

Technical Assistance for Systematic Change: Lessons Learned from a National Technical Assistance Center

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A Quick Look: ■ Technical Assistance (TA) is defined as a broad range of support activities that help leaders and staff in a community build knowledge, skills, and motivation within their field to implement innovative solutions to challenges they encounter. Since 2021, the Department of Education has invested over \$40 million in TA research, but little research has looked into the effectiveness of the practice. The State Implementation and Scaling Up of Evidence-Based Practices (SISEP) initiative is a national TA center that uses scientific research to promote evidence-based educational practices that yield positive outcomes for students with disabilities. In 2024, researchers reached out to five state education agencies (each serving millions of students) receiving TA from SISEP to determine the effectiveness of the center. TA was provided over an 18-month period, during which SISEP offered intensive TA to 908 team members and staff (an average of 182 people per state). Afterward, a survey evaluating the program's effectiveness was sent to all participants.

Key Findings: ■ Researchers learned five key insights from the data:

1. The need to understand the complexities and dependencies of operationalizing TA both longitudinally and at multiple levels of the system (state, regional, local)
2. The importance of building general and innovation-specific capacity for implementation success
3. The value of using a co-design and participatory approach for effective TA delivery
4. The need to develop TA providers' educational and implementation fluency across areas and levels of the system receiving TA
5. The need to ensure coordination and alignment of TA providers from different centers

Implications for Practice: ■ Technical assistance services were reported to be highly relevant, highly useful, and of high quality, with an average rating of 4.7 on a 5-point scale. Based on the survey results, 94% of participants reported increased knowledge of educational practices and strategies.

- Despite the notable benefits, many participants reported a decrease in implementation capacity over time. It is recommended that the amount of time spent with TA on the various levels of the system (state, regional, and local) be tailored based on their needs.
- It is equally important to teach both the broader context for implementing evidence-based practice (EBP) and innovation-specific scenarios. It is essential to understand how an EBP is properly implemented, but also consider new, creative, and specific uses for an EBP that can be experimented safely within the TA.
- Strong relationships and communication facilitate greater scaffolding and tailoring of TA services. The SISEP TA approach involved co-development of an implementation plan, where participants developed their plans using a selection of implementation strategies, tools and resources provided by SISEP. All five state education agencies demonstrated improvements in communication processes and team functioning over time.
- The level of knowledge required to successfully implement practices will vary based on participants' roles and needs. A teacher in a public school will need to have a deeper knowledge of EBPs and the infrastructure to implement those practices, while administrators will need to know how to support that infrastructure. Because of the variation in learners' needs, TA providers will need to have diverse knowledge and experience to better support participants' implementation plans. This will, however, take considerable time and cost.
- Given the number of TA centers throughout the USA, services can sometimes overlap between centers, causing issues with redundancy of services and supports. This can also cause confusion when two centers recommend different EBPs. Multi-center initiatives can reduce these issues, with organized, regular communication to better serve educators.

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