CRITICAL COMPONENTS TOOL FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION
EVALUATION REPORT
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Introduction

The following document summarizes an evaluation of the "Critical Components Tool for Special Education" (Critical Components Tool/CCT) and Screener as requested by the Special Education Department of the Illinois State Board of Education. The purpose of the evaluation is to determine the effectiveness of the CCT and Screener to identify areas for improvement.

To complete the evaluation, data was gathered from the following sources:

- District/Building Teams (DAT) who participated in the completion of the Critical Components Tool
- ISBE Representatives supporting Districts/Buildings who completed the Critical Components Tool

The following data collection tools were used to gather information:

- Feedback Form (See Appendix 1)
- Summary Feedback Questions (See Appendix 2)
- Completed CCT Screener
- Completed Critical Components Tool with Discussion Notes
- Data Analysis Tool
- Combined Action Plans provided to ISBE

District/Building Teams completed the Feedback Form following completion of the Critical Components Tool and Screener. ISBE Representatives supporting Districts/Buildings completed the Summary Feedback Questions following the completion of the Critical Components Tool. In addition, ISBE Representatives provided a copy of the Critical Components Tool with the

Discussion Notes, the CCT Screener, Data Analysis Tool and a copy of the Combined Action Plans developed as a result of participating in the process.

Seven districts utilized the Critical Components Tool and Screener supported by an ISBE Representative to identify areas of strength and challenge within their special education program. As a result of the process, districts were expected to develop an action plan resulting in improvements in identified areas. Districts were identified for participation by ISBE based on a number of factors including:

- Open findings of noncompliance and LEA Determinations
- Performance based on State Performance Plan (SPP) Compliance indicators 4,9,10,11,12,13 and Results Indicators 1, 5a, 6a
- The need for support in implementing the requirements of IDEA

The seven districts represented four of the seven regions within the state including districts in the north and central regions, both rural and urban. Each of the seven districts identified a team to complete the Critical Components Tool and Screener. Some districts utilized the District Assessment Team required as a part of the focus monitoring process, while others included additional members when completing the Critical Components Tool and Screener. Team sizes ranged from a low of 5 members to a high of 42 members with the average being approximately 10. The teams included a variety of stakeholders as indicated below:

- General (limited) and Special Education Teachers
- General and Special Education Administrators
- School Support Personnel
- Curriculum & Instruction Personnel

Only Chicago had parent participation and there was no student participation on the teams.

This is the first year that the districts used the directions contained in the introduction to the tool: "The team may choose to complete the *Critical Components Tool* in its entirety, select specific domains on which to focus, or complete the screener." As a result, five of the seven districts completed the screener.

The District Accountability Teams completed the forms in a variety of manners. Districts used the screener to prioritize the domains that they felt needed to be further studied. The information gathered was used as part of their planned response to the areas of non-compliance. Some completed the screener priority rankings to determine what CCT Tool domains they would complete in depth. Others completed the entire screener and still others not at all.

The Data Analysis Tool allowed the districts to record their strengths, challenges and areas for further analysis or action planning. It assisted the district teams to make determinations related to their combined plan and for completing the CCT Tools. It gave districts a direction to focus their energies in completing all of the CCT Tool and for parts of needed activities for their

Combined Plan. This document provided evidence of the depth of discussions that took place with the teams and assisted in the determination of activities listed in the combined plan.

Results of Feedback Form - District/LEA Teams

District/Building teams were asked to provide feedback regarding the Critical Components Tool by rating ten items and providing comments. (See Appendix 1). Twenty-two respondents representing all 7 districts provided feedback on the process and use of the CCT. Overall, the majority of ratings were in the agree to strongly agree range (3-5). (See Appendix 3).

The following are some of the strengths identified by the District/LEA representatives:

- The instructions were clear and easily understood.
- The purpose of the tool is clear and easily understood.
- The process used was conducive to reaching decisions for prioritizing activities for continuous improvement planning.
- The descriptors were detailed enough to understand and define indicators
- Completion of the tool was easy and effective

The following challenge and lowest rating noted by the District/LEA representatives:
- Completion of the Checklist through the team reaching consensus was effective, with one comment from the raters- "effective if all parties speak openly and honestly."

While the District/LEA Teams all completed the Feedback form, no additional written comments were provided.

It is interesting to note that Directors of special education and special education staff found the process to be the most helpful and generally provided the highest ratings on the feedback form. Conversely, Directors of Student Services and General administrators found the process to be the least helpful and provided the lowest ratings in comparison on the feedback form. None of the items were rated "1" and only a few respondents provided a rating of "2." No feedback forms were received from Superintendents even though they participated on the Team.

Results of Summary Feedback Questions - ISBE Representatives, Monitors

Six ISBE Representatives served as monitors for the seven districts that participated in the focused monitoring process for the 2021-2022 school year. As a part of the focused monitoring process all districts completed the "Critical Components Tool for Special Education" (CCT) and had the option to complete the CCT Screener. The ISBE Representatives served as coaches for the districts and were asked to respond to six questions (See Appendix 2) to provide feedback regarding the CCT.

In general, the ISBE Representatives indicated that the CCT was a useful tool that supported the development of continuous improvement plans for special education. The CCT provided an opportunity for teams to have in-depth conversations on a variety of topics related to improving outcomes for students with disabilities. It was noted the use of the CCT resulted in an opportunity to look at comprehensive program improvements.   The CCT required that

evidence be provided to support ratings which increased the validity of the self-assessment. In addition, the CCT easily correlated with existing district improvement planning and action steps to improve outcomes for students. A complete summary of responses provided by the ISBE Representatives can be found in Appendix 4.

The following are some of the strengths identified by the ISBE Representatives:

- The CCT provided an opportunity for teams to collaborate, plan, and come to consensus.
- The descriptors provided opportunities for meaningful discussion, reflection, and analysis.
- The organization of the CCT by topic areas (domains) allowed for increased focus on a particular topic and the identification of specific improvements.
- The CCT is comprehensive but adaptable to meet district needs.
- The CCT provided an opportunity for districts to evaluate their current practice, engage in focused conversation, and develop an action plan for improvement.

The following challenges were noted by the ISBE Representatives:

- Some districts experienced challenges with having enough time to thoroughly evaluate current levels of implementation and then prioritize areas of need.
- The timing of the monitoring process given that it occurs at the beginning of the year when many issues need to be addressed.

Summary of Evidence Reported

All seven districts completed the Critical Components Tool and developed a Combined Action Plan. These documents were submitted to provide data to evaluate the Critical Components Tool and Screener. Information was gathered from the CCT Screener, evidence section, data analysis form, and team discussion notes of the CCT tool. Four of the seven districts listed evidence when completing the CCT. Those four districts listed a variety of approaches and interventions when describing evidence in each domain. Many were specific to their district operations. Discussion notes contained a number of evidence-based practices available within the districts. A summary of the examples of evidence submitted included mandated requirements, a list of supports (both internal and external), and evidence-based practices that may be found in Appendix 5.

In addition, the ISBE Combined Action Plans were reviewed to identify evidence-based practices that were included. District action plans contained specific approaches that districts would use to address how they would correct currently identified issues. Information gathered from the action plans included protocols and processes being used, practices being implemented, and documents used for decision-making and reporting. A sampling of the evidence-based practices included in the Combined Action Plans can be found in Appendix 6.

Summary of Evaluation Results

General Strengths

- The CCT provides a comprehensive self-assessment that supports system change.
- The CCT provided an opportunity for rich discussions that identified program strengths and areas of challenge resulting in the development of district improvement plans and action steps.
- The process of self-assessment utilized in the CCT encourages collaboration, reflection, and consensus building.
- The CCT is comprehensive but allows for adaptation to district needs through the use of the Screener or the direct selection of identified Indicators by topic.
- The CCT captures critical components necessary for quality special education programming.

Recommendations for Change

- Include a parent representative on the team.
- Encourage the use of the Screener to focus the conversation on priority areas identified by the team allowing for a more thorough analysis and more efficient use of time.
- If completing the entire CCT, complete it in multiple sessions.
- Ensure that ISBE Representatives and DAT representatives are well versed in the Illinois Quality Framework (IQF) and are made aware of the alignment that exists between the IQF and the CCT.
- Encourage team members to independently complete the individual ratings of each item prior to meeting as a team to facilitate the process of coming to consensus and to efficiently use team time.
- Encourage the completion of the Evidence section as required on the CCT.
- Consider identifying the "evidence" first for each descriptor. This may make it easier for districts to assign a rating for each descriptor.
- Include specialists for specific domains (e.g. Health & Safety-nurse) on the team.
- Revise the evaluation instructions to more clearly identify who should be completing the feedback forms at the district/building level.

Comparison with Evaluation Results from 2020-2021 (See Evaluation Report June 30, 2021)

The results of the 2022 evaluation are very comparable to the 2021 evaluation report. The CCT continues to be perceived as a useful tool for the evaluation of special education programming and the development of improvement plans. Both evaluations note the CCT provides a platform for meaningful discussions, reflection, and the development of action steps. While this year, districts had the option of completing the screener and selecting identified domains for further study, four districts chose to complete the entire Critical Components Tool.