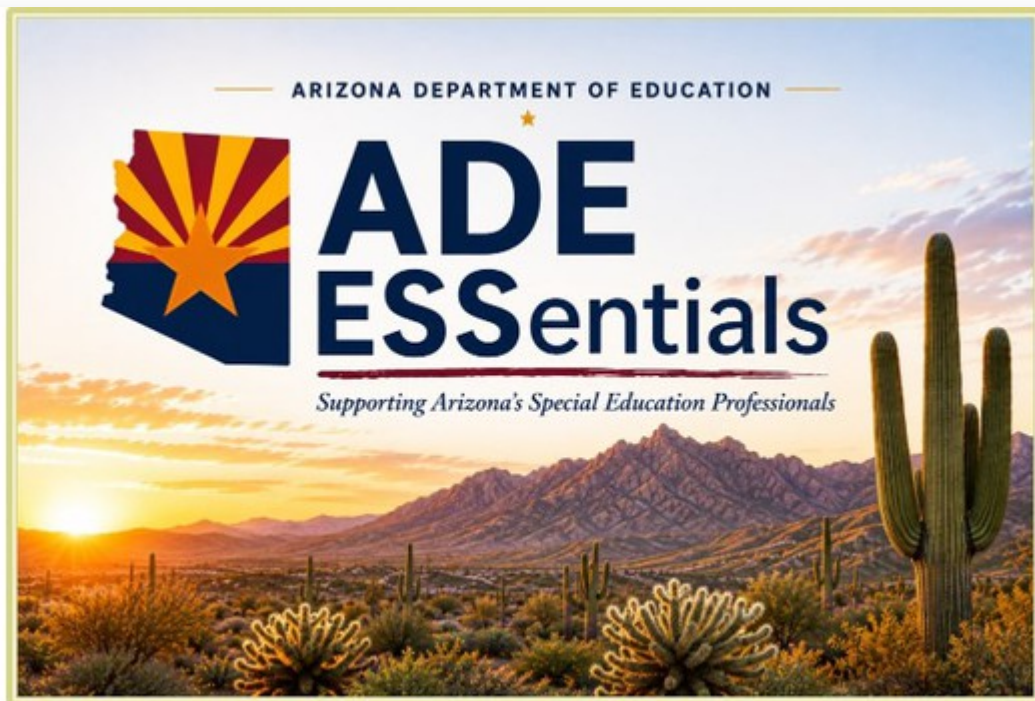




Welcome!

Welcome to the first edition of the **ADE ESSentials**, a newsletter designed to connect and support Arizona's special education community.

The Exceptional Student Services (ESS) team is committed to supporting Public Education Agencies (PEAs) in the effective implementation of the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**. Through Arizona's system of general supervision, ESS provides oversight, guidance, technical assistance, professional learning, and resources to support PEAs in meeting IDEA requirements while strengthening practices that lead to improved outcomes for students with disabilities.

Each edition of the **ADE ESSentials** will bring together timely updates, resources, learning opportunities, promising practices, and highlights from across ESS, all in one place. Our goal is to help PEAs stay informed, connected, and equipped to turn IDEA requirements into meaningful educational experiences and outcomes for students.

State Director's Note

Welcome to the first edition of Arizona's special education newsletter, The ADE ESSentials!

One of the things I've heard consistently from special education professionals across our state is the importance of receiving timely, relevant information that helps support the work happening every day on behalf of students with disabilities. This newsletter is designed with that goal in mind.



My hope is that this becomes a helpful resource for you. Through this newsletter, we'll share important updates from Exceptional Student Services and valued special education partners, reminders about key requirements and deadlines, available resources, professional learning opportunities, and information that can help you navigate the ever-changing special education landscape.

I know that your time is valuable and that the work you do is both complex and incredibly important. Whether you are a teacher, service provider, administrator, or support staff member, you are making a difference in the lives of students and families every day. We want this newsletter to support that work by keeping you informed, connected, and equipped with useful information from ADE/ESS.

Thank you for all that you do for Arizona's students with disabilities. I look forward to using this newsletter as another way to stay connected and support our collective efforts to improve outcomes for students across the state.

Warm regards,
Alissa Trollinger
State Director of Special Education

Professional Learning Updates

September 2026

September						
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6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29				

- **Phoenix Regional Training** (When: September 9-10 in Yuma)
Target Audience: Special education professionals working within the public school system in Arizona. [Regional Training](#).
- **High-Leverage Practices Webinar Series** (When: September 15)
Target Audience: Special education directors, administrators and instructional coaches. [High-Leverage Practices Webinar](#).
- **Special Education New Director Symposium (SENDS)** (When: Sept. 16 + virtual sessions)
Target Audience: New special education directors in their first or second year. [SENDS blog post](#).
- **Special Education Professionals Check-In** (When: September 17)
Target Audience: Special education professionals working within the public school system in Arizona. [Special Education Check In](#). For questions, please [email Bekah Shahan](#).
- **ESS Finance Office Hours** (When: September 22)
Target Audience: LEA Grant Business Managers, Authorized Representatives and Special Education Directors. [Register here](#).

October 2026

- **Special Education Professionals Check-In** (When: October 15)
Target Audience: Special education professionals working within the public school system in

Arizona. [Special Education Check In](#). For questions, please [email Bekah Shahan](#).

- **Community of Practice on Inclusion** (When: October 22)
Target Audience: Special education directors, administrators, special education teachers and general education teachers. [Community of Practice on Inclusion](#).
- **High-Leverage Practices Webinar Series** (When: October 27)
Target Audience: Special education directors, administrators and instructional coaches. [High-Leverage Practices Webinar](#).

October						
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November 2026

- **High-Leverage Practices Webinar Series** (When: November 10)
Target Audience: Special education directors, administrators, special education teachers and general education teachers. [Community of Practice on Inclusion](#).
- **Special Education Professionals Check-In** (When: November 19)
Target Audience: Special education professionals working within the public school system in Arizona. For information and registration: [Special Education Check In](#).
For questions, please [email Bekah Shahan](#)
- **Community of Practice on Inclusion** (When: November 19)
Target Audience: Special education directors, administrators, special education teachers and general education teachers. [Community of Practice on Inclusion](#).

November						
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29						

Looking Ahead 🗓️

- **Phoenix Regional Training**
(When: Dec 17, Jan 12 & 13, Mar 24 & 25)
Target Audience: Special education professionals working within the public school system in Arizona. [Phoenix Regional Training](#).
- **2027 Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education Summit Save the Date** (When: February 24, 2027)
Mark your calendars! We are gearing up for the next EI/ECSE Summit! Registration will be opening soon, for immediate questions please contact the [Early Childhood Special Education Inbox](#).



Legislative and Policy Updates

Federal Update: OSERS/OSEP Partnership with HHS

In June 2026, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) entered into an Interagency Agreement (IAA) that shifts day-to-day administration and coordination of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), including the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), to HHS while maintaining IDEA's statutory requirements and protections. OSEP is the federal office



that administers and oversees the IDEA Parts B (3-21) and C (0-3) programs. This administrative change is not expected to affect the day-to-day implementation of IDEA programs in Arizona at the state or local levels, as all statutory requirements, protections, and federal funding obligations under IDEA remain in place.

PEA Determinations Update

After more than two years of planning, modeling, and stakeholder engagement, the new PEA determination model is ready. The updated model is more closely aligned with the federal approach used for state determinations while also recognizing the unique circumstances of small schools and incorporating measures of growth.

Although FY25 determinations were issued last spring using the previous methodology, updated determinations based on FY25 data and the new model are scheduled for release in October. These determinations will serve as the baseline for future years and will be available in ADEConnect.

Additional information is available on the [PEA Determinations website](#). When the updated determinations are released, further details and resources will be shared through the listserv.

Parent Partnership 🤝



An Introduction to Encircle Families

Encircle Families: Helping Arizona Families Navigate Special Education and Beyond

Families of children with disabilities often navigate complex systems while trying to make the best decisions for their children. At Encircle Families, we believe they shouldn't have to do it alone. As [Arizona's Parent Training and Information \(PTI\) Center](#), Encircle Families provides information, training, and individualized support to help families understand their rights, partner effectively with schools, and advocate for their children. All of our services are provided at no cost to families.

Supporting Families Every Step of the Way

Whether a family is new to special education or preparing for adulthood, our experienced staff provides guidance on topics including:

- Understanding special education laws and processes
- Preparing for IEP and 504 meetings
- Building collaborative relationships with school teams
- Positive behavior support
- Transition planning for adulthood
- Accessing community resources and services

Our goal is to empower families while encouraging positive working relationships with educators and service providers.

Partnering with the Arizona Department of Education

Encircle Families is proud to partner with the Arizona Department of Education Exceptional Student Services (ADE/ESS) to strengthen family-school collaboration statewide.

Together, our work includes:

- Preservice training for future teachers and related service providers.
- Technical assistance and parent training provided in partnership with Arizona school districts and charter schools to improve communication and collaboration.
- Support for families and schools to address concerns early and resolve disagreements at the lowest possible level, keeping the focus on positive outcomes for students.

Strong partnerships between families and educators help students achieve better outcomes in school and beyond.

Connect With Us

If you know a family who could benefit from support, we encourage you to refer them to Encircle Families. Whether they have questions about special education, healthcare, transition planning, or disability-related systems, we're here to help.



Refer A Family

Click the QR Code to Refer a Family



Visit Encircle Families

Click on QR Code to Visit Encircle Families



Request Outreach/Training

Click on QR Code to Request Outreach/Training

Data Connection

Data News and Important Dates!!!

Upcoming Data Collection Dates:

- 📅 October 1 Data Collection (ODC) Verification: October 2, 2026 – November 4, 2026
- 📅 ODC Reconciliation: November 12, 2026 – December 9, 2026
- 📅 Teacher Attrition Survey: November 1, 2026 – January 31, 2027
- 📅 ODC: October 1 Data Collection

News and Updates:

- 🔗 A new ESS Help Desk ticket option is being introduced to support relationship requests for AzEDS reporting for special education programs.
- 🔗 The Beginning of Year (BOY) webinar training for FY27 is now available on the [Beginner's Guide to Data Management webpage](#).



🔗 [Sign up for ESS Data Management Alerts](#) to be informed about news regarding special education data reporting.

Visit the [ESS Important Dates Dashboard webpage](#) for all FY27 collection dates.

Success Spotlight on Arizona Schools

Tempe Union Special Education Director Speaks at National Conference

Tempe Union Special Education Director, Heidi Sinkovic presented alongside ESS Director of Operations, Judy Olaiz, at the national special education conference hosted by the IDEA Data Center, a technical assistance center overseen by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).



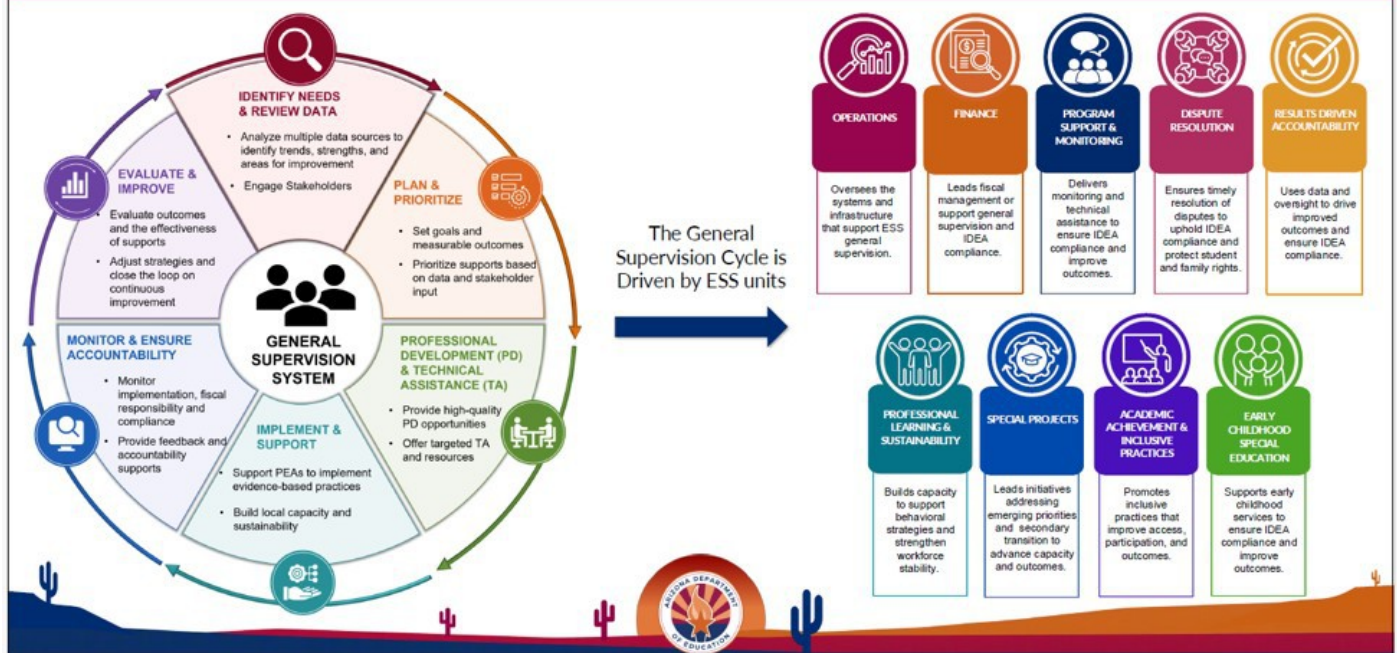
Heidi served as a co-presenter in a session highlighting her district's participation in the Public Education Agency (PEA) Data Processes Protocols pilot program led by our Exceptional Student Services (ESS) Data Management team. The session brought together state-level special education leadership (e.g., data managers, directors, monitors) from across the country. Attendees were highly engaged, asked thoughtful questions, and showed genuine interest in the work.

Heidi did an outstanding job clearly explaining her district's experience, including both the implementation process and the tangible benefits of participating in the pilot. She spoke on the topic of making complex data processes accessible and meaningful to a national audience. She also encouraged other states and local agencies to consider participating, helping to expand the reach and impact of this work. This effort underscores the critical value of state-PEA collaboration in developing and documenting data systems that promote consistency, strengthen local practices, and improve outcomes for students with disabilities.



Arizona's General Supervision Framework

A coordinated system of monitoring, technical assistance, and accountability that builds capacity, ensures compliance with IDEA, and improves educational results and functional outcomes for students with disabilities.



☞Click the image above to learn more☞

Unit Spotlight: Program Support & Monitoring

The **Program Support and Monitoring (PSM)** team is a major piece of the SEA's comprehensive general supervision system. This unit is responsible for conducting programmatic monitoring activities and providing technical assistance regarding state and federal special education regulations.

Key services and functions the team provides are to support PEAs through special education monitoring, data analysis, technical assistance, and stakeholder guidance to improve outcomes for students with disabilities and PEA systems for special education programs.

A current project is the collaboration with Academic Achievement and Inclusive Practices (AA&IP) to support PEAs as they work through the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) focused on early literacy. AA&IP will support the SSIP through various methods which may include professional learning opportunities, coaching conversations, implementation planning, and identification of High-Leverage Practices aligned to district goals.

Some of our major accomplishments from last year:

- Thirty-four PEAs closed their corrective action plans within the required one-year timeline.
- Forty-one PEAs successfully completed all Self-Assessment and Data Review programmatic monitoring activities without Corrective Action Plan.

For more information visit our [Program, Support & Monitoring](#) website.



MEET THE TEAM
Program Support & Monitoring
PS&M Team Directory

● **DIRECTORS**

Heidi Putnam

Scott Dobkovsky

● **LEAD PS&M SPECIALISTS**

Caitlyn Hess

John Shirk

Maribel Gamboa

Shana Smith

● **PS&M SPECIALISTS**

Renee Donovan

Darleen Sithole

Jennifer Thout

Kimberly Lipp

Kimberly Lyons

Teresa Kirkman

Autumn Johnson

Lauren Diesner

Michelle Grigsby (Secure Care)

Susie Kropp

Bethany Brown

Nicole Terry

John Bauer

John Roland

Kasie Hamman

Carol Lettieri

Krista Mayberry

⚠ To see which specialist works with your school click on the picture above ⚠

Connection Corner

Each newsletter will highlight helpful resources, tools and opportunities to connect with other important areas of education in Arizona.

Check back each issue for new resources to help you stay informed and connected.



Assessments

[ADE Assessments](#) oversees the development and administration of Arizona's statewide assessments. In coordination with ESS and other ADE partners, the unit supports implementation of the MSAA and AZELLA, helping ensure appropriate assessment access and participation for students with disabilities.



ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS
Dyslexia

ELA - Dyslexia

The Arizona Department of Education supports statewide efforts to identify and provide effective instruction and intervention for students with characteristics of dyslexia, in alignment with A.R.S. §15-704. **Connection to ESS:** Dyslexia resources and professional learning can support schools in strengthening literacy instruction, early identification,



ESS Blog

Our [ESS Blog](#) is your source for the latest updates, upcoming events, important announcements, and timely information in special education. Stay informed about opportunities, initiatives, and resources that support Arizona's special education professionals and the students they serve.

Connection to ESS:

Assessment data and cross-unit coordination support compliance, student outcomes, and continuous improvement for students with disabilities.

and intervention for students with disabilities and other struggling readers.

Connect & Learn: Explore the [ELA Dyslexia webpage](#), participate in Dyslexia Training Office Hours, and check out available grant opportunities. For questions or additional support, [contact Katie Lewis](#).



A New Chapter for Employment First in Arizona

The Arizona Office of Employment First was established to serve as a statewide coordinating hub, bringing together partners, resources, training, technical assistance, and shared strategies to advance competitive integrated employment for Arizonans with disabilities. While the Office is new, the work is not. It builds upon years of collaboration, innovation, and leadership from people with disabilities, families, providers, employers, educators, state agencies, Tribal partners, advocates, and community organizations who have helped move Employment First forward across our state.

To stay connected and expand opportunities for people with disabilities sign up for the [Employment First Arizona Newsletter](#).

Arizona's 2026 IDEA Conference



Stronger Systems, Better Outcomes for Every Student

More than 1,000 special education stakeholders gathered at the Grand Hyatt Scottsdale Resort August 18–20 for Arizona’s 2026 IDEA Conference. Administrators, educators, related service providers, agency partners, parents, and youth and young adults with disabilities came together to learn, connect, and strengthen their shared commitment to improving outcomes for students across Arizona.

This year’s theme, *Stronger Systems, Better Outcomes—for Every Student*, highlighted the power of collaboration in building robust coordinated systems that help every student thrive. Throughout the conference, participants shared ideas, celebrated successes, and explored strategies to support students with disabilities and their families.

The event opened with two engaging preconference sessions. Special education leaders explored topics including AI, innovative practices, and both celebrations and challenges; while youth and family participants focused on career awareness, workplace readiness, and self-advocacy. Opening keynote speaker, Jeremy Poincenot, energized attendees with an inspiring message of resilience, emphasizing how challenges can become opportunities through perseverance and support from others.

Participants enjoyed a wide range of learning opportunities led by national speakers, statewide agencies, community organizations, school districts and charters, universities, and ADE staff. Popular topics included IDEA legal issues, special education compliance, behavior supports, AI, high-leverage practices, and secondary transition. Attendees also connected with more than 20 vendors, exhibitors, and community partners, further strengthening Arizona’s special education network.

Secondary Transition Services Award winners were celebrated for their dedication to empowering Arizona’s youth and young adults as they transition into adulthood. Over 60 pieces of art created by Arizona students with disabilities from pre-school to high school were displayed.

Thanks to the support from the Arizona Department of Health Services' Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs Program, more than 100 youth, young adults, and family members attended the conference. Youth and family participants heard an empowering keynote from Winston Clements on self-advocacy and enjoyed memorable evening activities.

The success of the IDEA Conference reflects the dedication of a collaborative planning committee that includes ADE/ESS staff, the Rehabilitation Services Administration, parent representatives from Encircle Families, young adult leaders from Diverse Ability Incorporated, and local special education administrators. Their planning and dedication continue to make the event a meaningful experience for Arizona's special education community.

Each year, the IDEA Conference reinforces a powerful message: meaningful outcomes are built through collaboration, shared commitment, and a belief in the potential of every individual. By working together, Arizona continues to build stronger systems and brighter futures for students with disabilities.

To stay informed about next year's IDEA Conference, [sign up for the conference email list](#).



FAQ Focus

Questions from Around Arizona Schools

Our *FAQ Focus* section highlights hot topics and trending questions from schools across Arizona. We invite you to submit any questions you would like addressed by using the QR code or completing the [FAQ Focus Question Submission Survey](#). We look forward to featuring answers to the questions that matter most to Arizona educators and school leaders.





Arizona Department of Education

[ESS Website](#)

[Contact ESS](#)

[Sign Up for Newsletter](#)