustain Implementation.** The demographics of AL indicate significant educational and economic needs as a state, although the needs vary greatly by region, county, and district. The variability in outcomes suggest a need to adapt interventions to fit the contextual needs of schools. Developing District and School Implementation Teams (DITs/SITs) and Transition Teams will assist with meeting the contextual needs of individual districts. Furthermore, district and school leaders must be able to support implementation of evidence-based practices in classrooms; however, leaders need professional learning regarding how to support these practices. These concerns will be addressed through both goals.

The AL SPDG will be aligned with state-driven initiatives and departments, including the

AL-MTSS, and the work of Career and Technical Education and the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS), who oversees both Part C and Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Furthermore, although the AL Literacy Act has resulted in more reading efforts in grades K-3, for struggling readers in grades four and higher, additional supports are needed. Work within the context will help ensure the needs of the state are met and aligned.

**B. The extent to which the training or professional development services to be provided by the proposed project are of sufficient quality, intensity, and duration to lead to improvements in practice among the recipients of those services. [Sig. (ii)]**

Through the proposed SPDG, the ALSDE-SES will provide professional learning (training, coaching, resources, other supports) on: 1) Reading interventions, particularly Tier II and Tier III supports, within an MTSS framework and the structures to maintain those supports; 2) Early intervention transition, and elementary, middle, and high school secondary transition services and programming. The use of implementation science in the development of these goals will increase the likelihood of fidelity (Fixsen, Van Dyke, & Blasé, 2019).

ALSDE-SES staff have taken steps to ensure the content and delivery of professional learning are of high quality. Through its use of OSEP Technical Assistance and Dissemination Centers trainers and resources (MTSS Center, National Technical Assistance Center for Transition, IRIS Center), the AL SPDG will include high-quality and current practices to project participants. SPDG Coaches have had training on coaching, leadership, implementation science, and content, and they bring an average of approximately 31 years of experience in teaching, leading, and coaching districts and schools.

The AL SPDG proposal is framed in terms of implementation science, including the implementation stages and drivers. Using this model ensures quality indicators will be addressed

through each implementation cycle. Moreover, the project’s professional learning activities will be developed and delivered using principles of adult learning. More information about the quality of professional learning can be found in Section D below.

When determining the intensity of the proposed AL SPDG, the team reviewed the IDEA Data Center (IDC) Rubric to identify factors for intensive, high-quality assistance to districts and schools, including methods of delivery, frequency of contacts, and intensity over time. In both Goal 1 and 2, educators and families will have multiple methods of assistance, including training, coaching, resource dissemination, a SPDG website, team supports, and peer-to-peer learning. Professional learning and supports will occur both in-person and virtually.

The project includes four coordinators (SPDG MTSS, Transition, Professional Learning, and Coaching Coordinators) for 1.65 FTE, an Implementation Specialist (0.5 FTE), and nine SPDG Coaches (approximately 4.2 FTE). Districts, schools, and families will be offered 11 training events per year for Goal 1 and nine events, plus seven modules for EI providers, for Goal 2. While the number of coaching contacts will vary depending on the needs of the schools and teachers, SPDG Coaches will provide at least 48 coaching contacts per year. It should be noted in the past year, SPDG Coaches averaged 62 contacts per school.

Supports to districts and schools will be delivered through the selection of three cohorts. An overview of the professional learning duration for cohort districts and schools for both Goal 1 and Goal 2 is listed in Table 1. From current SPDG data, the ALSDE-SES has found implementation within districts and schools requires lengthy and sustained supports. The proposed SPDG framework includes supports for each district and school for up to three years, which will allow adequate time for the project to establish District and School Implementation Teams (DITs/SITs) or Transition Teams, ensure buy-in from staff, receive training and coaching,

review data and MTSS or transition plans, and adjust activities based on data.

**Table 1: Duration of SPDG Professional Learning for Cohort Districts and Schools**

|                               |                | 2023 | 2024           | 2025                | 2026                | 2027                |
|-------------------------------|----------------|------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Goal 1 &amp; 2 Cohorts</b> | Cohort 1 Yr. 1 |      | Cohort 1 Yr. 2 | Cohort 1<br>Sustain |                     |                     |
|                               |                |      | Cohort 2 Yr. 1 | Cohort 2 Yr. 2      | Cohort 2<br>Sustain |                     |
|                               |                |      |                | Cohort 3 Yr. 1      | Cohort 3 Yr. 2      | Cohort 3<br>Sustain |

For both Goals 1 and 2, staff in cohort districts and schools will participate in training during the first two years, as detailed in the Project Design section. During the third year of implementation, districts will move into a sustainability phase, where refresher trainings will occur as needed and SPDG Coaches will use general release strategies. For Cohort 3, who will continue receiving supports through 2027, state discretionary funds will be used as needed to support the full three years of implementation.

**C. The likelihood that the proposed project will result in system change or improvement.**

**[Sig. (iii)]**

The AL SPDG will offer professional development on implementing an MTSS framework, focusing on supporting high-quality reading instruction, particularly for students requiring evidence-based interventions and more intensive (Tier III) supports. The SPDG will also expand the work of its 2017 SPDG transition initiative to focus on early transition planning, beginning from Part C to B transition, and instruction, programs, and teams to support secondary transition services. These initiatives will be supported through strong and active collaboration with

partners, the integration within other state initiatives, and the use of evidence-based models and practices.

### Past Performance with Initiatives

While the MTSS initiative is new for the SPDG, the ALSDE-SES implemented secondary transition supports primarily at the high school level through its 2017 SPDG. Over the past four years, the project has experienced numerous successful outcomes. In 2022, 93% of project participants reported their transition programs were stronger as a result of the SPDG. In fact, Team Functioning Scale results showed 84% of Transition Teams were fully functioning after two years, 93% of teachers had greater capacity to implement a transition curriculum, and 91% reported students had better outcomes. In cohort schools, graduation rates were 16% higher and Indicator 14b results were 10% higher in cohort districts, compared to baseline.

The state's current transition work through its SPDG has made an impact on individual students. In one district with few work opportunities and where 96% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, an AL SPDG Coach began working with teachers and district staff to develop the district's first Transition Team. The Coach encouraged the Team to invite community and business leaders to meetings. The owner of a local candy manufacturer attended a Transition Team meeting, learned about the needs of employing students with disabilities, and contacted the district to offer community-based employment opportunities. One student, who is on Alabama's Essentials Pathway for graduation, began working at the company and demonstrated his reliability and willingness to try new tasks. On breaks, a supervisor helped him with studying math, and by the end of the semester, the student made the Honor Roll. After graduation, the company offered the student a permanent position.

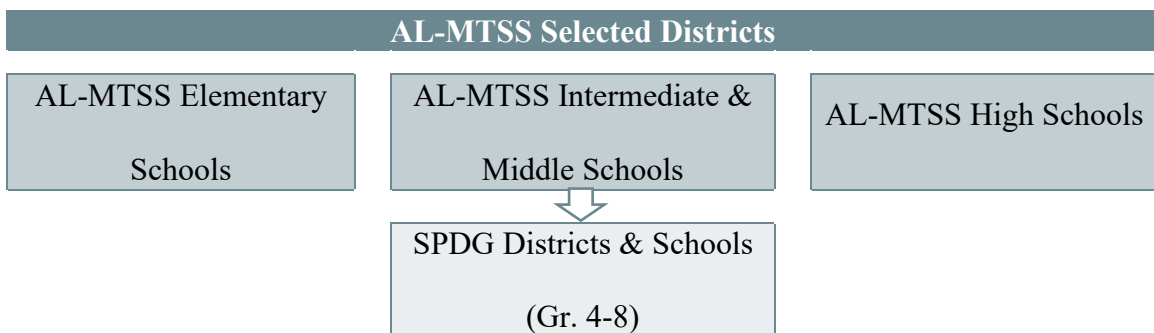
While this story is only one example, AL has established its model to develop transition



programming has worked. By expanding the transition work to middle schools (MS) and increasing supports in early intervention services and elementary schools, the ALSDE-SES seeks to increase educator and family capacity to plan for transition at each level.

Working Within State Structures

Embedding the work within existing ALSDE structures and supports will help sustain the efforts. For Goal 1, the AL SPDG will support a subset of the larger AL-MTSS work. The figure below demonstrates the relationship between the AL-MTSS selected districts and schools and the SPDG-selected districts and intermediate/middle schools.



The AL-MTSS initiative is within the ALSDE Instructional Services Section, which creates continuity after funding. Moreover, Goal 2 activities will work in tandem with the state’s SSIP initiative, which has a focus on secondary transition infrastructure. Alignment with the SSIP and AL-MTSS initiatives will enhance SPDG implementation and add continuity after funding.

Application of an Implementation Science Model

The foundation for the proposed professional learning model is rooted in the research on effective implementation [e.g., Dughman et al., 2011; Michigan Implementation Network (MIN), 2010; Fixsen et al., 2005; Fixsen & Blase, 2008; Duda et al., 2011]. The AL SPDG model and activities are aligned with Innovation Fluency through its collaboration with content experts to ensure high-quality training; using research-based practices; determining individual district and school needs and creating MTSS frameworks and transition plans that address the context of the

district; and developing coaches to provide sustained supports. The MIN key feature of Improvement Cycles, based on the research by Fixsen and Blase (2008), includes built-in review and assess activities, which allows ALSDE-SES staff to make mid-course corrections and opportunities to recommend changes in practices and operations.

### Use of Evidence-Based Professional Learning Strategies and Interventions

The AL SPDG applies both evidence-based approaches to training and coaching. SPDG training and coaching will be delivered in accordance with research on adult learning. Effective adult learning is critical in order to impact student outcomes (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). The training developers will follow the strategies outlined in Dunst and Trivette’s research (2009) on the Participatory Adult Learning Strategy (PALS) approach to adult learning (Obj. 1.2, 2.2, 2.4).

The ALSDE-SES staff recognize the importance of coaching and follow-up activities to improve the skills of the training recipient, increase the likelihood of implementation with fidelity, and sustain the innovations. As Joyce and Showers (2002) reported, training is difficult to sustain without coaching. Training without coaching showed no effect yet training with coaching had a 1.42 effect size (Joyce & Showers, 2002). The SPDG team will support teachers, leaders, and teams with ongoing coaching (Obj. 1.3-1.5, 2.5, 2.7).

## **II: QUALITY OF THE PROJECT DESIGN**

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### **A. The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable. [Design (i)]**

The AL SPDG proposal aims to improve instruction, structures, and supports for Alabama students with disabilities to prepare them for each level of education and post-school success. The AL SPDG’s proposed goals and activities to develop an infrastructure and offer proactive and sustained professional learning to better prepare districts, schools, and families to support

students. The project design is based on two goals:

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**Goal 1:** To increase reading achievement results for students with disabilities in grades 4-8 through professional learning on implementing MTSS supports to teachers and leaders in selected AL-MTSS cohort districts and schools.

**Goal 2:** To improve Part C to Part B, elementary, middle school, and high school transition outcomes for toddlers and students with disabilities through training, coaching, and resources for early intervention providers, teachers, administrators, and families of students with disabilities.

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To achieve these goals, the ALSDE will implement a model and activities that build upon the state’s SPDG/SSIP work, which have been demonstrated to be both feasible and effective.

Appendix A includes a project logic model and illustrates how activities and outcomes of the AL SPDG correspond with project goals. A description of objectives and outcomes are below.

The structure for each goal is based on Blasé and colleagues’ (2009) implementation drivers: Selection, Training, Coaching, Data, Facilitative Administration; and are aligned with the structure of the SPDG’s Evidence-Based Professional Development (EBPD) Worksheet sections: Selection, Training, Coaching, Data Systems to Support Decision Making, and Systemic Leadership Supports (Signetwork, 2022). Structuring the objectives around the implementation drivers allows staff to recognize strengths and weaknesses in a systematic manner.

**Goal 1: Developing and Sustaining Middle School AL-MTSS Sites to Support Reading**

Obj. 1.1: To identify, determine the readiness, and select three cohorts of at least seven districts per cohort to implement supports for students in an MTSS framework.

Activities under Objective 1.1 address the selection of at least 21 AL-MTSS districts to

implement reading instruction and strategies using an MTSS framework. Goal 1 will include three cohorts, which will allow time to train, coach, and support districts and schools over a three-year cycle. Each cohort will consist of at least seven districts and nine intermediate, middle, or junior high schools (grades 4-8). Over three cohorts, approximately 21 districts and at least 27 schools will be selected to participate. Table 2 shows the cohort process.

**Table 2: Selection and Implementation of the AL SPDG Goal 1 Cohorts**

|                 | <b>SPDG Selection</b> | <b>SPDG PL</b>        | <b>Sustaining Activities</b> |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Cohort 1</b> | March 2023            | July 2023-Spring 2025 | Spring 2025-Spring 2026      |
| <b>Cohort 2</b> | March 2024            | July 2024-Spring 2026 | Spring 2026-Spring 2027      |
| <b>Cohort 3</b> | March 2025            | July 2025-Spring 2027 | Spring 2027-Spring 2028*     |

\*Cohort 3 activities outside of the grant period would be supported with ALSDE-SES funds.

AL-MTSS districts are selected by the ALSDE Instructional Services Section. In the first year of the cycle, AL-MTSS will provide foundational MTSS framework activities to support an understanding a multi-level prevention system, form teams, and develop an MTSS action plan. AL-MTSS selected 21 districts for its first cohort, beginning in fall 2022.

The AL SPDG staff will select SPDG Cohort 1 in spring 2023 from the group of AL-MTSS Cohort 1 districts selected in summer 2022. Although the unit of selection is the district, SPDG staff will consider the intermediate and middle schools within the districts. SPDG staff will select districts from the AL-MTSS cohorts based on the readiness and interest to focus on reading supports and Tier II and III supports in the middle grades.

Selection activities will include defining the expectations for participating as a SPDG school, reviewing the selection tools for choosing districts to participate, and determining specific criteria for selection to ensure an equitable process for selecting districts. After the selection

processes have been established, the SPDG Goal 1 team will conduct an asynchronous webinar for AL-MTSS cohort districts to learn more about AL-MTSS reading in the middle grades and the expectations for SPDG participation. Beginning with Cohort 2, district staff will have an opportunity to contact or visit SPDG Cohort 1 districts and schools. Districts can better understand the expectation and vision for MTSS implementation.

While there is no secondary application process to participate in AL-SPDG, the Goal 1 team will field questions from AL-MTSS districts and schools about the process and expectations. Following the awareness webinar, the SPDG Director, SPDG MTSS Coordinator, and the Implementation Specialist will review the AL-MTSS district applications. Using the selection tools, the reviewers will determine the readiness and needs of the districts and schools and select SPDG cohort districts. As noted in Table 2, selection will occur March 2023, 2024, and 2025.

Obj. 1.2: To increase the knowledge of teachers, leaders, and families in cohort schools to provide evidence-based reading instruction and supports in a tiered framework through high-quality, engaging training on AL-MTSS as applied to reading in grades 4-8.

Objective 1.2 addresses training activities for AL-MTSS/SPDG districts, schools, and families. Prior to the training, the SPDG Goal 1 team will determine the sequence and formats (virtual, in-person, hybrid) for the year. Dr. Tessie Rose Bailey, Director of the MTSS Center at the American Institutes for Research (AIR), will facilitate several trainings. Other training will be offered by ALSDE staff, including facilitated IRIS Center modules.

The SPDG Professional Learning Coordinator will draft a schedule to share with SPDG districts and schools, as well as develop all training forms (e.g., a Participant’s Memo, sign-in sheets, etc.), and prepare and organize registration materials. The Professional Learning Coordinator and SPDG MTSS Coordinator will work with SPDG Coaches to assess school-

specific needs for training content and orient the trainers to any school-based needs or questions. The trainers will have the needed context to adapt instruction and add examples, as needed.

Training will be provided as outlined in Table 3. To broaden the knowledge and awareness of those implementing AL-MTSS, universal training will be offered to all AL-MTSS districts and schools. Participants in the SPDG cohorts will receive priority for in-person training.

Additionally, while available to all AL-MTSS participants, the focus of the training will be on implementing an MTSS framework in the middle grades.

**Table 3: Training Schedule and Content for AL SPDG Goal 1 Participants**

| <b>Content</b>                  | <b>Leaders</b> | <b>Teachers</b> | <b>Families</b> | <b>AL-MTSS</b> |
|---------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Evidence-Based Interventions    | Year 1         | Year 2          | Year 2          | Year 2         |
| Progress Monitoring             | Year 1         | Year 2          | Year 2          | Year 2         |
| Data-Based Decision Making      | Year 1         | Year 2          | Year 2          | Year 2         |
| Progress Monitoring Series (x3) | Year 1         | **              | **              | (Leaders)      |
| Reading and Progress Monitoring | (optional)     | Year 1          | Year 1          | (MS only)      |
| Specially Designed Instruction  | (optional)     | Year 1          | Year 1          | Year 1         |
| Family Engagement               | Year 1 or 2    | Year 1          | Year 1          | Year 1         |
| Reading in Middle School Series | Year 1 or 2    | Year 1          | Year 1          | (MS only)      |

In the first year of the SPDG, district staff, school leaders, interventionists, and district/school MTSS coordinators (noted as Leaders in the table) will be invited to participate in the following training: Evidence-Based Interventions; Progress Monitoring Overview; a three-part Progress Monitoring Series; and Data-Based Decision Making and Using Data Systems. All six trainings will be led by staff from the MTSS Center at AIR. The training series will be repeated in the second year of the SPDG for the next cohort, and leaders can choose to attend again.

Also in the first year of the SPDG cohort, teachers, families, and AL-MTSS staff not in SPDG schools will be offered the following training: Overview of Reading and Progress Monitoring; Specially Designed Instruction in Tiers II and III; Family and Stakeholder Engagement; and a two-part series on Reading in Middle School, focusing on intensive reading supports. Leaders can choose to participate in the training in the first or second year of the cohort. For the reading-focused trainings, non-SPDG AL-MTSS teachers and leaders in middle schools will be invited to attend. The SPDG MTSS Coordinator will work with the APEC staff to help disseminate information about the training to parents and families.

In the second year of the cohort cycle, teachers, families, and non-SPDG AL-MTSS staff will be offered Evidence-Based Interventions, Progress Monitoring, and Data-Based Decision Making. Cohort 2 leaders will be in their first year of their cohort, and leaders in Cohort 2 would attend the training with the Cohort 1 teachers, families, and AL-MTSS staff.

Training evaluations and training fidelity will be collected for each training. Training data will be used to make modifications to future events as needed.

Obj. 1.3: To increase capacity of educators in cohort schools to provide reading instruction and supports within an MTSS model through coaching supports and resources regarding implementing an MTSS framework that will lead to improved 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade reading achievement in cohort schools.

Objective 1.3 addresses coaching activities for Goal 1 cohort schools. While SPDG Coaches and the Coaching Coordinator will be available for questions and targeted support, SPDG Coaches will primarily support SPDG cohort districts and schools. Coaches for the AL SPDG will be selected from the pool of current part-time SSIP/SPDG coaches, who are retired, former school and district leaders. Additional hires will be made as needed. The SPDG Coaches will

have two roles: systems coaches and instructional coaches. Current SSIP/SPDG Coaches have experience in both roles through the SSIP activities.

Coaches will receive intensive professional learning content, as outlined in Objective 1.6. Coaching skills will be honed through training from the ALSDE's external coaching contractor, who provides instructional coaching training to ALSDE employees through the Alabama Reading Initiative. The SPDG Coaching Coordinator and Professional Learning Coordinator will organize other training opportunities for SPDG Coaches. Collectively, the Coordinator and coaches will refine the system of coaching, including identifying when to initiate coaching, protocols, and methods of coaching.

Collaboratively with their coach, each SPDG school will review and expand their MTSS action plans based on the fidelity of intervention tools for reading, the Tiered Fidelity Inventory-Reading (TFI-R). Using the TFI-R results and action plans, SPDG Coaches will offer in-person and virtual coaching to teachers and leaders. Coaching formats will include one-on-one, small group, and observations of best practices. Coaching content will include: reading in an MTSS framework, including progress monitoring; implementing universal screeners for academics; specially designed instruction; guiding student placements in a tiered prevention framework; scheduling interventions; and evidence-based reading interventions. Although the number of coaching contacts will vary by school, SPDG Coaches will provide at least four coaching contacts with teachers and leaders per month to each school.

Other SPDG personnel will provide coaching supports. The SPDG MTSS Coordinator and Implementation Specialist will identify and develop resources on MTSS, reading, and family engagement that will be disseminated by SPDG Coaches to school teams, staff, and families in cohort districts and schools. Also, the SPDG MTSS Coordinator will lead networking options for



SPDG districts and schools, including a SPDG AL-MTSS Community of Practice.

The Coaching Coordinator will analyze the effectiveness of the coaches through the High-Quality Coaching Assessment (HQCA). Coaching processes and outcomes will be assessed through the annual Stakeholder Survey, led by the project's evaluator.

Objective 1.4: To improve teacher and leader capacity to make data-based decisions regarding reading instruction through the use of universal screening data, progress monitoring results, fidelity tools, leader checklists, and an assessment of school climate.

Activities in Objective 1.4 addresses the data systems and usage activities led by SPDG staff and the evaluation of Goal 1 implementation. At the beginning of each year, SPDG Coaches will work with teachers and school leaders to inventory their reading strategies and interventions. Using the TFI-R as a checklist, Coaches will observe and assess the needs of schools and districts related to reading in an MTSS framework. SPDG Coaches will help MTSS teams collect and analyze district, school, and classroom-level screening, progress monitoring, achievement, attendance, and school climate data to help identify needs and areas of strength. Through this process, teams and leaders will receive coaching on data-based decision making, including using progress monitoring data, as well as refining action plans (Objective 1.3). Assistance with using local data systems for recording student progress monitoring data will be provided as needed.

Each spring, the SPDG MTSS Coordinator will facilitate a discussion with the MTSS team and SPDG Coach regarding the fidelity of reading supports in an MTSS framework. Based on the feedback, teams and leaders will work with the SPDG Coach to adjust implementation. Coaches will also use the fidelity results as a vehicle for identifying successful practices to use as exemplars for other districts and schools.

Obj. 1.5: To build the capacity of participating administrators and implementation teams to support components of an MTSS framework through on-going professional learning on team development, communicating with families and stakeholders, and sustainability.

The activities of Objective 1.5 address the organizational and systemic leadership aspects of reading implementation in an MTSS framework, through supports to Implementation Teams and administrators. Training and coaching to district and school leaders are described in Objectives 1.2 and 1.3. Building the capacity of leaders to support MTSS implementation is important for sustainability (Freeman, Miller, & Newcomer, 2015).

As part of the larger AL-MTSS process, District and School Implementation Teams (DITs/SITs) are formed in the first year of the MTSS process (the year prior to the SPDG cohorts). SPDG Coaches will help DITs and SITs assess their functioning through the organizational components of a fidelity assessment (District Capacity Assessment for districts and TFI-R for schools) and the results of the Team Functioning Scale. Based on the needs of the teams, Coaches will provide supports to teams on procedural functions such as roles, functions of teams, the fidelity of implementation assessments, action plans, and forms and checklists. Coaches may also provide supports to teams and leaders on content, including family and stakeholder engagement, using data systems, and sustainability practices, including implementation science.

Since communication with families around MTSS is an essential component of AL-MTSS, teams, with assistance from SPDG Coaches, will develop communication protocols for families. The MTSS Coordinator will assist with messaging to families. The capacity of DITs and SITs to support and sustain SPDG AL-MTSS implementation will be evaluated annually.

Obj. 1.6: To improve state staff capacity to support and disseminate resources, best practices, and data on implementing an MTSS framework through training, resource development, and the development of a SPDG website.

Activities in Objective 1.6 include state activities designed to support and sustain reading instruction using an MTSS framework. First, the capacity of SPDG Coaches and staff will be improved through on-going professional learning: sustainability and implementation science; developing local leadership; assisting LEAs with inventory assessment; achievement in reading; understanding middle school students; evidence-based practices and interventions; and compiling and analyzing data to improve achievement. While current SPDG Coaches have experience in these areas, both training and coaching will be provided. The Professional Learning and Coaching Coordinators will organize training opportunities for SPDG staff.

The MTSS Coordinator and Implementation Specialist will collaboratively lead efforts to identify and create resources to support SPDG AL-MTSS implementation in districts and schools. Resources may include information for families, progress monitoring guides, reading strategies and best practices, and learning in the middle grades. Resources will be shared on the SPDG website, as well as video-based exemplars and information on trainings. SPDG staff will also offer awareness presentations on SPDG activities at state conferences and meetings to increase awareness of MTSS around the state.

**Goal 1 Outcomes:** Intermediate and long-term outcomes for Goal 1 are explained in the Evaluation section and logic model (Appendix A). A sample of outcomes are listed below.

**Obj. 1.1:** 80% report more knowledge of project expectations; At least 21 districts selected.

**Obj. 1.2:** 75% or higher training learning outcomes; 75% of educators and families have

greater awareness about reading and MTSS; 80% report increased capacity to implement progress monitoring, evidence-based reading practices in an MTSS framework.

**Obj. 1.3:** 80% report coaching impacted skills and implementation; 90% of coaching implemented with fidelity; 75% rate resources as high-quality.

**Obj. 1.4:** 70% of schools implement MTSS with fidelity after 3 years; 80% report more skills related to data-based decision making.

**Obj. 1.5:** 75% of DITs achieve fidelity; 80% score on Team Functioning Scale; 75% of families report improved communication about MTSS.

**Obj. 1.6:** 90% of Goal 1 Team have greater capacity to support districts and schools; website Goal 1 resources have 5,000 page views annually.

## **Goal 2: Developing Transition Programs and Supports**

**Obj. 2.1:** Increase Part C to Part B transitions for children through professional learning to early intervention providers on using Routines-Based Model (RBM) with families of infants and toddlers with disabilities ages birth to three.

Activities in 2.1 address the need to improve the quality of services for children and families receiving Part C services that will lead to a better foundation for Part C to Part B transitions. This objective involves a collaboration among the SPDG staff, AL Part C services, and the University of Alabama. All EI providers have received training on Routines-Based Model (RBM), a system of providing services to families receiving Part C services. Dr. Robin McWilliam from the University of Alabama has developed seven self-paced RBM modules, and early intervention providers are expected to complete a competency exam at the end of training.

Through the SPDG, Part C staff will identify seven early intervention coaches, one per Early Intervention Services (AEIS) district, to evaluate the fidelity of implementation of RBM. AEIS

Coaches will observe EI providers using the Finesse-II observation tool to determine fidelity to the RBM approach. Data will be analyzed to determine providers needing additional supports.

Two health districts per AEIS district (14 total health districts) will be selected per cohort, and three cohorts will be selected over the grant period for a total of all 42 health districts. Within each cohort, EI providers in the health districts will receive additional training and coaching supports from the AEIS Coaches. Providers would be expected to achieve 80% or higher on the competency exam and demonstrate fidelity on the Finesse-II. Part C and the Goal 2 Transition Coordinator will work together to evaluate the impact of the professional learning on family satisfaction, participation of typically under-referred and underserved populations, and the percentage of Part C to Part B transitions.

Obj. 2.2: To increase the capacity of teachers, leaders, and families to support early transition planning for students beginning in elementary school through the development and dissemination of resources and training.

Feedback from SPDG Transition Family Focus Groups conveyed the need to start secondary transition planning early for some students. The SPDG Transition Coordinator will lead the SPDG Goal 2 Team in identifying resources aimed at assisting students who will need intensive transition supports with early secondary transition planning. Resources may include developing accessible videos for families, teachers, and leaders; school- and home-based applications of life skills and self-determination; short briefs; and career awareness resources. All resources will be disseminated through the SPDG website and in accessible formats.

In addition to the resource development, the AL SPDG will offer universal, statewide virtual training to elementary and intermediate teachers, school leaders, and district administrators on transition planning in elementary school and fostering IEP participation. The training, led by

NTACT staff, will be offered in Years 2-5. Statewide early transition training will also be provided by APEC to families of students with disabilities in preschool and elementary school. The family training will focus on early transition planning ideas at home and IEP participation. All early secondary transition training will be evaluated for program improvement.

Obj. 2.3: To identify, determine the readiness, and select three cohorts of at least six districts per cohort, to develop and expand transition programs.

Activities under Objective 2.3 address the selection of Alabama districts to expand their secondary transition program at the middle and high school levels. Objectives 2.3-2.7 will include three cohorts, each with a three-year cycle. Cohort will consist of at least four middle schools and five high schools per cohort, and over the grant period, at least 18 districts and 27 schools will be selected to participate. Table 4 shows the Goal 2 cohort process.

**Table 4: Selection and Implementation of AL SPDG Goal 2 Cohorts**

|                 | <b>SPDG Selection</b> | <b>SPDG PL</b>      | <b>Sustaining</b> |
|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Cohort 1</b> | February 2023         | June 2023-Fall 2025 | Summer 2026       |
| <b>Cohort 2</b> | February 2024         | June 2024-Fall 2026 | Summer 2027       |
| <b>Cohort 3</b> | February 2025         | June 2025-Fall 2027 | Summer 2028*      |

\*Cohort 3 activities outside of the grant period would be supported with ALSDE-SES funds.

Initial selection activities are similar to those in Objective 1.1; selection tools will be identified, and selection criteria determined. A webinar will be offered to potential schools interested in expanding and improving their secondary transition programs. Interested schools would have the opportunity to contact or visit a best practice site from the current SPDG high schools. Application links will be posted on the SPDG website and shared during the webinar.

The SPDG Director, Transition Coordinator, and Implementation Specialist will review

district applications. Using the selection criteria, reviewers will determine the needs, costs, and current transition activities of districts, and select districts. Following the selection process, schools will be asked to evaluate the process and clarity of expectations on the annual Stakeholder Survey.

Obj. 2.4: To increase the knowledge of teachers, leaders, and families to provide evidence-based secondary transition services and promote student-led IEP meetings through high-quality, engaging training on transition and student-led IEPs.

Objective 2.4 activities include the transition training offered to educators in cohort districts and schools and family training on secondary transition. Through their experience with the 2017 SPDG, ALSDE-SES staff have found broad content topics can be delivered to all participants, whereas training on a transition curriculum is best conducted for an individual district. Trainers from NACT have agreed to facilitate several of the AL SPDG trainings. Other training will be offered by APEC (AL's PTI) and ALSDE staff.

The SPDG Professional Learning Coordinator will schedule and prepare all training forms, assemble training materials for participants, and organize registration and continuing education credits. Like Goal 1, the Professional Learning Coordinator, SPDG Transition Coordinator, and SPDG Coaches will assess district and school-specific needs and questions to share with the trainer prior to the session.

Each district would be asked to purchase, with SPDG funds, an evidence-based transition curriculum if they did not already have one. Teachers would receive subsequent training on the curriculum either through the vendor or a SPDG Coach.

As seen in Table 5, training for educators will occur in the first two years of the cohort, although educators are welcome to repeat training and attend with later cohorts as needed.

Transition Teams will be developed during the first year of participation (Objective 2.7), and Transition Team members who join later in Year 1 may attend the training in Year 2.

**Table 5: Training Schedule and Content for AL SPDG Goal 2 Participants**

| <b>Content</b>                        | <b>Teachers</b> | <b>Families</b> | <b>Leaders/Teams</b> |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Effective Transition Planning         | Year 1          | Year 1, 2, or 3 | Year 1               |
| Transition for Middle School Students | Year 1, MS only | Year 1, 2, or 3 | Year 1, MS only      |
| Student-Focused Planning & IEPs       | Year 1 or 2     | Year 1, 2, or 3 | Year 1               |
| Connecting IEP Goals to Instruction   | Year 1          |                 | Year 1, optional     |
| Independent Living & Engagement       | Year 2          | Year 2 or 3     | Year 2               |
| Interagency Collaboration             |                 |                 | Year 2               |
| Education & Employment                | Year 2          | Year 2 or 3     | Year 2               |
| Transition Training for Families      |                 | Year 1, 2, or 3 |                      |

In the first year, teachers and leaders will participate in Effective Transition Planning training, led by NTACTION staff. Middle school educators would also participate in Transition for Middle School Students. Other Year 1 training include: Student-Focused Planning and Participating in IEP Meetings and Connecting IEP Goals to Instruction. The IEP Goals training focuses on linking individual student goals to an evidence-based transition curriculum, and therefore, the hands-on training is designed for teachers.

In the second year of the cohort, two trainings would be offered to emphasize post-school outcomes: Independent Living and Community Engagement and Post-Secondary Education and Employment. Interagency Collaboration training would be provided to leaders and Transition Team members, facilitated by the SPDG Coach using the IRIS Center module.

Families in cohort districts would be invited to attend transition trainings, as indicated in



Table 5. The Director of APEC has provided training to parents and families on independent living and post-secondary education. These trainings would be continued, as well as more focused training on early secondary transition planning.

Training evaluations and training fidelity will be collected for each training. Training data will be used to make modifications to future events as needed.

Obj. 2.5: To build the capacity of teachers and leaders to support students in middle and high school through instructional and systems coaching and resources in cohort schools on secondary transition and student-led IEP meetings.

Training content outlined in Objective 2.4 will be supported through Objective 2.5 coaching supports. Currently, there are two part-time SSIP/SPDG Transition Coaches, who are retired district leaders. One to two additional part-time SPDG Coaches will be hired to further support districts across the state. The current SPDG Coaches have experience working with teachers on implementing a transition curriculum at the middle and high school levels, as well as working at a systems level developing Transition Teams. The proposed SPDG will expand both their roles through further professional learning on self-determination, encouraging IEP participation and post-school opportunities. The Transition Coordinator and Professional Learning Coordinator will work with the coaches to provide further learning. SPDG Coaches will also receive coaching training from the ALSDE’s coaching contractor.

**Table 6: Coaching for Transition Program Components**

| Program Component           | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Transition Program Vision   | X      |        |        |
| Transition Team Development | X      | X      |        |

|  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| Transition Curriculum & Instruction        | X | X | X |
| Student-Focused Planning/IEP Participation | X | X | X |
| Family & Stakeholder Engagement            | X | X | X |
| Interagency Collaboration                  |   | X | X |
| School-Based Work Program                  |   | X | X |
| Community-Based Work Program               |   | X | X |

ALSDE-SES staff have found coaching for developing a transition program is extensive and requires several years. As noted in Table 6, components of the proposed transition programs require a three-year process, with coaching supports fading in the third year. In the first year, SPDG Coaches will support training outlined in Objective 2.4 and focus on working with leaders and teachers to develop a vision for a school’s transition program, assist teams with developing a school and community-based Transition Team and providing supports on how the team can engage families and stakeholders. Coaches will also provide instructional coaching to teachers on the evidence-based transition curriculum selected by the district (e.g., Stanfield Transitions, Project Discovery, Life Centered Education Transition Curriculum, etc.) and student-focused planning. The number of coaching contacts is estimated to be at least four per month per school.

In the second and third years, SPDG Coaches and teams will focus on interagency collaboration and school and community work opportunities. For example, 2017 SPDG transition programs have resulted in school- and community-based opportunities such as a garden (vegetables and flowers), coffee café, herb packaging, a career clothing store, and a full-service restaurant. Coaches will support teams’ vision for developing sustainable programs.

The Transition Coordinator and Implementation Specialist will identify and develop resources on transition, IEP participation, post-secondary options, and family engagement that

will be disseminated by SPDG Coaches to school teams, staff, and families in cohort schools. Resources will also be distributed on the SPDG website for anyone in AL to access.

The impact of the coaching system and the effectiveness of the coaches and resources will be evaluated. The Coaching Coordinator will analyze the effectiveness of the coaches through the High-Quality Coaching Assessment. Coaching processes, resources, and outcomes will be assessed through the SPDG Stakeholder Survey.

Obj. 2.6: To increase cohort school and district use of transition data for transition program development through interviews, assessments, and feedback from families, teachers, and Transition Teams.

Objective 2.6 includes evaluation data collection, analysis, and planning at the school and family levels. The first two activities involve fidelity data collection. Transition Teams, SPDG Coaches, and the Transition Coordinator will assess their transition programs using a modified Taxonomy for Transition Planning 2.0 tool (Kohler, Gothberg, Fowler, and Coyle, 2016). Coaches will work with teams to analyze their results and refine their programming.

A valuable source of data for the 2017 SPDG has been interviews and focus groups with parents of students of transition age. Due to the effects of the pandemic and to ensure a more representative group, APEC and the External Evaluator will partner to coordinate and conduct interviews with families of students with disabilities between 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade. The Evaluator will interview at least 20 parents each year and report aggregate results to the ALSDE-SES.

Other evaluation data will be gathered and analyzed by the External Evaluator. Transition teachers and leaders will share feedback through surveys and interviews to help determine effective practices and barriers to implementing transition programs. Additionally, the Evaluator will share individual districts' results on families' perceptions of IEP meeting participation

currently gathered through the statewide AL Parent Survey. These data, coupled with district data on IEP meeting attendance, will help districts work toward increasing meeting participation.

Obj. 2.7: To build the capacity of district and community Transition Teams in selected middle and high schools to support transition programs through professional learning on team development, leadership, communication with families and communities, and sustainability.

Objective 2.7 activities address the organizational and systemic leadership aspects of transition programming, through supports to Transition Teams and administrators. One of the initial coaching activities is to help districts create and/or further develop a Transition Team with representation from the district and community. After the team is formed, SPDG Coaches will provide supports on procedural functions such as roles, functions of teams, fidelity of implementation assessments, and transition program plans. Coaches may also provide supports to Transition Teams and leaders on interagency collaboration, family and stakeholder engagement, using data systems, and sustainability practices, including implementation science. Like Goal 1, SPDG Coaches will help teams develop communication protocols to communicate with families and provide support on messaging to families and other stakeholders.

Transition Teams will be assessed through the Team Functioning Scale and the Taxonomy for Transition Planning 2.0, and results will be used to refine coaching activities. Through questions added to the Team Functioning Scale assessment, team members will also assess their capacity to support and sustain transition program implementation.

Obj. 2.8: To build state staff capacity to support teachers, leaders, and families helping students make successful transitions at each educational level through collaboration, professional learning, and resource dissemination.

Objective 2.8 includes state activities designed to support and sustain high-quality, evidence-

based transition services. The capacity of SPDG Coaches and Goal 2 staff will be improved through on-going professional learning related to transition programs (Obj. 2.4 and 2.5). The Professional Learning and Coaching Coordinators will organize training for Goal 2 staff.

The AL SPDG staff will continue to work with the AL SSIP and other ALSDE-SES staff to develop the state-level infrastructure to support Part C to B and secondary transition services. Through the development of a SPDG State Implementation Team, representatives from other AL-MTSS (Goal 1), Career and Technical Education, and ADRS will meet quarterly to align program activities and deliver a common message regarding transition services to stakeholders.

Project staff will also facilitate transition networking opportunities for both parents and teachers at the AL MEGA conference. SPDG staff will give awareness presentations on SPDG activities at state conferences to increase awareness of transition services.

**Goal 2 Outcomes:** Intermediate and long-term outcomes for Goal 2 are explained in the Evaluation section and logic model (Appendix A). A sample of outcomes are listed below.

**Obj. 2.1:** 75% family satisfaction with early intervention services; higher percentage of families from typically underserved populations receive services.

**Obj. 2.2:** 3,000 page views/yr. for early transition resources; 75% score for learning outcomes.

**Obj. 2.3:** 80% report more knowledge of project expectations; At least 18 districts selected.

**Obj. 2.4:** 75% score for learning outcomes; 75% of educators and families have greater awareness about transition content; 80% report increased capacity to implement transition services, teach a transition curriculum, and prepare students for post-school outcomes.

**Obj. 2.5:** 80% report coaching impacted skills and implementation; 75% rate resources as high-quality; More schools have school/community work options.

**Obj. 2.6:** 70% of schools implement transition with fidelity after 3 years; 80% report more

skills related to data-based decision-making; 70% parent satisfaction with transition services.

**Obj. 2.7:** Transition Teams score 80% on Team Functioning Scale; 75% of families report improved communication about transition; Teams have increased community partnerships.

**Obj. 2.8:** 90% of SPDG staff report greater capacity to support Goal 2; 80% of State Implementation Team members have more knowledge of state transition services.

**B. The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to the needs of the target population or other identified needs. [Design ii]**

The table below lists each of the expressed needs discussed in the Significance section, with a description of how the project design addresses those needs.

**Table 7: A Crosswalk of Expressed Needs and Project Objectives**

| <b>Expressed Need</b>                           | <b>Addressed in Proposal</b>         |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Reading achievement, especially among SWD       | Obj. 1.1-1.6                         |
| Transition preparation for continued success    | Obj. 2.1-2.8                         |
| Post-school outcomes for SWD                    | Obj. 2.2-2.8                         |
| Family engagement in schools                    | Obj. 1.2, 1.5-1.6, 2.1-2.2, 2.4, 2.6 |
| Developing structures to sustain implementation | Obj. 1.5-1.6, Obj. 2.1, 2.7-2.8      |

Reading Achievement: Achievement will be impacted most by Goal 1 through: statewide training on MTSS components and applying/implementing evidence-based reading strategies in alignment with AL-MTSS framework; coaching and DIT/SIT activities in SPDG cohort districts and schools; an MTSS community of practice; and the focus of using various data systems and results to make decisions about individual students and district and school reading supports.

While SPDG districts and schools will concentrate on reading in grades 4-8, SPDG training and

support on reading, progress monitoring, evidence-based practices, and data-based decision-making will be available to all AL-MTSS educators as shown in Table 3.

Transition Preparation: All Goal 2 activities aim to prepare students for Part C to preschool and secondary transition. Families in the Part C system will receive higher quality services and more information and preparation for Part B/619 services. Professional learning on secondary transition at the elementary school level and with cohort middle and high schools will impact IEP participation and college and career readiness for students with disabilities. Training on student-focused planning and IEP meeting participation was specifically included to address the low attendance and participation rates of students in IEP meetings at all school levels.

Post-School Outcomes: Like transition preparation, all Goal 2 activities are designed to address post-school outcomes. Developing Transition Teams and improvements in transition programming will enhance the structures to support and prepare students for graduation, and ultimately, college enrollment or competitive employment. Data from the 2017 SPDG has demonstrated transition cohort districts that focused on transition classes and programming had a positive impact on post-school outcomes (SPP/APR Indicator 14b, 2022). The proposed SPDG emphasizes earlier transition planning and more structured transition supports, which should further improve post-school outcomes.

Family Engagement: Data shared in the Significance demonstrate a greater need to engage parents and families in project activities. Training will be offered to families for both MTSS and reading (Goal 1) and elementary, middle, and high school secondary transition (Goal 2). While parents can attend statewide training as indicated in the Project Design, the ALSDE will partner with APEC to deliver trainings specifically for families of students with disabilities. Coaching and resources will be provided to families through Part C supports, web-based resources, and

APEC support. Interviews with a sample of families (Obj. 2.6), training evaluations, and the state's Parent Survey all provide mechanisms to ensure family voice in the project.

Developing Structures and Supports to Sustain Implementation: To address the need for greater leadership capacity, the SPDG will support and sustain the development of a State Implementation Team, DITs, SITs, and Transition Teams. The Part C focus on achieving and maintaining fidelity in RBM among its providers also builds an infrastructure to support EI providers in their professional learning. The proposed SPDG will also include alignment of ALSDE programs and external partners addressing similar services. This alignment will occur through: 1) Developing a State Implementation Team and restructuring a state Stakeholder Team; 2) Partnering with the AL-MTSS initiative to focus on implementing an MTSS framework; 3) Having a greater emphasis on families, who will help implement the reading and transition supports; and 4) Maintaining a SPDG website for information sharing.

**C. The extent to which the services to be provided by the proposed project involve the collaboration of appropriate partners for maximizing the effectiveness of project services.**

**[Design (iii)]**

The ALSDE has recognized the need for proactive and sustained professional learning to ready its students for college, career, and adulthood. To do so requires integration within the ALSDE offices and sections. The SPDG MTSS activities in Goal 1 is embedded within the larger AL-MTSS work, and SPDG staff will work closely with staff from the AL-MTSS program in the Office of Instructional Support. As described in the Project Design section, the AL SPDG will provide training to all AL-MTSS districts and schools, and cohort SPDG intermediate/middle schools will be a subset of the larger AL-MTSS population of schools. Therefore, collaboration among the projects is critical, and as noted in the letter of support, both



Directors are committed to the partnership.

The AL SPDG staff will work with the Office of Career and Technical Education at the ALSDE for Goal 2 transition alignment. A member of Career and Technical Education will serve on the State Implementation Team and assist with using the Kuder assessment in early transition planning and including results in IEPs, developing a common language for messaging, and reviewing and disseminating shared resources.

The SPDG will collaborate with required partners to implement the work scope. The proposal has a large scope of work for APEC to serve families impacted by disabilities. APEC will assist with resource dissemination activities and early literacy training for Goal 1, although their scope of work is larger for Goal 2. They will provide training to families on secondary transition and early planning for transition, coordinate the family transition interviews, and develop resources on IEP participation, transition planning, and post-school supports.

Auburn University (AU) will partner with the AL SPDG to provide training and assistance to Goal 1 districts and schools on reading and specially designed instruction (SDI). Dr. Margaret Flores will lead the AU/AL SPDG efforts focusing on reading, including the reading training series and SDI training in Tiers II and III of an MTSS framework. AL SPDG activities will also be supported by the University of Alabama (Part C) and Regional Inservice Centers at the University of Athens and Troy University.

During the course of the grant, the AL SPDG will partner directly with at least 39 LEAs to implement Goals 1 and 2 through the selection of cohort districts and schools. The AL SPDG will also provide universal training and resources to all AL-MTSS districts (Obj. 1.2) and districts statewide regarding early transition planning (Obj. 2.2) and resources (Obj. 2.8).

The AL SPDG is partnering with the AL Early Intervention System (Part C) within the

ADRS for offering professional learning on RBM to early intervention providers to ensure fidelity of service delivery to families (Obj. 2.1). Collaborations with other, non-required partnering organizations, are described in Section E below.

**D. The extent to which the design of the proposed project reflects up-to-date knowledge from research and effective practice. [Design (iv)]**

ALSDE-SES staff have developed the proposed scope of work based on research of effective practices. While there have been times collaborators have suggested a particular program or strategy, SPDG staff have focused on “What does the research say?” Both the proposed AL SPDG content and processes are founded on the research of effective practices. Additionally, the project includes national centers to provide the most current research and best practices.

The AL SPDG is implementing an MTSS framework designed to improve reading outcomes for students by integrating instruction, evidence-based practices and interventions, assessment, and use of data to make decisions about student supports. The essential components of Alabama’s MTSS framework adopt a preventative approach to addressing student needs before special education services are warranted (Shepley & Grisham-Brown, 2019). An MTSS framework has been found to benefit both teachers and students. Teachers reported more discussions about student needs and data-based problem solving when utilizing an MTSS framework (Gamm et al., 2012). MTSS and progress monitoring, when implemented with fidelity, has been demonstrated to improve academic outcomes in students (e.g., VanDerHeyden, McLaughlin, Algina, & Snyder, 2012; Witzel & Clarke, 2015).

Through its Goal 2 activities, the AL SPDG will implement evidence-based transition curriculum, professional learning, and programming to improve student preparation at each school level and ultimately post-secondary outcomes. While programs emphasizing transition

planning, programming, and self-determination skills have been found to be effective (e.g., Morningstar, 2010; Patton & Kim, 2016; Kohler & Field, 2003). Furthermore, there is greater emphasis to offer secondary transition planning beginning in elementary school (Papay, Unger, Williams-Diehm, & Mitchell, 2015). Teachers, however, have reported feeling underprepared to use secondary transition evidence-based practices, and more professional learning is needed (Plotner, Mazzotti, Rose, & Carlson-Britting, 2016). Transition training will consist of training by NTACTION, as well as the use of IRIS Center modules, which have been shown to be an effective delivery model (Matyo-Cepero and Varvisotis, 2015).

The ALSDE-SES will implement the AL SPDG activities using processes rooted in implementation science. The delivery of SPDG professional learning utilizes an implementation science framework, which has been shown to be beneficial for translating education research into practice (Cook & Odom, 2013). In its approach to training, the AL SPDG incorporates the Participatory Adult Learning Strategy (PALS) approach to adult learning (Dunst & Trivette, 2009). Additionally, the AL SPDG emphasizes coaching, which has been demonstrated to positively impact instruction on student achievement (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018; Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010).

**E. The extent to which the proposed project will establish linkages with other appropriate agencies and organizations providing services to the target population. [Design (v)]**

ALSDE will collaborate with several external organizations to implement the SPDG activities. Letters of commitment from these partners can be found in Appendix C. The external organizations providing services related to the proposed SPDG can be grouped into four categories: training and coaching partners; IHE partners; family supports; and AL organizations, as described in Table 8.

**Table 8: External Organizations Partnering to Implement the AL SPDG**

| Type of Support                | Organizations  | Objectives                  |
|--------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Training and Coaching Supports | MTSS Center; NTACTION; Region 7 Comprehensive Center; IRIS Center                              | 1.2, 1.6, 2.2, 2.4, 2.8     |
| IHE Partners                   | Auburn University; University of AL; Troy University; University of Athens                     | 1.2-1.3, 2.1, 2.4           |
| Family Supports                | AL Early Intervention Services (Part C); APEC  | 1.3, 1.6, 2.1-2.2, 2.4, 2.6 |
| State Organizations            | Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS); Council for Leaders in AL Schools (CLAS) | 1.6, 2.1, 2.5, 2.8          |

The ALSDE-SES will partner with several national partners to provide training and coaching supports, including: (1) the MTSS Center at AIR to provide direct training and support to SPDG Coaches related to Goal 1; (2) NTACTION to provide direct training and support to SPDG Coaches related to Goal 2; (3) the Region 7 Comprehensive Center at the RMC Research Corporation to provide support to Goal 1 SPDG Coaches on reading; and (4) the IRIS Center to provide resources and modules used for coaching and just-in-time training supports for Goal 2.

In addition to Auburn University (see Section C), the SPDG will partner with the University of Alabama to provide RBM training and follow-up supports for Part C EI providers. The SPDG will also use the resources of the Regional Inservice Centers at Troy University and the University of Athens for disseminating information about training, building partnerships, and establishing connections to administrators in the region.

The assistance of parent partners is detailed in Section C; however, the AL PTI has provided

significant support in prior SPDGs, and this partnership will continue. The AEIS will provide training and coaching to providers in an effort to improve services to Part C families.

Other partnerships will include the ADRS, who oversees Vocational Rehabilitation Services and adult disability supports. ADRS staff will serve on the State Implementation Team, assist with coaching, and review and provide resources for dissemination. Additionally, professional organizations, including Ala-CASE will be represented on the Stakeholder Team. Ala-CASE leadership will assist AL SPDG staff in recruiting districts to participate in training and cohorts, provide expertise on materials for leaders, and disseminate project information.

### **III: QUALITY OF PROJECT PERSONNEL**

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Staff within the ALSDE-SES will lead the AL SPDG activities. Project staff will be supported by several key contractors and consultants. Vitae for key staff and consultants can be found in Appendix B. A personnel loading chart by activity is located in the Adequacy/Management Plan.

#### **A. The extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. [Pers. 2, GEPA]**

AL SPDG personnel are fully staffed and ready to start upon funding. If a future vacancy should occur, the ALSDE will make every effort to hire individuals from traditionally underrepresented groups. The ALSDE is an equal opportunity employer, and does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, creed, color, or national origin. The ALSDE actively supports the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. Accommodations will be made as needed.

Efforts will be made to hire individuals with disabilities and/or other underrepresented groups including: (1) Seeking guidance from the AL Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)

and ALSDE stakeholder groups about ways to hire traditionally underrepresented candidates, (2) Encouraging members of the AL SEAP to promote the opportunity to their stakeholders, (3) Advertising in diversity outlets such as Hispanic Outlook and Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and (4) Including diverse representation on hiring committees.

**B. Qualifications, including training and experience, of key project personnel. [Pers. (3)]**

**Ms. Celeste Minor, Ed.S.** (.80 FTE *in-kind*) will serve as the *SPDG Director*. Ms. Minor is an Education Specialist II with the ALSDE, SES, and has worked with fiscal services, technical assistance, monitoring, and LEA support. Ms. Minor has participated throughout the development of the AL-MTSS through numerous roles with the partnership between NCSI and ALSDE. In her previous role as special education director for a LEA, she developed and led professional development for educators serving students with special needs. She managed the LEA's IDEA budget and personnel (directly and indirectly). Additionally, she was a special education teacher, an interventionist, and a building administrator. Ms. Minor's current professional memberships include the CEC, CLAS, and ALA-CASE.

**Ms. Patrice Harvill, M.Ed.** (.10 FTE *in-kind*) will serve as the *SPDG Principal Investigator*. Ms. Harvill is an Education Administrator with the ALSDE-SES overseeing the Instructional Support Team. Prior to coming to SES, Ms. Harvill worked with the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) at the ALSDE as the Dyslexia Specialist. She is also a Certified Academic Language Therapist trained to assist students with dyslexia and reading difficulties. Ms. Harvill has served as a local Reading Specialist as well as 16 years as a special education teacher and private dyslexia tutor.

**Ms. Teri Shriver, M.Ed.** (.50 FTE *in kind*) will serve as the *SPDG MTSS Coordinator*. Ms. Shriver is on the Curriculum and Instructional Support Team for the ALSDE-SES. She is

currently on the Instructional Services team to revise the state’s MTSS manual and has previously been involved with SPDG as a Transition Coordinator. She holds a certificate for K-12 special education collaborative teaching and has been a special education professional for 37 years, including 25 years as a special education teacher at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Ms. Shriver has taught specialized reading and math programs, including six years as a Reading Specialist for a district.

**Ms. Tiffany Moore, M.Ed.** (.50 FTE *in-kind*) will serve as the *Transition Coordinator*. Ms. Moore has served as a member of the Technical Assistance Team in the ALSDE-SES. In this role, she has facilitated several virtual and in-person trainings on the Alabama High School Diploma Pathways for students with disabilities. Ms. Moore serves as a Transition Coordinator for the current SPDG. She was a special education teacher for 19 years and has experience in elementary, middle, and high school settings. Ms. Moore also holds a National Board Teacher Certification as an Exceptional Needs Specialist/Early Childhood Through Young Adulthood. As a parent of children with disabilities, Ms. Moore has worked with the ADRS. She has first-hand experience of the transition process from early intervention to Part B. Additionally, Governor Kay Ivey appointed her to serve as a representative on the State Rehabilitation Council.

**Ms. Sonja Hines, Ed.S.** (.50 FTE *in-kind*) will serve as the *Professional Learning Coordinator*. Ms. Hines has over 32 years of educational experience, starting as a school secretary and ending as a district administrator. Currently, she is a SPDG Coordinator and Coach at the ALSDE-SES. Ms. Hines brings 12 years of experience as a special education teacher, four years as a psychometrist, and 14 years in district administration. As an administrator, Ms. Hines was a Special Education Coordinator, 504 Coordinator, Interim Federal Programs, Title IX Coordinator, Data Governance Coordinator, Grant Writer for Special Projects and Office of

School Readiness, and the Coordinator of Data Governance. She was the former President of CLAS, AL CEC, and the AL Association for 504 Coordinators.

### **OTHER PROJECT PERSONNEL AND PARTNERS**

**Ms. Rebecca Hardiman, M.S.** (.15 FTE) will serve as the *Coaching Coordinator for Goals 1 & 2*. Ms. Hardiman has served as an SSIP and SPDG Coach at the ALSDE-SES for the past seven years. This experience has guided her informed support for the SPDG/SSIP schools in both programmatic and fiscal aspects of the grant. Additionally, she was a special education and general education teacher for 11 years, followed by ten years as a district administrator. She has worked as a Special Education Coordinator, College and Career Ready Implementation Team Coordinator, Section 504 Coordinator, and English Learner Program Coordinator. She is also the past President of the AL Association of 504 Coordinators.

**Ms. Pam Gann, Ed.S.** (.50 FTE) will serve as a *SPDG Implementation Specialist*. Ms. Gann currently serves as a SPDG Coach at the ALSDE-SES. She is a retired educator with 32 years of experience in public education as a special education teacher, Assistant Principal, and Special Education Coordinator/Assistant Superintendent. Ms. Gann also serves as an Adjunct Professor at Jacksonville State University, supervising and instructing potential special education teacher candidates. Before retiring, Ms. Gann served on the district improvement team and as a district member to individual school improvement committees. She has extensive experience conducting walkthroughs, targeting classroom teachers' reading and math instruction. Ms. Gann served as the 504 Coordinator and Response to Intervention Coordinator for many years.

**Tessie Bailey, Ph.D.** (15 days). Dr. Bailey from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) will serve as the Lead Trainer for Goal 1 activities. She has conducted MTSS training and consultation to local and state educators across the country through her role as Director of the



MTSS Center at AIR. She is also a content advisor for the National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII) and National Center on System Improvement (NCSI). She has engaged in similar work for over 20 years, focusing on MTSS-related content to preservice educators at the university level for over 10 years.

## **V: ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES & MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **A. The relevance and demonstrated commitment of each partner in the proposed project to the implementation and success of the project. (Adequacy 2i)**

The ALSDE has adequate staffing, facilities, equipment, and infrastructure to support a SPDG over the next five years. Since 1998, the ALSDE has successfully administered a SIG/SPDG project, and therefore has demonstrated its capacity to execute the proposed project. ALSDE's Special Education Services will implement project activities. The ALSDE-SES currently manages state and federal resources to serve approximately 73,000 students with disabilities ages 5K-21. The ALSDE provides the necessary office space for the project and infrastructure, including fiscal, accounting, human resources, and technology support.

The ALSDE-SES has the necessary technology and videoconferencing capabilities to implement the project activities. Furthermore, the SPDG facilitates accessibility to professional learning via a strong technological infrastructure, including online resources created for asynchronous learning and virtual training opportunities. These technologies allow schools and families in rural and remote areas access to high-quality resources and training. Additionally, the ALSDE maintains a website that meets government accessibility standards.

The ALSDE will provide the necessary equipment for the SPDG to create documents in accessible formats. Materials, developed by SPDG activities, will be available in alternate formats such as audiotape, large print, and Braille, upon request. Services, including interpreters,

or other assistance will be provided as needed. Trainings will be held at accessible locations, and for virtual trainings, closed captioning will be utilized. As noted in the Budget Narrative, the project will contract with a vendor for closed captioning services upon funding and will use the ALSDE's vendor for interpretation and sign language services. These contracts demonstrate the project's commitment to ensuring project activities are barrier-free.

## **COMMITMENT OF PARTNERS**

The AL SPDG uses its partnerships throughout the state and nation in order to provide high-quality professional learning. Appendix C includes the letters of support for project partners.

**ALSDE Partners. AL-MTSS.** Housed within the ALSDE Instructional Services Section, AL-MTSS is a comprehensive framework that encompasses the academic, behavioral, physical, mental health and wellness, and social-emotional needs to support the whole child. AL-MTSS will begin training and coaching to MTSS Cohort 1 districts beginning in fall 2022. Through its partnership with the AL SPDG, AL-MTSS will provide initial district planning and team development prior to the AL SPDG cohorts, as well as non-academic supports in Goal 1 AL SPDG schools.

Career and Technical Education. The Career and Technical Education program within the Office of Student Learning at the ALSDE works to develop the skills of K-12 students and strives to prepare them for postsecondary learning and workforce opportunities. The ALSDE-SES will partner with Career and Technical Education to serve on the State Implementation Team, review resources regarding community-based work programs (Obj. 2.2 and 2.5), as well as share results and resources with stakeholders (Obj. 2.6). This collaboration will ensure services preparing students with disabilities for work after graduation are complementary and not duplicative.

**Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS).** ADRS houses both the AL Early

Intervention System (AEIS) and the Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS). In collaboration with schools throughout AL, VRS provides transition services to assist students with disabilities achieve their employment and education goals. The AL SPDG will partner with ADRS to disseminate assessments to districts and to align activities (Obj. 2.5 and 2.8)

**Alabama’s Early Intervention System.** AEIS (Part C) under the ADRS, has operated since 1986 and supports approximately 8,000 families. AEIS is a comprehensive service delivery system that incorporates evidence-based practices and initiatives in support of children with disabilities, birth to age three, and their families. AEIS will provide training and coaching to EI providers to ensure they provide high-quality services to families with fidelity (Obj. 2.1).

**Alabama PTI.** Alabama Parent Education Center (APEC). The Alabama PTI, APEC, has provided training and information to parents about special education since 2002. APEC assists schools to strengthen the home-school partnership to improve educational outcomes. APEC will work with families and school staff on early literacy supports, transition training (Obj. 2.2 and 2.4), resource development (Obj. 1.3, 1.6, 2.5, and 2.8), and coordination of annual family/parent interviews (Obj. 2.6).

**AL IHE.** Auburn University. Auburn University has been preparing teachers for over 100 years. Drs. Margaret Flores and Vanessa Hinton, special education faculty in the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling, have extensive experience with reading and special education. The AL SPDG will partner with Auburn University to develop and offer training for teachers and leaders in Goal 1 on SDI and intensive reading supports (Obj. 1.2).

University of Alabama. Located at the University of Alabama, the Evidence-Based International Early Intervention Office is a unit within the Department of Education and Multiple Abilities. The unit provides family-centered, early intervention using the Routines-Based Model

(RBM). Dr. McWilliam at the University of Alabama will continue to provide Routines-Based Model training modules for the project's EI providers.

**Local Education Agency (LEA) Partners.** During the five-year funding period, the SPDG will work with districts located throughout the state, including rural and urban districts. As part of Goals 1 and 2, the ALSDE will provide subcontracts to LEAs that participate in AL SPDG training for participant costs, substitute teachers, and training materials. Goal 2 cohort districts will receive additional funding to purchase an evidence-based transition curriculum and launch school-based work programs. Letters of support from these districts are in Appendix C.

**External Evaluation.** Alabama statute requires all contracts over \$25,000 be filled through a request for proposal process. Upon notification of funding, ALSDE will allow bids for the project evaluation services as described in the Quality of the Project Evaluation. The current evaluator for both the AL SPDG and SSIP initiatives is Center Street Consulting, led by Dr. Jocelyn Cooledge. Dr. Cooledge has led evaluations of OSEP-funded state-level grants in ten states, including external evaluations for SIG/SPDG projects in six states.

**National Consultants.** American Institutes for Research (AIR). The AL SPDG will also contract with the AIR MTSS Center to provide training on MTSS components (Obj. 1.2). Tessie Rose Bailey, Ph.D., the Director of the MTSS Center and the PROGRESS Center will serve as the national MTSS consultant and provide training, as well as further develop the capacity of SPDG Coaches to support MTSS implementation (Obj. 1.6). Dr. Bailey also works with the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) and National Center on Intensive Interventions (NCII), bringing additional areas of expertise to the AL SPDG.

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT). The OSEP-funded NTACT works to increase postsecondary education enrollment, graduation rates and community

engagement for students with disabilities. The AL SPDG will partner with NTACT to provide statewide training on elementary transition (Obj. 2.2) and training to cohort districts, schools, and families on secondary transition topics (Obj. 2.4). Additionally, NTACT trainers will provide consultations with Goal 2 staff and Coaches to support the implementation of secondary transition programming (Obj. 2.8).

The IRIS Center. The IRIS Center offers resources and services suitable for a wide variety of educational needs, including MTSS, reading, and secondary transition. The IRIS Center develops these resources to aid all students, particularly those with disabilities. The AL SPDG will use the IRIS Center modules and other resources for both Goals 1 and 2.

Region 7 Comprehensive Center. The Center, located with the RMC Research Corporation, provides technical assistance to Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi. Through their partnership with the ALSDE, the Region 7 Comprehensive Center staff will support ALSDE staff in their provision of training and coaching of reading (Obj. 1.6).

**Commitments of Personnel**

For required partners (i.e., APEC, Auburn University, and LEAs) the ALSDE will issue contract activities upon funding. For other partners, the ALSDE will seek formal partnerships to implement SPDG activities. Table 9 demonstrates the personnel loading chart by objective for key staff and contractors. Days are listed for one year (240 days).

**Table 9: AL SPDG Personnel Loading Chart: Objectives by Days**

| <i>Objectives</i>   | <b>PH</b> | <b>CM</b> | <b>TS</b> | <b>TM</b> | <b>SH</b> | <b>RH</b> | <b>PG</b> | <b>Coach</b> | <b>ET</b> |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| <i>1.1 (Select)</i> | 0         | 9         | 5         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 8         | 0            | 2         |
| <i>1.2 (Train)</i>  | 2         | 12        | 15        | 3         | 22        | 4         | 10        | 58           | 8         |
| <i>1.3 (Coach)</i>  | 2         | 17        | 25        | 3         | 8         | 4         | 10        | 180          | 7         |

| <b>Objectives</b>    | <b>PH</b> | <b>CM</b> | <b>TS</b> | <b>TM</b> | <b>SH</b> | <b>RH</b> | <b>PG</b> | <b>Coach</b> | <b>ET</b> |
|----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| <i>1.4 (Data)</i>    | 2         | 18        | 27        | 3         | 8         | 0         | 6         | 92           | 22        |
| <i>1.5 (Leaders)</i> | 2         | 16        | 15        | 2         | 12        | 4         | 6         | 109          | 7         |
| <i>1.6 (SEA)</i>     | 3         | 18        | 16        | 6         | 7         | 6         | 16        | 40           | 5         |
| <i>2.1 (Part C)</i>  | 1         | 7         | 0         | 8         | 2         | 2         | 2         | 48           | 8         |
| <i>2.2 (Elem.)</i>   | 2         | 10        | 0         | 10        | 4         | 0         | 2         | 24           | 6         |
| <i>2.3 (Select)</i>  | 0         | 8         | 0         | 5         | 0         | 0         | 8         | 0            | 2         |
| <i>2.4 (Train)</i>   | 2         | 14        | 3         | 15        | 22        | 0         | 10        | 48           | 8         |
| <i>2.5 (Coach)</i>   | 2         | 17        | 3         | 16        | 8         | 4         | 12        | 170          | 7         |
| <i>2.6 (Data)</i>    | 2         | 18        | 3         | 20        | 8         | 0         | 6         | 98           | 28        |
| <i>2.7 (Teams)</i>   | 2         | 16        | 3         | 17        | 12        | 4         | 6         | 111          | 7         |
| <i>2.8 (Collab)</i>  | 2         | 12        | 4         | 12        | 7         | 8         | 18        | 30           | 5         |

*PH= Patrice Harvill; CM= Celeste Minor; TS= Teri Shriver; TM= Tiffany Moore; SH= Sonja Hines; RH= Rebecca Hardiman; PG= Pamela Gann; Coach= SPDG Goal 1 and Goal 2 Coaches (approx. 4.2 FTE); ET= Evaluation Team*

**C. The budget is adequate to support the proposed project. [Adequacy 2ii]**

Using prior fiscal experience and the prior SPDG budgets, the ALSDE has determined the estimated costs to implement the AL SPDG in terms of salaries, benefits, and other direct costs. The ALSDE is requesting \$1,139,436 for the SPDG project. This amount, with an in-kind contribution from the ALSDE, will provide adequate funds for staff, travel, subcontracts, SPDG consultants, and project operational costs. The application Budget and Budget Narrative detail the breakdown of costs by expense category and the justification of costs. Salaries, benefits, travel, and other expenses are set by the state’s salary schedules, state travel allowances, and

other state policies. As required, 90% of the projected costs will support professional learning.

The ALSDE will provide significant in-kind contributions using IDEA Part B discretionary funds, which will subsidize the costs of the SPDG. The ALSDE-SES will contribute the salary and benefits for the SPDG Principal Investigator (.10 FTE), Director (.80 FTE), four Coordinators (1.65 FTE), the Implementation Specialist (.50 FTE), and SPDG Coaches and support staff positions (approximately 5.7 FTE). The ALSDE recognizes the importance of the SPDG, and the importance of providing personnel and funds to sustain the project. For example, AL's 2012 SPDG had a co-teaching initiative, which is now supported through the state's SSIP activities and sustained with state discretionary funds.

**C. The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks. [Adequacy (iii)]**

The AL SPDG management structure is based on the State Implementation and Scaling-Up of Evidence-Based Practices (SISEP) model of collaborative implementation partnerships (Fixsen & Blasé, 2008). The SPDG Team, consisting of the AL SPDG Director, four Coordinators (MTSS, Transition, Professional Learning, and Coaching Coordinators), and the Implementation Specialist, will lead daily operations. The Team will be responsible for implementing the project work scope: managing communication among ALSDE departments and stakeholders; meeting federal reporting requirements; overseeing the evaluation of grant activities; hiring personnel; developing contracts; and ensuring fiscal responsibility of the grant. At a minimum, the Team will meet bi-weekly. The SPDG Project Director (C. Minor) will work with the SDE Accounting to manage the SPDG budget. All accounting procedures will be conducted in accordance with EDGAR and state rules.

The AL SPDG Principal Investigator (P. Harvill) will oversee personnel and communication with ALSDE leadership. The SPDG Director (C. Minor) will oversee the SPDG Coordinators and Coaches, as well as contracts and fiscal management. Two of the Coordinators have general oversight of specific content. The MTSS Coordinator (T. Shriver) will assist the Director with selection activities, lead the Community of Practice, assist with reading supports; conduct external fidelity checks, provide supports to district and school leaders, and identify and develop MTSS resources. Similarly, the Transition Coordinator (T. Moore) will work with AEIS for Part C data collection; coordinate the elementary-level transition supports; assist with cohort selection; liaise with APEC and family engagement activities; conduct external fidelity checks with the Evaluator; and identify and develop resources.

Other SPDG personnel will provide supports across goals. The Professional Learning Coordinator (S. Hines) will organize training opportunities; work with trainers regarding training logistics; communicate with training participants; conduct training fidelity checks; assist with developing marketing materials; and provide supplemental coaching supports, as needed. The Coaching Coordinator (R. Hardiman) will identify professional learning needs for SPDG Coaches and provide training to Coaches on implementation science, as well as conducting fidelity of implementation checks of Coaches. The Implementation Specialist (P. Gann) will assist with cohort selection; the SPDG website; identifying and developing resources for both goals; and assisting the Director with fiscal tasks. While not a direct member of the SPDG Team, the External Evaluator will work closely with the Director and other Team members to collect data and evaluate project progress and outcomes.

The SPDG Team responsibilities are defined, however the Director and Coordinators share assignments with the nine SPDG coaches. As a result, no individual is solely responsible for a



task, and this structure buffers the project against any staffing changes.

The SPDG Team and coaches, with project partners, will implement the project work scope. The activities, milestones, personnel, and timelines for project activities can be found in Appendix A. This table will be a guiding document for tracking process measures and measuring progress toward the project goals.

**D. How the applicant will ensure that a diversity of perspectives are brought to bear in the operation of the proposed project, including those of parents, teachers, the business community, a variety of disciplinary and professional fields. [Adequacy (iv)]**

Through its work with the SSIP/SPDG, Alabama has established a system of stakeholder involvement. The AL SPDG uses four primary stakeholder groups to ensure a diversity of perspectives are informing the implementation and evaluation of the project: The State Implementation Team and partners in other organizations; the SPDG Stakeholder Team; districts and schools; and parents/families. These groups include a broad spectrum of expertise and constituencies, including consumers, families, educators, state partners, and organizations.

The State Implementation Team will share information from ALSDE offices or sections including AL-MTSS, the State Transition Team, the 619 Coordinator, and Career and Tech Education; ADRS for Part C and secondary transition; and participating Auburn University faculty. The State Implementation Team members bring a broad range of stakeholder input and meetings will give the SPDG Team the opportunity to share about aligned work. To receive further feedback, each quarterly State Implementation Team meeting will include time for SPDG Coaches to share successes and concerns from districts, as well as feedback from the AL Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP).

The AL SPDG will redevelop its Stakeholder Team as the focus of the project has shifted.

The Stakeholder Team, who will meet at least annually, will be comprised of representatives across the state and in various roles, including families of SWD, teachers, and other community members. This team will ensure SPDG activities work in tandem with other state services and provide a diversity of perspectives to share with the State Implementation Team.

Supported by State Implementation and Scaling-Up of Evidence-based Practices (SISEP) practices, DITs/SITs and Transition Teams will be supported within Goal 1 and 2 cohort districts. As described in the Project Design, these groups will provide oversight for the implementation of professional learning in their buildings and districts; remove barriers to implementation; and provide organizational support for sustainable professional learning. The DITs and SITs will provide feedback regarding needed changes to the State Implementation Team conversations with SPDG coaches, training events, networking meetings, and evaluation data.

Both the educators and families will interact to impact AL students. APEC is instrumental in providing knowledge and skills to parents and will assist parents with supporting transition activities. Other feedback will be sought through the representation of parents on DITs and SITs, parent surveys, and parent interviews (Obj. 2.6).

**E. The potential for continued support of the project after Federal funding ends, including the demonstrated commitment of appropriate entities to such support. [Adequacy (v)]**

The AL SPDG is designed to include support mechanisms for post-grant continuation. ALSDE-SES have had success at sustaining successful SPDG activities after grant funding, including co-teaching and behavior/PBIS supports, by using SSIP project oversight and state discretionary funds. The ALSDE is making a large investment in personnel and resources up-front to braid in-kind supports with SPDG funding, as the ALSDE seeks to ensure the

reading/MTSS and transition supports are implemented, evaluated, and deemed to be successful. Without SPDG funding, the ALSDE-SES would not be able to test or implement these activities and determine success.

The project will build capacity and knowledge at every level (state, region, district, and school). The capacity begins with the SPDG staff through training and coaching supports (Obj. 1.3, 1.6, 2.5, and 2.8). Leaders, Implementation Teams, and Transition Teams will receive professional learning (Obj. 1.2-1.3, 1.5, 2.4-2.5, 2.7). Lastly, the project will build capacity among teachers, other school staff, and families (Obj. 1.2-1.4, 2.1-2.2, 2.4-2.6).

The concept of the SPDG model was designed to provide a mechanism for teams to sustain practices. The implementation model with built-in feedback loops creates a framework of communication and support between districts and the state that follows the Policy Enhanced Practice and Practice Informed Policy (PEP-PIP) cycles (MIN, 2010). Creating and building capacity among DITs/SITs and Transition Teams will ensure districts have procedures to continue building capacity among staff. While not the same program, 84% of current SPDG transition implementers were able to demonstrate and sustain fidelity of transition activities.

Objectives 1.3, 1.6, 2.5, and 2.8 will lead to new resources and a centralized location for accessing resources for coaching in order to promote knowledge and awareness among schools, and families of students with disabilities. The development of these resources, which will continue to be available after funding, will also foster collaborations among the ALSDE and its partners. The collaborative interactions can lay the groundwork for future post-SPDG work.

Activities to determine the common indicators for sustainability are built into the project's evaluation (Obj. 1.4, 2.6). Data related to sustainability will be reviewed annually and shared with stakeholder groups, as outlined in the Evaluation section below.

## **VII: QUALITY OF THE PROJECT EVALUATION**

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The AL SPDG evaluation will be a coordinated effort. The ALSDE-SES is committed to supporting evaluation efforts and will obligate funds for external evaluation services. In compliance with state regulations, the ALSDE-SES will submit a Request for Proposal for an External Evaluator (see Adequacy of Resources and Management section for a description). Almost 8% of the SPDG budget is included for evaluation services, as the ALSDE-SES values the role of an External Evaluator. The External Evaluator will oversee the evaluation activities and work closely with the Director and Coordinators to manage the data collection of training, coaching, fidelity, and outcome data.

### **A. The extent to which the methods of evaluation are thorough, feasible, and appropriate to the goals, objectives, and outcomes of the proposed project. [Eval. 2]**

Evaluation is an essential and integral component of the AL SPDG, and SPDG staff are committed to improving implementation and using evaluation findings to guide decisions about the project. The AL SPDG evaluation will provide feedback to the SPDG Team and stakeholders. Feedback will consist of both qualitative and quantitative data, as the ALSDE-SES recognizes the importance of multiple measures and multiple methods to triangulate the data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

Formative evaluation measures will consist of progress measures to ensure accountability and effectiveness. The AL SPDG Evaluator will examine whether activities are implemented as proposed and the grant is meeting its timelines. Other formative data will be collected on an ongoing basis to determine effective activities; barriers to implementation; unintended results;

and activities moving the SPDG toward its goals. Formative data are key for providing ongoing feedback to the SPDG Team and stakeholders, in order to revise and refine project plans.

The summative evaluation will examine the extent to which the objectives and goals were met, and the outcomes of the project. These data will provide information on the project's impact on districts, schools, families, and students. Outcome data will be collected for the project's Annual Performance Report to demonstrate which outcomes have been achieved, and impact evaluation data will be provided in the project's Final Performance Report.

When developing the direction and goals and objectives of the proposed project, the ALSDE-SES sought to ensure there were clear connections between the project goals and the desired outcomes. A logic model for each goal, depicting the expected short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes, was created (Appendix A). The development of the logic model helped to formulate the proposal and the AL SPDG Evaluation Plan (Table 10 below). The Evaluation Plan consists of the evaluation questions for each objective, however, there are five overarching questions for the AL SPDG:

- 1) Have project activities been implemented with *fidelity* as outlined in the proposal?
- 2) Are *diverse perspectives* represented in both the implementation and feedback?
- 3) What resources, contacts, and other *outputs* were the result of the work?
- 4) Were the specified *outcomes* achieved, and what factors influenced the outcomes?
- 5) How can the activities and structures of the AL SPDG be *sustained*?

In addition to these overarching questions, the AL SPDG Evaluator will assess, analyze, and review objective-specific evaluation questions. An abridged AL SPDG Evaluation Plan to measure the project's progress toward its goals, as well as answering the overarching questions listed above can be found below. The Plan includes evaluation questions, methods and

instruments used, persons responsible, and timing of the data collection. Several elements of this Evaluation Plan have been implemented through prior ALSDE-SES evaluations and have been found to be feasible and effective, although the plan will be reviewed upon funding. Any new protocols or instruments will be designed, tested, and implemented in accordance with standard evaluation protocols (Dillman, Smyth, & Melani; 2014; Fowler, 2008).

The Evaluation Plan is based on Guskey's (2000) five levels of professional learning: 1) Participant reactions (attitudinal measures); 2) Participant Learning (knowledge measures); 3) Organization and support change (behavior measures, outcomes); 4) Participant's use of new knowledge and skill (behavior measures, outcomes); and 5) Student learning outcomes. Measuring these five levels yields data measuring the effectiveness of the AL SPDG.

**Table 10: AL SPDG’s Abridged Evaluation Plan**

| <b>Objective</b> | <b>Evaluation Questions</b>   | <b>Method and Instrument</b>  | <b>Persons Responsible</b>  | <b>Timing</b>         |
|------------------|---|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1.1-1.5          | Were 85% of Goal 1 activities conducted as proposed each year?                                | Review of Management Plan and SPDG Team meetings.   | Evaluator,<br>SPDG Director | 2 times/year          |
| 1.1, 2.3         | Did 80% of applicants report more knowledge about project expectations?                       | Stakeholder Survey question for district and school leaders.                                | Evaluator                   | May, annually         |
| 1.1              | Were at least 21 districts selected by the end of the project?                                | Count of districts selected, by region and size of district.                                | Director                    | April, annually       |
| 1.2, 2.2,<br>2.4 | Did 80% of participants view the training as high-quality, relevant, and useful?              | Analyze post-evaluation ratings and comments for each training.                             | Evaluator                   | December,<br>annually |
| 1.2, 2.2,<br>2.4 | Did training participants average a 15% gain, or at least 75%, on training learning measures? | Analyze learning measure gains on pre/post or retrospective-post training evaluation forms. | Evaluator                   | Ongoing               |
| 1.2              | Did 75% of educators and families have greater awareness about reading/MTSS?                  | Analyze training evaluation forms.<br>Interviews with parents.                              | Evaluator,<br>APEC          | Summer &<br>September |

| <b>Objective</b> | <b>Evaluation Questions</b>  | <b>Method and Instrument</b>   | <b>Persons Responsible</b> | <b>Timing</b>     |
|------------------|--|--|----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1.2, 2.2, 2.4    | Were 90% of trainings delivered with fidelity?   | Observe trainings and complete HQPD v. 3 for each training.                      | PL Coordinator             | Ongoing           |
| 1.2              | Do 80% of Goal 1 participants report increased capacity to implement progress monitoring, EB reading, SDI, and MTSS? | Analyze Stakeholder Survey content capacity questions by audience.               | Evaluator                  | May, annually     |
| 1.3, 2.5         | Did 80% of coaching participants report coaching enhanced their skills?  | Analyze Stakeholder Survey questions for coaching                                | Evaluator                  | May, annually     |
| 1.3, 2.5         | Were 90% of the coaches able to coach with fidelity?   | Observe and complete High Quality Coaching Assessment for coaches.               | Coaching Coordinator       | Nov-Jan, annually |
| 1.3, 2.5         | Were briefs, videos, and other resources developed and disseminated, and did 75% rate resources as high-quality?     | Counts of products developed and disseminated by content. Pop-up website survey. | Implementation Specialist  | Quarterly         |
| 1.4, 2.6         | Did 80% of cohort participants report more skills re. data-based decision making?                                    | Analyze Stakeholder Survey capacity question.                                    | Evaluator                  | May, annually     |



| <b>Objective</b> | <b>Evaluation Questions</b>   | <b>Method and Instrument</b>   | <b>Persons Responsible</b> | <b>Timing</b>         |
|------------------|---|--|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1.4              | After 3 years of implementation, do 70% of cohort schools demonstrate fidelity of intervention? | TFI-Reading collected by MTSS Coordinator in meetings with SIT and SPDG Coaches. | MTSS Coordinator           | Jan.-Feb., annually   |
| 1.4              | After 3 years of implementation, do 70% of districts demonstrate fidelity?                      | District Capacity Assessment collected with DIT and Coaches.                     | MTSS Coordinator           | Jan.-Feb., annually   |
| 1.5, 2.7         | Did SIT/DIT/Transition members and administrators report more collaboration?                    | Analyze Stakeholder Survey collaboration question.                               | Evaluator                  | May, annually         |
| 1.5, 2.7         | Did DIT/SITs and Transition Teams score 80% or higher on team functioning?                      | Analyze Team Functioning Scale results & compare prior year's data.              | Evaluator                  | Nov., annually        |
| 1.5              | Did 75% of families report improved communication about MTSS?                                   | Analyze Stakeholder Survey parent questions. Parent Interviews                   | Evaluator                  | May, annually & Sept. |
| 1.6, 2.8         | Do 90% of SPDG Team & Coaches have greater capacity to support cohorts?                         | Stakeholder Survey of staff and focus group of coaches.                          | Evaluator                  | May, annually & Oct.  |
| 1.6              | Did the website MTSS resources page have  | Review GA4 Google analytics  | Implementation             | Quarterly             |

| <b>Objective</b> | <b>Evaluation Questions</b>   | <b>Method and Instrument</b>   | <b>Persons Responsible</b> | <b>Timing</b>           |
|------------------|---|--|----------------------------|-------------------------|
|                  | at least 5,000 visitors per year?   | dashboard.   | Specialist                 |                         |
| Goal 1           | Do 75% of participants report more use of progress monitoring, EB reading strategies, SDI, and data-based decision making?              | Analyze Stakeholder Survey behavior changes by questions & by audience.  | Evaluator                  | May, annually           |
| Goal 1           | Do educators report greater collaboration & data-based decisions about students?  | Analyze Stakeholder Survey data.<br>Interviews w/ sample of staff.   | Evaluator                  | May, annually<br>& Oct. |
| Goal 1           | Do school's screening data show improvements in reading scores for SWD after 1 year? For all students?                                  | Analyze sample of de-identified classroom screening data by disability for fall to spring gains.   | Coaches,<br>Evaluator      | June-Aug.,<br>annually  |
| Goal 1           | Do state ACAP results for Reading, Literary Text, and Informational Text show improvements in cohort schools for SWD? For all students? | Review ACAP achievement data for school assessment data by content.<br>Calculate gap for subgroups and percent in "on-track" and "prepared." | Evaluator                  | Aug., annually          |
| 2.1-2.8          | Were 85% of Goal 2 activities conducted   | Review of Management Plan and  | Evaluator,                 | 2 times/year            |

| <b>Objective</b> | <b>Evaluation Questions</b>   | <b>Method and Instrument</b>   | <b>Persons Responsible</b> | <b>Timing</b>   |
|------------------|---|--|----------------------------|-----------------|
|                  | as proposed each year?  | SPDG Team meetings.  | SPDG Director              |                 |
| 2.1              | Did 75% of participating families report higher satisfaction with EI services?    | Survey of a sample of families receiving RBM EI services.            | EI Coordinator             | Jan., annually  |
| 2.1              | Are more families from underserved populations receiving EI services?             | Review tracking sheets to see counts and demographics of recipients. | Evaluator                  | June, annually  |
| 2.1              | Can 80% of EI providers receiving coaching demonstrate fidelity?                  | Calculate fidelity from Finesse-II observation data results.         | EI Coordinator             | March, annually |
| 2.1              | Did 75% of participating families report more prepared for Part C/B transition?   | Survey of a sample of families receiving RBM EI services.            | EI Coordinator             | Jan., annually  |
| 2.2              | Were at least 25 early transition resources identified or developed over 5 years? | Count of resources on website.<br>Activity Log data.                 | Implementation Specialist  | July, annually  |
| 2.2              | Did the early transition resources page receive 3,000 views per year?             | Review GA4 Google analytics dashboard.                               | Implementation Specialist  | Quarterly       |
| 2.3              | Were at least 18 districts selected by the  | Count of districts selected, by region                               | Director                   | April, annually |

| <b>Objective</b> | <b>Evaluation Questions</b>  | <b>Method and Instrument</b>  | <b>Persons Responsible</b> | <b>Timing</b>            |
|------------------|--|---|----------------------------|--------------------------|
|                  | end of the project?  | and size of district.   |                            |                          |
| 2.4              | Did 75% of families have greater awareness of transition content?  | Analyze Stakeholder Survey parent questions. Parent Interviews.         | Evaluator                  | May, annually & Sept.    |
| 2.4              | Do 80% of Goal 2 participants report increased capacity to implement transition services, curriculum, and prepare for PSO? | Analyze Stakeholder Survey content capacity questions by audience.      | Evaluator                  | May, annually            |
| 2.5              | Did 75% of participants rate SPDG transition resources as high-quality?  | Analyze Stakeholder Survey resources question. Parent interview.        | Evaluator                  | May, annually & Sept.    |
| 2.5              | Do more schools have school/community work options?  | Analyze Stakeholder Survey. Interview w/ sample of G2 teachers.         | Evaluator                  | May, annually & Nov-Feb. |
| 2.6              | After 3 years of implementation, do 70% of districts demonstrate fidelity with their transition programs?                  | AL Taxonomy for Transition collected with Transition Teams and Coaches. | Transition Coordinator     | Jan.-Feb., annually      |
| 2.6              | After 1 year, can 75% of teachers teach an   | Analyze AL Transition Teaching  | Evaluator                  | Dec.-Feb.                |

| <b>Objective</b> | <b>Evaluation Questions</b>  | <b>Method and Instrument</b>   | <b>Persons Responsible</b> | <b>Timing</b>   |
|------------------|--|--|----------------------------|-----------------|
|                  | EB transition curriculum with fidelity?  | Form self-assessment & observations.   |                            | annually        |
| 2.6 & 2.7        | Did 70% of parents report more satisfaction with transition services?<br><br>Improved communication? | Theme parent interview results for why satisfied, changes in services<br><br>changes in communication. | Evaluator                  | Sept., annually |
| 2.7              | Do districts and schools report more community partnerships?   | Count of Transition Team members, review of Team minutes.  | Transition Coaches         | May, annually   |
| 2.8              | Do 80% of State Imp. Team members report more knowledge and collaboration?                           | Score Frey Collaboration Survey data and knowledge measures.   | Evaluator                  | Jan., annually  |
| Goal 2           | Do parents report 55% of SWD in grades 7-12 participate in their IEP meetings?                       | Analyzed Indicator 8 AL Parent Survey by SPDG district/grade.  | Evaluator                  | Dec., annually  |
| Goal 2           | Did SPDG districts show gains in college & career ready scores after 3 years?                        | Analyze AL Report Card CCR data for districts compared to baseline.                                    | Evaluator                  | Aug., annually  |
| Goal 2           | After 3 years of implementation, do SPDG districts average 65% for Indicator 14b?                    | Analyze PSO Indicator 14b data compared to district baseline.  | Evaluator                  | Dec., annually  |

## **B. EVALUATION METHODS APPROPRIATE TO CONTEXT**

Alabama’s demographics indicate significant educational and economic differences across the state. The variability in needs suggests evaluation activities must adapt to fit the contextual needs of districts and schools. As Stufflebeam (2007) noted, the context for the evaluation involves the needs, assets, and barriers in which the project operates. Aligned with Stufflebeam’s checklist, the project evaluation addresses the context through multiple activities. The initial selection process, which gathers background information on applying districts and schools, will be reviewed to ensure diversity in location, size, population, and needs are reflected in the cohorts (Obj. 1.1, 2.3).

Differences in districts and schools will be reflected in the fidelity data collection. For Goal 1, the school fidelity tool (TFI-R) process will be conducted with the SPDG MTSS Coach, SPDG Coach, and SIT members. For Goal 2, the AL Taxonomy for Transition Planning will be completed by the SPDG Transition Coordinator, Coach, and Transition Team. For both goals, the completion of the fidelity forms with the input from the implementation teams will allow the SPDG Coordinators and Coaches to better understand the context and needs of the schools.

The Evaluator will work with the ALSDE and other stakeholders to conduct data “drill-downs” and determine the story behind the data by incorporating qualitative data. As noted in the AL SPDG Evaluation Plan, numerous tools include qualitative data, including the Activity Log, training surveys, focus groups, interviews, observations, and the AL SPDG Stakeholder Survey. The External Evaluator will interview administrators to further understand the contextual needs and barriers (Obj. 1.4, 2.6).

## **C. PROGRAM AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

The evaluation questions within the Evaluation Plan formulate key project and SPDG

program performance measures. The AL SPDG performance measures provide measurable data for both OSEP and the AL SPDG Team to determine the efficacy of the activities. Program performance measures (PPM) below describe the approach and will be reviewed with the Project Officer upon funding.

**PPM 1** reflects components of the AL SPDG professional learning system: selection of districts and schools; training; coaching; data systems to support decision making; and systemic leadership supports. To measure the components, the External Evaluator and SPDG Team will complete the Evidence-Based Professional Development Worksheet. PPM targets will reflect the OSEP-recommended increases in performance over years.

**PPM 2** reflects fidelity of intervention. As O'Donnell (2008) found, programs that implemented with fidelity were significantly more likely to achieve higher outcomes, and the AL SPDG will focus on activities progressing toward fidelity. For Goal 1, schools will complete the TFI-Reading, and by the end of three years of implementation, the target is 70% of schools will achieve fidelity. For Goal 2, schools will complete an AL-modified Taxonomy for Transition Planning, and at the end of three years of implementation, the target is 70% of schools will achieve fidelity.

**PPM 3** reflects the use of funds designed to sustain implementation. Using the AL SPDG Activity Log, the Evaluator tracks activities by personnel, school, and type of activity (coaching, teaming, data planning, etc.). Having this level of analysis, combined with the budget spreadsheets provided by the SPDG Director, will allow the project to determine whether 60% of funds are used for activities sustaining implementation.

**PPM 4** reflects student outcome measures. For Goal 1, the AL SPDG will use the state's ACAP achievement data in SPDG MTSS cohort schools. The target after three years of

implementation will be more students with disabilities in cohort schools will be in the “on-track” or “prepared” categories compared to the schools’ baseline data. For Goal 2’s PPM 4, the project will use post-school outcome data (SPP/APR Indicator 14b, the AL SiMR) to measure the outcome of the transition programming in districts. The target will be cohort districts will average 65% for their Indicator 14b after three years of implementation.

The project will also track project performance measures for determining progress and outcomes. A sample of performance measures are included in Table 11. These measures will be collected according to the project’s Evaluation Plan and reported as indicated below.

**Table 11: Sample of AL SPDG Performance Measures for Outputs and Outcomes**

| <b>Performance Measure</b>   | <b>Goal</b> |
|--|-------------|
| At least 400 staff have completed SPDG MTSS training.  | 1           |
| At least 40 parents participated in transition training per year.                                      | 2           |
| Training participants average 75% or higher on training learning measures.                             | 1 & 2       |
| 80% of coaching recipients report SPDG coaching enhanced their skills                                  | 1 & 2       |
| 70% of schools demonstrate fidelity of intervention by the end of 3 years.                             | 1 & 2       |
| DIT/SIT/Transition Teams average 80% or higher on the Team Functioning Scale                           | 1 & 2       |
| 80% of teachers report greater capacity to use progress monitoring data.                               | 1           |
| 80% of EI providers can demonstrate fidelity (80% or higher) on Finesse-II.                            | 2           |
| 55% of students (grades 7-12) in cohort districts participate in their IEP meetings.                   | 2           |
| 75% of family members report greater capacity to support child with transition.                        | 2           |
| After 3 years of implementation, SWD in SPDG schools average 5% higher on AL state reading assessment. | 1           |
| After 3 years of implementation, SPDG districts average 65% for Indicator 14b.                         | 2           |



## **PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK & REPORTING**

A continuous improvement cycle will guide the AL SPDG's review and continuation of activities and approaches. The Evaluation Plan depicts specific performance targets and data collection processes for each goal. Established performance measure benchmarks will help ensure ongoing progress toward meeting targets and allow for the description of incremental changes over time. The evaluators will monitor progress toward the performance targets as scheduled in the Evaluation Plan. The evaluators will analyze data for each performance measure using a mixed-method approach. For example, the performance measures will be complemented with qualitative data demonstrating how and why SPDG participants benefited from the project. Integrating both quantitative and qualitative analyses results in a more comprehensive depiction of the results.

Following the PEP-PIP cycle (Fixsen et al., 2009), ALSDE-SES staff recognize the importance of providing data and seeking feedback in order to make programmatic changes and determine the effectiveness of the AL SPDG. The feedback activities included in every objective allows for evaluation data to be formally reviewed by the SPDG Team. Through this evaluation review, the results will be used to generate ideas for improvements, suggest alternative ways to examine the data and discuss necessary procedural or programmatic changes.

The AL SPDG Team uses a transactional model of communication that allows bi-directional sharing and feedback accounting for differing perspectives and contexts. This model accounts for the expertise and experiences of both SPDG staff, project participants, and partners (see Adequacy of Resources Section D). Due to resources and time, the evaluation results will be reviewed first with the SPDG Team; followed by the AL SPDG State Implementation Team; and spiraling to the larger Stakeholder Team. This process allows for rapid corrections in activities

while maintaining a diversity of perspectives and contexts.

The External Evaluator will continue regular communications with the Director, SPDG Coordinators, and SPDG Coaches regarding the data. Formally, the ALSDE-SES SPDG Leadership Team meets monthly to review SPDG and SSIP progress and data, and the External Evaluator shares SPDG data at each meeting. The SPDG Leadership Team uses a 30-60-90 Day Plan to assess progress toward completion of activities. Additionally, the AL SPDG Coaches meet six times per year, and evaluation data collection and results are presented by the External Evaluator at each meeting. These regular meetings will allow the SPDG Team to act on any concerns in a short timeframe.

Through the selection process in each goal (Obj. 1.1 and 2.3) as well as through coaching and data systems activities (Obj. 1.3-1.5, 2.5-2.7), the AL SPDG gathers information on district, school, teacher, and family needs. This needs assessment helps inform the approach to coaching and DIT/SIT/Transition Team development. Subsequent coaching and planning will address the identified needs and improve the districts' and schools' readiness for capacity building and sustainability. The evaluation will also measure participant and stakeholder satisfaction with the AL SPDG, the fidelity of implementation, and outcomes of the SPDG. Outcome data will inform future cohort district and school activities, as well as training and support to families.

## **EVALUATION TIMELINES AND REPORTING**

Dates of evaluation activities can be found in the AL SPDG Evaluation Plan (Table 10). After the Evaluation Plan and performance measures are finalized in consultation with the SPDG Project Officer, the External Evaluator, SPDG Coordinators, and SPDG Coaches will collectively review the purpose of and timelines for planned evaluation activities and review their roles in providing feedback to the program. The External Evaluator will also develop a Data

Manual to include evaluation links and dates to ensure timely data collection.

The Evaluator or Director will present a biannual report for the SPDG Stakeholder Team. Sharing data to stakeholders ensures AL SPDG staff and stakeholders can make informed decisions about changes to the implementation of the activities and provide information to inform the story behind the data. Members of the SPDG Team and Stakeholder Team members will be responsible for communicating data and receiving feedback from assigned constituency groups.

The External Evaluator will compile and submit a monthly report or presentation to be shared at SPDG Leadership Team meetings, such as Activity Log data or fidelity data. The SPDG Team will consider the data to determine how activities are being implemented and whether they are successful. Annually, findings will be summarized in the SPDG Annual Performance Report.

Reports will include quantitative and qualitative data that provide periodic performance feedback and examine the effectiveness of the AL SPDG's training, coaching, resources, and other supports. In addition to traditional types of evaluation reports, the AL SPDG External Evaluator will develop one-page infographics with data summaries to be shared with the State Implementation Team and Stakeholder Team. The External Evaluator will also assist with the submission of the SPDG Annual Performance Report and Final Report to OSEP. The AL SPDG Team and External Evaluator meet each summer to conduct a comprehensive review of the data, determine any changes that need to be made, and celebrate successes.