The Illinois State Board of Education has stated that “in successful districts and schools, there is a collective commitment to collaboratively identify, plan,

implement, monitor, evaluate, and communicate changes necessary to continuously improve student learning for **all** students.” Further, it is essential to ensure that students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) have opportunities to benefit from high-quality instruction, to reach the same standards as all students, and to leave school prepared to successfully transition to post-school learning, living, and working. The Critical Components Tool for Special Education Programswas developed via an extensive literature review to assist school leaders in facilitating conversations, reviewing, and improving the quality of special education programs, services and supports as a key component of continuous improvement efforts at the district/cooperative/school levels.

Identify a site’s current implementation level (baseline analysis).

Identify areas that are effective and those in need of improvement.

Support the development of goals and action planning in critical areas of special education programming.

In summary, the purpose of the Critical Components Tool for Special Education Programsis to assist districts/cooperatives/schools with achieving the following goals:

This Critical Components Toolis meant to be used in conjunction with a continuous district/cooperative/school improvement process that reviews multiple

measures, including a variety of data and other assessment tools. It can be utilized in conjunction with the Illinois Quality Framework as a companion tool to look deeper into the area of special education and special education programming. The team may choose to complete the Critical Components Toolin its entirety, complete the screener, or select specific domains on which to focus. Action plans resulting from this analysis should be integrated with the district/cooperative/school improvement plan.

The Critical Components Tool for Special Education Programsoffers guidance to educators and administrators when developing,

implementing, and evaluating quality programs and services for students with an IEP. The Critical Components Toolidentifies 12 domains to consider for effective programs. There is an indicator under each domain and below that are descriptors of the indicator that define quality school experiences with the goal of improving post-school outcomes for all students with an IEP. The Critical Components Toolis designed to assist districts/cooperatives/schools to identify strengths and review practice ~~and~~ to identify and act on areas where improvement is desired or needed and should not be interpreted as a policy or regulation.

**Purpose:**







**DATE:**

**TEAM MEMBERS:**

A black background with blue text

Description automatically generated

**CRITICAL COMPONENTS TOOL FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

After each member has reviewed the Critical Components Toolindependently, schedule approximately one to two hours to meet as a team to discuss individual responses and reach agreement on the rating that best represents the status of implementation at the identified site. A team member should be identified as the notetaker to record the ratings for each item, supporting evidence, and team discussion. A facilitator to support administration of the Critical Components Tool also should be identified.

Complete the Critical Components Tool. The facilitator will identify each item and ask team members to indicate their individual rating by a show of fingers. (Not

implementing = 0, Emerging = 1, Implementing = 2, Exemplary = 3) If everyone agrees, the notetaker will record that rating. If team members have varying responses, discussion will be held until a consensus regarding the rating is reached. Discussion will be documented in the team discussion notes section. You must provide ~~Record~~ evidence supporting the ratings of “Implementing” and “Exemplary” only.

Implementation is occurring consistently in all settings without support and is a part of the district/cooperative/school culture.

Use the completed Critical Components Tool for Special Education Programsto analyze the results and identify areas of strength and challenges. Prioritize areas of

challenge and select items for action planning and/or further analysis. Develop goals to improve identified areas. Goals and action planning from your review should be integrated with the district/cooperative/school improvement plan.

Prior to meeting as a team, each team member must review the Critical Components Tooland independently rate each item on it. Each member’s review should be submitted to the team facilitator so the scores can be aggregated to identify areas of agreement and disagreement. Each team member should think about evidence that supports their rating. Should an item not be used within the district/cooperative/school, the team member and team should insert N/A in the evidence column of the Critical Components Tool.

**Instructions for Administration:**

Identify a team to complete the Critical Components Tool for Special Education Programs*.* This team should include a variety of stakeholder representative of both general and special education (e.g., administrators, teachers, support personnel, parents, students, a school board member, etc.). It could be an existing district/cooperative/school leadership team, or an ad hoc team developed for this specific purpose.

**Rubric for Evaluation:**

The following definitions describe each rating utilized on the Critical Components Tool for Special Education Programs*:*

**Not Implementing (0)**

No evidence of implementation.

**Emerging (1)**

Inconsistent evidence of implementation.

**Implementing (2) Evidence Required**

Implementation is occurring but requires ongoing support, professional learning, and/or further development.

**Exemplary (3) Evidence Required**

l. District/cooperative/school leaders ensure that curriculum, instruction, and assessment expectations are communicated to staff and students.

b. A continuous improvement plan that aligns with the district/cooperative/ school goals is developed and implemented.

**I. LEADERSHIP**

**CCT Indicator Descriptors**

**1. The district/cooperative/school establishes a culture of shared leadership, teamwork, and collaboration focusing on continuous improvement.**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

a. Special education staff are represented on district and building leadership teams.

c. A professional learning plan that aligns with the continuous improvement plan is developed and meets the needs of the staff.

d. District/cooperative/school leadership and all staff develop and communicate a common vision for specialized instruction in an ongoing and consistent manner.

e. Leadership proactively tracks and analyzes special education data.

f. There are district- and building-specific goals that include students with IEPs.

g. District/cooperative/school leaders allocate human and financial resources to support scheduling and planning time to ensure all students receive rigorous and appropriate instruction throughout the continuum of special education programs and services.

h. Follow-up and support for implementation of new initiatives or programs and maintenance of established programs are evident.

i. District/cooperative/school leaders promote an atmosphere conducive to increasing achievement of students with IEPs.

j. District/cooperative/school leaders understand and support programs for struggling learners.

k. A comprehensive coordinated program (literacy, math, behavior/social-emotional learning [SEL]) for students with IEPs exists and is implemented with fidelity.

b. The district/cooperative/school has established an internal procedure to research evidence-based practices focused on improving student

**II. MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS**

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**2. The district/cooperative/school implements a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) that integrates academic, behavior, and social-emotional instruction and intervention.**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

a. Educators collect and analyze data to identify individual students in need of additional supports and services.

b. Evidence-based interventions are provided in a timely manner to students needing more support and programming.

c. Progress monitoring data are collected and inform decisions about the effectiveness and/or need for modification to tiered based interventions/programs/practices/instruction/eligibility.

d. A problem-solving process is in place for students with IEPs.

e. Interventions are developed and implemented based on data.

f. Educators actively engage families in MTSS.

g. Documented intervention plans are developed based on verified reasons why students are not meeting expectations.

h. A three-tiered model of instruction/intervention is clearly defined across content areas, behavior/social-emotional domains, and grade levels.

i. Data on the fidelity of MTSS implementation are collected and analyzed.

j. Data-based problem solving is utilized for students across content areas, behavior/social-emotional domains, and grade levels.

k. Decision making guidelines are developed and utilized by problem solving teams at all tiers.

**III. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**3. A professional development plan is developed based on the needs of the staff and students and is aligned with the district/ cooperative/school continuous improvement plan.**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

a. Professional development is outcome focused, ongoing, and results driven.

h. Monitoring of carryover of professional development into the classroom.

performance and outcomes that results in the need for professional development.

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

c. Opportunities for professional development are differentiated and built into the regular school schedule.

d. Participation is expected of every member of the school community, including administration.

e. Professional development activities are facilitated and supported.

f. Professional development is provided for newly hired staff, including continued skill development and follow-up.

g. Job-embedded technical assistance is a critical element of professional development.

**IV. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

**4. The district/cooperative/school provides high-quality, inclusive programs and activities in a positive learning environment.**

a. Special and general education teachers engage in intentional, collaborative lesson planning to meet the needs of each student with an IEP.

b. The needs of the students are the primary consideration in the configuration of special education programs and services to be provided to students with IEPs.

c. Special and general education staff and administration demonstrate a high level of knowledge about implementing effective programs for students with IEPs.

d. Students with IEPs in inclusive settings are provided the accommodations and explicit, specially- designed instruction needed to progress in the curriculum.

e. Students participate in the general education environment, including curriculum and instruction, assessment, and social activities, based on individual student needs.

f. All students have access to field trips and extracurricular activities, with supports as needed.

g. The district/cooperative/school supports inclusion of all students by providing the whole educational community with training and ongoing assistance to support an inclusive environment.

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

h. Students are educated with their non-disabled peers in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent possible as determined by the IEP team.

i. Environmental access allows students with physical disabilities and/or sensory needs to participate in all activities.

j. High expectations for all students are clearly articulated and defined.

1. Programs are in place to help students make successful transitions of all types, including, but not limited to:
   * Home to school
   * School system to school system
   * Class to class
   * Program to program
   * Building to building
   * School to postsecondary

**V. ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**5. The district/cooperative/school establishes an assessment system that provides data for instructional planning and program evaluation.**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

a. Individual student data are used to inform and design instruction for students with IEPs to progress toward grade-level standards.

b. Rate of improvement data are used to project annual goals that will decrease the achievement gap.

c. Data from multiple sources is used to disaggregate and analyze outcomes for students with IEPs to improve schoolwide programs and interventions.

d. Data are presented in visual displays to support evaluation of student learning goals.

e. Data are used to determine the effectiveness of the instruction provided for all students and all student groups.

f. Teachers are trained to administer, score, and interpret assessment measures they administer.

g. Valid, reliable, efficient, and meaningful assessments are selected for specific purposes, including screening, diagnostics, progress monitoring, and measuring outcomes.

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

h. Curriculum-based assessments (both formative and summative) are used to monitor student progress.

i. Teachers use formative assessments aligned with the objectives of the lesson to inform instruction and monitor student progress.

1. The assessment system includes academic, behavior, and social- emotional data sources that address the following purposes:
   * Identify students at risk.
   * Determine why a student is at risk.
   * Monitor student progress.
   * Inform academic and social emotional instructional planning.
   * Determine attainment of goals.

**VI. INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES**

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

6. **Special education personnel provide specially designed instruction using evidence-based practices to ensure the opportunity for participation and progress in the general education curriculum.**

a. All students receive instruction in curriculum aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards.

b. IEPs are developed in consideration of grade-level standards.

c. Student data are used to support development of and changes to student IEPs.

d. A collaborative decision-making process is used by the IEP team to inform instruction and program decisions.

e. IEPs are implemented and reviewed by educators, families, and students to ensure that students are meeting their annual goals.

f. Evidence-based practices are implemented.

g. Instruction is individually planned and continually assessed to maximize student learning

h. Goal-directed, explicit instruction is used to teach academic and social-emotional content and skills.

i. Instructional groups are appropriate to support learner outcomes.

j. Individualized supports and structures are in place to meet the needs of students within the general education setting.

t. Each student has a meaningful communication system (i.e., verbal/augmentative and alternative communication/sign/pictures) that is efficient, effective, functional, and understandable across a variety of people, environments, and content.

m. The cistrict/cooperative/school supports principles of schoolwide positive behavior practices with a proactive approach to behavior.

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

k. Students with IEPs receive instructional materials in alternative formats at the same time as other students in the class receive their instructional materials.

l. Approved adaptations (accommodations and modifications) are individualized to meet each student’s needs and used during instruction and assessment.

n. Evidence-based intensive individualized interventions for students with chronic and severe behavioral difficulties are in place.

o. A comprehensive evaluation, including a Functional Behavioral Assessment, is conducted for each student with behavioral concerns to identify the function of the behavior.

p. Students with behavior supports have individualized positive behavior intervention plans that include all the required components.

q. Self-regulation and executive functioning are an integral part of instruction, compensatory strategies, and effective habits of mind.

r. Students’ individualized needs for assistive technology devices and services are considered, accommodated, and incorporated into the daily instruction plan for each student.

s. Students use technology with scaffolded supports that build toward independence.

**VII. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

7. **The district/cooperative/school establishes family and community partnerships that facilitate the development of students with IEPs.**

a. Families and community representatives are included in the process of district/cooperative/school continuous improvement planning.

**8. Special education personnel engage students in self-advocacy, determination of their own educational goals/plans, opportunities for career development, participation in work-based learning, and identification of necessary adult services and supports.**

j. The district/cooperative/school leaders work to sustain collaborative relationships with parents and community organizations to ensure that they are active members in the special education process including providing training on identified topics, as needed.

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

b. Parents/guardians actively participate in the development of their child/young adult’s IEP.

c. Families and students are respected as essential team members.

d. Parents understand what their child is expected to know and be able to do based on their individual needs.

e. Parents and educators actively discuss the educational needs of the student on an ongoing basis.

f. Parents have the information they need about effective strategies to support the learning of their child/young adult.

g. Parents have the information they need to support their young adult with transition from school to post-school activities.

h. Families, community providers, and school staff work together to assure appropriate individual plans for transitions experienced by students with IEPs.

i. Parent input and needs are collected through a variety of data-collection tools.

**VIII. TRANSITION SELF-ADVOCACY**

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

a. Students attend their IEP meetings.

b. The student actively participates in his/her IEP by providing input regarding decisions.

c. Students facilitate their own IEP meetings.

d. Students provide input regarding the development of academic and social goals as well as reporting on progress toward those goals.

e. Transition planning and exploration of postsecondary opportunities begins when students are 14½.

f. Students and their families actively participate in the transition planning process.

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

g. Students provide information on their choices, preferences, and interests during planning processes for the development of goals for adulthood.

h. Students engage in career planning; age-appropriate transition assessments; work-based learning opportunities; and the selection of courses of study to prepare them for postsecondary living, working, and learning.

i. Students with IEPs have the opportunity for community-based instruction and work experiences that are linked to the general curriculum and classroom instruction.

j. Students with IEPs and their families are provided early and clear information on graduation requirements and education to 22 years of age.

k. Students are provided instruction to develop lifelong learning skills, such as self-advocacy, social-emotional skills, higher-order thinking, employability skills, and consumer and life skills.

l. Schools provide timely student and family connections to postsecondary supports and services through local and state agency programs and services.

m. Community agencies and postsecondary schools are invited to actively participate in IEP meetings, as appropriate for individual students, in which transition services are discussed.

n. Staff and students develop a summary of performance document that is distributed to necessary adult providers that outlines needed services and supports, as well as current abilities.

o. There is evidence of enrollment in postsecondary education or training, employment, and independent living.

**IX. HEALTH AND SAFETY**

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**8. The district/cooperative/school plans for the health, safety, and well-being of students with IEPs.**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

a. Staff and administration receive specialized training in how to respond to mental health issues, including how to respond in non-academic settings and/or during out-of-school time.

b. A health care plan is written for all students with documented medical/health care needs.

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

c. All staff working with students with health care plans are trained, understand the content of the plan, and their role in implementation.

d. District/building safety/emergency plans are developed to address the safety needs of all students and staff in the building.

e. District/building safety/emergency plans include the special needs of students and staff (e.g., evacuation plan for a second story classroom for a student who uses a wheelchair with route, equipment, and designated personnel).

f. Students with special needs participate in all practice sessions for safety/emergency situations, including drills for fire, tornado, evacuation, and lockdown, etc.

**X. EDUCATOR QUALITY**

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**10. The district/cooperative/school employs highly qualified, licensed special education personnel who demonstrate expertise in working with students with IEPs**.

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

a. Staff hold full credentials/licensure and advanced degrees in content areas.

b. Staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and implemented.

c. All staff working with students with IEPs are knowledgeable about their responsibilities in implementing IEPs.

d. Staff collaborate with specialized instructional support personnel as specified in a student’s IEP or as needed.

e. All staff working with students with IEPs share and communicate common instructional outcomes.

f. There are systems in place that provide para-educators with instructional plans, training, and the necessary information to successfully support students with IEPs (e.g., disability-specific, IEP goals and objectives, adaptations).

g. Fading para-educator support is preplanned and outlined in a student’s IEP.

d. The district/cooperative/school engages strategically with federal and state agencies, cooperatives, other local entities, grantees, and outside organizations to assure that the needs of students with IEPs are met.

c. The district/cooperative/school conducts ongoing review of programs and services and, where needed, implement reform to ensure alignment with department and district/cooperative/school goals.

**11. The district/cooperative/school is following federal and state-identified indicators/mandates.**

h. All staff involved with students are trained in nonviolent crisis intervention techniques and district/cooperative/school policy for the use of restraint and time out, including the reporting procedure.

**XI. ACCOUNTABILITY**

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

a. Educators use the full continuum of services to ensure that students with IEPs are educated in the least restrictive environment.

b. Staff proactively track special education data and monitor for equity.

e. Facilities of the school district, special education cooperatives, or joint agreements used for special education services shall be comparable to those provided to the students in the general education environment.

f. Systematic procedures for identifying and evaluating the provision and need for special education and related services is in place.

g. The district/cooperative/school understands and implements special education policies, laws, and regulations with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

**XII. RESOURCE ALLOCATION**

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**12. The district/cooperative/school allocates finances and resources necessary and appropriate for the provision of equitable services for students with IEPs.**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

a. The district/cooperative/school provides adequate resources to support key initiatives.

b. Grant expenditures reflect excess costs necessary to provide equitable services to students with IEPs.

c. Administrators take proactive steps to coordinate and identify funding for special education programs and services within the larger school budget.

d. Funding for special education is understood to be an integral part of the whole school budget.

f. The district/cooperative/school maximizes special education revenues.

**Indicator and Descriptors**

**Not Implementing**

**Emerging**

**Implementing**

**Exemplary**

**Evidence**

e. The cistrict/cooperative/school has a fiscally responsible process to determine if special education services, supports, and program outcomes match the intended purpose of the expenditure.

g. The district/cooperative/school ensures that all purchases are completed in a cost-effective manner.

h. Each building allocates and leverages available resources (e.g., funding, personnel, time, facilities, technology) to respond to the needs of students with IEPs.

TEAM DISCUSSION NOTES

**LEADERSHIP**

**The district/cooperative/school establishes a culture of shared leadership, teamwork, and collaboration focusing on continuous improvement.**

**MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS**

**The district/cooperative/school implements a multi-tiered system of supports that integrates academic, behavior, and social-emotional instruction and intervention.**

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**A professional development plan is developed based on the needs of the staff and students and is aligned with the district/cooperative/school continuous improvement plan.**

**ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

**The district/cooperative/school establishes an assessment system that provides data for instructional planning and program evaluation.**

**LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

**The District/Cooperative/School provides high quality, inclusive programs and activities in a positive learning environment.**

**INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES**

**Special education personnel provide specially designed instruction using evidence-based practices to ensure the opportunity for participation and progress in the general education curriculum.**

**FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

**The district/cooperative/school establishes family and community partnerships that facilitate the development of students with IEPs.**

**TRANSITION SELF-ADVOCACY**

**Special education personnel engage students in self-advocacy, determination of their own educational goals/plans, opportunities for career development, participation in work-based learning, and identification of necessary adult services and supports.**

**HEALTH AND SAFETY**

**The district/cooperative/school plans for the health, safety, and well-being of students with IEPs.**

**EDUCATOR QUALITY**

**The district/cooperative/school employs highly qualified, licensed special education personnel who demonstrate expertise in working with students with IEPs**.

**ACCOUNTABILITY**

**The district/cooperative/school is in compliance with federally and state-identified indicators/mandates.**

**RESOURCE ALLOCATION**

**The district/cooperative/school allocates finances and resources necessary and appropriate for the provision of equitable services for students with IEPs.**