

## The General Soup Podcast

### Episode 1: Developing a Recipe for Systems Improvement in South Carolina

#### Transcript

**Sara Doutre** 00:08

Welcome to the General Soup podcast, a podcast about all things related to special education accountability and support systems, also known as general supervision. I'm Sara Doutre.

**Susan Hayes** 00:18

And I'm Susan Hayes and we will be your hosts from the National Center for Systemic Improvement, or NCSI, on this exploration of general supervision systems, and also the world of soup jokes.

**Sara Doutre** 00:32

Welcome to our first episode of the General Soup podcast, short for general supervision. We're excited to explore this new format to geek out on results-based accountability and supports with you. I'm Sara,

**Susan Hayes** 00:44

and I'm Susan and we're your hosts. We are the leads of the Results-Based Accountability and Supports collaborative, or RBAS, part of the National Center for Systemic Improvement, or NCSI. Sara, would you like to introduce yourself briefly to our listeners?

**Sara Doutre** 00:58

Thanks, Susan. I started my career as a special education teacher and learned to love monitoring and all things accountability while working at the US Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. I've worked at WestEd for the past two years, and I'm proud to work on NCSI. Susan, will you share a little bit about yourself?

**Susan Hayes** 01:19

Sure, thanks, Sara. Hi, everyone. I'm Susan Hayes. I've been honored to work at WestEd and on NCSI for the past several years. I mostly provide technical assistance to states around the design, implementation, and evaluation of their general supervision systems. And prior to joining WestEd, I worked in a state education agency in their assessment and accountability division. And because this podcast is called General Soup, we'd now like to share our favorite soups with all of you.

**Sara Doutre** 01:46

My favorite soup is butternut squash soup. I really like it best when the butternut squash is roasted first. And so I probably should clarify that as roasted butternut squash soup.

**Susan Hayes** 01:57

That sounds really good. So I feel bad sharing — this is Susan — my favorite soup at the moment because it requires much less work. I feel like I've been doing a lot of slow cooking because it's you just kind of dump it and go. I aspire to be the kind of cook that would roast the butternut squash first and then make a soup but lately, I've been, I'm going to go to do it today. I've been making a slow cooker chicken and dumpling, which isn't really a soup, it's more like a, I don't know what, a stew, but it's been working for me as the temperatures have gotten colder. And as Sara said, this is our General Soup podcast, short for general supervision. And we will discuss all things general supervision, and we're going to go to organize these episodes around our theme. We love a good theme. So we're first going to go to set the table and provide a little bit of context around this podcast and our topic today. And then we'll move right into the soup du jour, which is a fabulous interview that we have lined up with Beckie Davis and Nicole Adams from the South Carolina Department of Education, sharing a bit about their system and RBAS journey. Then we will digest everything we learned from Beckie and Nicole and share some reflections that Sara and I have on their interview. And then finally, we will end with a dessert and or cheese plate. And we're are going to go to share a highlight of a new resource that we've developed here at NCSI before we all close out with a cup of coffee. So that is our menu for today. And let's get started. So Sara, why don't you set the table for us and provide some context on the focus of our episode today.

**Sara Doutre** 03:36

Today on our episode, we are going to speak about the history of results-based accountability and the requirements of IDEA that have encouraged states to move toward more results-focused general supervision systems. When we talk with states about general supervision systems, we always go back to Section 616 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, to talk about what the law says about monitoring systems. And what it says is that the primary focus of any federal state and monitoring activities should be on first, improving educational results and functional outcomes for all children with disabilities. So, just thinking through that, we really do believe that that really is the intention of the law. And we're actually required by the law to focus on improving educational results and outcomes for kids with disabilities. The second focus of state monitoring activities is to ensure that districts are meeting the requirements of IDEA with a particular emphasis on the requirements that are most closely related to improving educational results for children with disabilities. So not only is the first purpose of any state monitoring activities, or general supervision activities, on improving results, but even the secondary purpose is ensuring compliance with the requirements that are most closely related to improving results.

**Susan Hayes** 05:00

Thanks, Sara. And I think what I would add to that, you know, really reflecting on the intent of the law, is thinking about how that can shape the design and implementation of state general supervision systems. So what are general supervision systems? You know, at their core, it's a series of levers that state education agencies can pull to influence practice at the local level. We often call

general supervision systems, state systems of accountability and support. So ultimately, it's your, at the state level, monitoring LEA implementation of IDEA, but then also assisting (this is the support side of the equation), providing assistance and support to those LEAs to implement the law well. And as Sara said, if we take it back to what's in the law, it's fundamentally about improving outcomes for students with disabilities, as well as ensuring compliance with the law. So throughout this podcast and our work on NCSI, we're trying to support states to, again, design, implement, and ultimately evaluate general supervision systems or accountability and support systems that are intended to improve outcomes for students while ensuring compliance with the law. And we are excited to share with you all several interviews over episodes to come with states that are engaged in that work so that we can learn together about this process.

**Sara Doutre** 06:23

Thank you, Susan. It's so important for our listeners to understand that when we talk about general supervision, we really are referring to both of those sides — accountability and support — because often, it seems like general supervision gets a bad rap for being compliance-focused. But even when we are focusing on improving compliance, that requires a lot of support, and the state agencies that we work with and are going to be interviewing through this podcast put a lot of resources into that support. So, whenever we talk about general supervision, we really are talking about that broad picture and both the levers of accountability and support.

**Susan Hayes** 07:00

So with that, let's all pick up our soup spoons and dive in to our interview with Beckie and Nicole in South Carolina. Well, hello, everyone. We are excited to welcome Beckie Davis and Nicole Adams from the South Carolina Department of Education to our podcast today to share an overview of their RBAS or results-based accountability and support system design and some of the lessons they've learned along their journey. And to kick us off, I'm going to go on to invite Beckie and then Nicole to introduce themselves by sharing with us their (we know their names), but their title and their work responsibilities, something that they enjoy about the work that they do and because this is, of course, our General Soup podcast, also their favorite soup. So Beckie, let's start with you.

**Beckie Davis** 07:49

Thanks, Susan, we appreciate the opportunity to be part of this. I am Beckie Davis. I am the director in the office of special education services at the South Carolina Department of Education. And my favorite thing about the work I do is that I get to work with a very dynamic, creative group of people who are firmly committed to improving outcomes for kids with disabilities in our state. And who love the challenge of thinking outside the box and doing, and questioning why we've always done it this way. And my favorite soup is French onion soup because it's got a very salty taste. And I also use it in stews and all kinds of of different cooking options.

**Nicole Adams** 08:42

It's because she's salty.

**Beckie Davis** 08:44

Yes. Well.

**Susan Hayes** 08:48

Do you like it with the cheese where the cheese is like coming around the top of the bowl?

**Beckie Davis** 08:52

Yes.

**Nicole Adams** 08:53

So she's salty and cheesy.

**Susan Hayes** 08:58

So. (laughter) Borom-pshh. We need the drums.

**Beckie Davis** 09:00

Yes.

**Susan Hayes** 09:01

Thank you, Beckie. You can save up what you wanna share when Nicole's done introducing herself. Nicole, tell us about yourself.

**Nicole Adams** 09:09

Oh, yes, this is Dr. Nicole Adams. I'm the Assistant Director here at the Office of Special Education Services in South Carolina. And my job responsibilities are everything my boss tells me to do. It's everything Beckie tells me to do. And my favorite thing about work is actually it's the same as when I was a teacher and when I was in the classroom. My favorite thing is that "aha moment" when you can see that epiphany or that click or the light bulb turn on and people go "oh my gosh, I finally get what you mean." So whether it's with kids or with adults, it's, it's watching them have that experience of that "aha" that's really cool. That would definitely be the favorite thing about what I do. And my favorite soup is...is chili a soup, is chili a soup? Because I like it. Thick, just like work. I like it thick, meaty, and full of substance.

**Susan Hayes** 10:04

Your metaphors are fantastic. And we'll take chili as a soup.

**Nicole Adams** 10:08

Ok. Excellent.

**Susan Hayes** 10:08

We take a broad, broad approach to defining soup. Yes. Well, thank you both.

**Sara Doutre** 10:14

Yes. Thank you both. And Nicole, your description of your favorite thing about your job was a great segue way into our first question about kind of "aha" moments and where things get started. Because we'd love for you all to start with telling us what prompted your state, what prompted you in South Carolina to work toward a more results-driven accountability and support system.

**Beckie Davis** 10:35

We had a great deal of turnover with our State Systemic Improvement Plan, our SSIP coordinator position during phases one and two. And I actually was hired as the SSIP coordinator at the beginning of phase three. And at that point in trying to

recreate what had happened in phase one, what had happened in phase two and piece together why we were doing what we were doing, we put together a results-driven accountability team to oversee the implementation of the SSIP work. And this kind of prompted us to reach out to National Center for Systemic Improvement and some of our other TA partners, to help us look at how we could overhaul and redefine our entire system of general supervision so that we were focusing on results, and not quite so much compliance. And I have to say that for me, the “aha” moment, like Nicole was saying, I have Susan Hayes to thank for. She had come down to work with us in the initial stages of looking at our system of general supervision. And she said, “you’re not compliant if you’re not improving outcomes for students.” And it really it was like the light bulb coming on, and I went, Wow, that’s exactly right. I have it now written on a sticky note that I keep on my laptop. It’s probably in every PowerPoint presentation I ever do to any group and I’ve threatened to have it as a tattoo, but haven’t quite gotten up that nerve yet.

**Nicole Adams** 12:14

Part of what we did with NCSI and what they had done, we took that they had already developed a mission when I started and it was a beautiful like they had, this is great. And so the next steps were what doesn’t fit with this mission, what doesn’t belong, it was kind of like the Sesame Street. One of these things are not like the other. And except it was three of those things that didn’t match. And we came down to four. And I think that was kind of the defining, for me, it was the defining moment when we really were able to grab on to that change to feel the differences, when we said these are the four things that we feel we need to focus on to improve student outcomes.

**Sara Doutre** 12:55

Thank you. And Beckie, I’m thinking we need to embroider that, right? That statement on like, I’m envisioning an embroidered pillow. But I, I really do love the idea of a tattoo as well.

**Nicole Adams** 13:07

Cocktail napkins.

**Sara Doutre** 13:11

I think we could go all out there.

**Nicole Adams** 13:14

We’ll have a whole line.

**Susan Hayes** 13:16

So many possibilities. And that’s a beautiful segue way. I think, Nicole, you mentioned the mission statement that the team had crafted to really drive this work and this shift. So can you and Beckie speak a bit to that? We think of it sometimes as the North Star, how you all describe your overall goal for your general supervision system, and any of that language that you all have found to be important for your vision in terms of your grounding assumptions or your overall mission. It would be lovely to hear you talk about those pieces.

**Beckie Davis** 13:50

So we, we looked at the what we were doing, how we were doing it, to whom we were doing it, and what the expectation or the expected outcome was. And what we came up with, in looking at defining our core was that, what our office was charged

to do is provide consistent, collaborative, proactive. So those are our describing words, direction and support. It's focused in the four areas that Nicole talked about — early childhood, academics, social-emotional, and post-secondary outcomes. So if we provide that consistent, collaborative direction and support in those four areas, we're going to gonna do it using data-based decision making, quality instruction, evidence-based practices, making sure that we're using good family and community engagement and that everything we're doing is with fidelity. Then, the districts will have the infrastructure, the capacity, and sustainability to provide students with disabilities and here's kind of our key phrase: "equitable access and opportunity to meet the," what we call "the profile of the South Carolina graduate," which is, world-class knowledge, world-class skills, life and career characteristics. So we felt like that captured what we were going to do, how we were going to do it, what the result at the district level would be, and then ultimately, providing that equitable access and opportunity for our students.

**Susan Hayes** 15:23

That's beautiful. Thank you for sharing.

**Sara Doutre** 15:26

Thank you so much. So, I love that Beckie and thinking about data-based decision making and how that's operationalized, and you and you give feedback to your districts, which sounds really important. Can you talk us through how you make LEA determinations and how kind of those priorities you've described impact your determinations?

**Beckie Davis** 15:46

So we started four years ago using a point system, because we can't forget about compliance. But we also, we had been so heavily compliance-oriented, pulling files, IEP reviews, checklists, those kinds of things. But compliance is important. So that's part of what we look at. But then we have seven performance factors. And it's graduation rate, preschool LRE, school-age LRE, math and ELA performance on our statewide assessments, suspension rate, and career readiness. So we look at the seven factors. And we compare district performance against not only our state actual performance, but our state target. And districts get points for exceeding the state target of state performance. And they also get a point, if they improved, even if they didn't meet the state target, they get a point for improving from their previous year's results. So we combined all of that into our determination. And it's a possibility, I think of 36 points, and aligned with OSEP's meets requirements, needs assistance, needs intervention, needs substantial intervention. And that's what we had been using to make our determination. So there was still some compliance in there. But it was the first time we had ever made substantial decisions using results-based. And our districts, actually, we still had some difficulty getting districts to take it seriously and to realize that it meant something. But I think we've kind of figured out a way to get them to pay a little bit better attention and Nicole, if you'll talk about what we're actually doing with the determinations and how we're integrating that into our technical assistance at this point.

**Nicole Adams** 17:43

Absolutely. What we did was we took our LEA determinations and turned them into a risk assessment. So we had to focus in on what we thought were the most important parts, and we really felt, specifically as a state, that we wanted to make a big turn — compliance is important — but make that turn from compliance to outcomes. So we took those seven performance factors, not that they still get their

LEA determinations based with those compliance factors. But we took those seven performance factors, and put together a score and said, All right, let's look at who's struggling with performance, the most where, but we had to do that. But we also had to compare over years, because our LEAs are very, very little and very, very big. And so you can't base it off of that one year. So it takes those, it takes three years' worth of results and still that data is just the temperature check. It's still the check that you do when you go to the doctor. And he takes your vitals and says, okay, you're good, we'll leave you alone, or, hey, let's look a little deeper. So we use those LEA determinations, the results over a period of three years. And then if any of those districts in order to have the capacity at the state office, we also had to consider how many districts can we actually put in a tier and actually be able to provide support to. So that was another piece of it. So in order to get to a group that we could work with, we also threw out anybody who was 'meet expectations' during that three year period, regardless of what that end score was. We also left them in Universal support. So we tiered everybody's supports — universal supports tier two, tier three, tier two and tier three, since we're still dipping our fingers in the toe, our toes in the water here. To put our fingers in the soup. Is that what we're doing here? We're dipping our fingers in the soup...

**Beckie Davis** 19:38

We are. We're testing the soup, yes.

**Nicole Adams** 19:41

We, we left those tier two and tier three groups together, because we're not entirely sure what differentiates between two and three and what it's gonna take to get them out of there. They've got systemic problems if what we're measuring them on is graduation rate. You don't turn that over in a year. You can't change that in a year.

**Susan Hayes** 20:00

That's really helpful, Nicole. And I'll just mention too to our listeners that you all were generous enough to do a presentation on this a couple weeks ago and developed some PowerPoint slides. So we'll make sure those are available to accompany this episode so folks who want to dig in a little bit more into some of the, the technicalities of how you run those calculations can do so. But I wonder if everything that you all just shared is a nice segue way into talking a bit about the way you plan to provide support to those districts in tier two and tier three. And those four teams that you've established for those four priority areas. Be great to hear you say a bit more about that.

**Beckie Davis** 20:36

So we have put everybody in our office into one of four teams, early childhood, social-emotional, academic, or post-secondary. And that includes our fiscal and our data and technology folks. So everybody is on a team. And it's based on their areas of expertise, and also their areas of interest, as much as we could take that into consideration. And then we've tried to build out where we saw gaps. We found out that there were only two of us actually, who had had experience teaching preschool at all. Most of our folks had experience at middle school and then in high school. So, once we divided into the four teams, we started looking at similar frameworks to make sure that that we're being consistent. And as Nicole said, our primary focus this year has been building out the universal supports that anyone can access. I will say that as bad as COVID has been, it has really pushed us I think to make some changes more quickly than we typically would have with how we provide support

and, and looking at alternative methods of providing support and professional development and adult learning. And so, we've spent time building out universal supports across all four areas. And then our tier two and tier three, we have been working for a long time with a couple of our higher ed kind of agencies, and have built out some real good supports for our post-secondary. We have a transition alliance of South Carolina, that is kind of the boots on the ground. And they're the ones that can go into a district and actually work with district folks and district teams. We're developing more fully a behavior alliance of South Carolina because we've got to have, we've got to have acronyms. And so we have TASK for the post-secondary transition. We have BASK for the behavior. And then we have, it doesn't rhyme with BASK or TASK, but it is the South Carolina Preschool Inclusion network, or SCPI, for early childhood. So we're working on now that academic support, but working through those partners to sort of meet in the middle. Again, we've put lots of time and will continue developing the universal supports that are available and easily accessible to anyone. And then those intensive supports. And so, what we envision happening is that, meeting in the middle will be those targeted supports that we'll be able to provide in conjunction with our TA providers.

**Nicole Adams** 23:24

Well the other layer of support that we have in there is, think of that jigsaw activity that teachers do in their classroom, where she breaks everybody up, or he, breaks everybody up into groups. And you become an expert in one area, when there are so many things, there are so many moving parts and pieces that, you know what, you become an expert in one area, and then I'm gonna have you go back and teach it to people. So we took that focus group, and everybody on those focus groups are also on a regional, or a cohort group. So they are, they're on a cohort team. So each one of those cohort teams has a social emotional professional, a post-secondary outcomes professional, a academic, professional, an early childhood professional, where they get to be that expert, but they are assigned very specific districts. Because we do know from the way that we did general supervision historically that districts do appreciate a single point of contact or a single-ish point of contact, one person, so that they don't have to try to figure out the layout of the land or who to go to or who holds the key to what magical activity.

**Sara Doutre** 24:37

That's great. And so many different people you're coordinating. So I heard Beckie talk about internal staff reorganization, right? to get on those teams and then coordinating the districts working together and then coordinating all of these external stakeholders as well. So maybe you could tell us a little bit more about...I think it would be really interesting to hear how you made decisions through this design process. How you made the design, and how you brought those people along and involved them — both your external and internal stakeholders. So your staff and then those external stakeholders, as well as districts, and how is that going, how is bringing them along? And where you kind of at in that process, but a little bit more about that design and the involvement of those stakeholders.

**Beckie Davis** 25:20

And it is an ongoing process, both with internal stakeholders and external stakeholders. We started this, like I said, about four years ago with the SSIP work and that creation of the results-based accountability team. And that was one of five teams in our office, we had fiscal, data technology, we had a team that was focused on monitoring, and it was called oversight and assistance. And then we had the programs and initiative team. And the teams didn't necessarily talk a lot to each

other, which is really strange. But oversight and assistance would go and do their on-site monitoring, and they would pull their files and do their IEP checks. And they would then do technical assistance. Programs and initiatives did their thing. And so when the results-driven accountability team came in, we started trying to get everybody to play together. We also had, fortunately, or unfortunately, South Carolina has had the distinction of having had the only settlement agreement because of MFS issues in the nation. And that we have, thankfully wrapped up finally, but in looking at all of that work, that's where we kind of came up with the seven performance factors. And we use those in the MFF, MFS work, and then pulling in the SSIP work to that and our SIMR was improving reading outcomes for students with disabilities at grade three. And so really concentrating on that those results, and then trying to pull in other folks. The team leads for each of those teams, for most of the teams, were pretty on board with things. Our other "aha" was, wow, the state performance plan really is our six-year IEP, it should be the focus of everything that we're doing. And, so starting to lobby staff about this and lay the groundwork. And as a former early literacy reading teacher, I really do believe that redundancy builds fluency. So it was saying the same things to staff over and over and trying to reassure them that we were not looking to make changes because, we were not saying that what you've been doing in the past that's been so compliance-focused has been wrong. What we're saying is that because of your hard work and the focus that you've had, you've put us in a position to be ready and able to take that next step. And so, for what Nicole for at least a year and a half, it's really been that, kind of that balance and trying to support as we move forward. And our external stakeholders, our districts, I think, have come on board more easily, maybe than our, some of our internal staff. But we're at the point with the tilt now that it's a firm, this is the direction we're going. We'll provide you support and skills to come with us. We'll also slow the bus down long enough if you feel the need to get off, but this is the direction that we're going in. We have a firm commitment to improving outcomes. We're using evidence, we're using research base. And this is the way to do it. And this is what we are going to do.

**Nicole Adams 28:59**

We've also been using Leading by Convening and trying very hard to do this bottom up. And sometimes that's very difficult, especially when you've had folks that have worked in a top down. They've been institutionalized to a top down. Here it comes, you just go and do. So it's a little tough sometimes when you're like, no go ahead, make that decision. And they're like, No, I can't. No, you make that decision. And we're okay, we'll make your decision, but you just, you gotta be ready to like it. So we've definitely been trying that bottom up, which also is a little bit slower, and that's okay, that's okay. But that's why it can be frustrating sometimes and it doesn't go as fast as some of us want sometimes, but that's also how you build buy-in and when you've got that buy-in, it makes all the difference.

**Beckie Davis 29:50**

And, and along those lines, another good thing that's come out of COVID is as soon as our public school buildings were closed, we pulled together a stakeholder group that was a broad representative of our districts' special education directors, some of our higher ed special ed professors, our parent advocacy groups, and then some of our staff members. And we met weekly. And we talked about what was going on, how do we meet your needs? What do we do? How do we do it? And from that, then developed a call with districts that was once a week to get feedback, but also to give them any information, any guidance. The stakeholder group worked on

developing some guidance. The other thing it did was to give us great access to our higher ed stakeholders, our parent advocacy group stakeholders, and our district, our LEA reps. And in doing that, if we were intending to roll out this new system at our spring administrators conference in March of 2020, and COVID changed that. So then we said, okay, well, we'll kind of roll it out in a little more gentle fashion, but we'll roll it out and we'll start in September, November. And this was, this was mid-summer, I guess, maybe early summer. And the closer we got to that, the more we saw that districts just weren't ready for that, whether we were or not. And so based on the feedback from our stakeholder group, we said, okay, we hear you loudly and clearly. Let's look at how we can change this rollout. So we have this year. Like Nicole said, we monitor all of our districts every year. But with the rollout, with the use of the root cause analysis, we have offered districts the ability to opt in if they want to, and have gotten a really good response. And I think some of the districts that we might have gotten a pushback from if we had said you're going to play, when we said would you like to or when we asked would you like to play, we've gotten a better response that way. So, listening to stakeholders and trying to be sensitive to their needs. And it probably didn't hurt that South Carolina was chosen in the first cohort for the new OSEP DMS monitoring process. And so we knew exactly what our districts felt like.

**Nicole Adams 32:26**

Because I, I have always said, and research shows that you need to prepare people and that change goes much easier if you've said it so many times, by the time you actually change, they're like, finally. So you know, we were trying to say it and say it and say it, they didn't hear it as much as they would have without COVID going on. It's that Maslow's hierarchy of needs. They're just trying to survive. So it's hard to do new teaching, which is what Beckie had to convince me of as we rolled out and she's like, we need to scale back, we need to pull back, Nicole, because I kind of took a line of, there are some things in life that just have to go on dang it. There's some things in life just have to keep moving forward. And so...

**Beckie Davis 33:09**

Well and to, to keep up with our soup theme. And I don't remember who said it, but it's posted in my office, that what we wanted them to do was to look at their data and and come up with formative assessment that would help them because the data we provide is summative, it's the end of your graduation, it's your end of the year standardized assessment. And if you wait until you get those data, you don't have any opportunity just like a good IEP process, you don't have any good opportunity to change. And so what we tried telling them was, when this cook tastes the soup, that's formative assessment, that gives you the opportunity to add a little more salt or add a little bit of basil or whatever you need to add to your soup. But by the time you get your summative results, that's when your customers in the restaurant are taking, or tasting the soup, and it's too late to do anything about it by that point. So, here's your opportunity to look at your data. And to figure out again, what the ingredients are, what are you missing? Let's analyze what goes into that soup to make a good soup and graduation rate is a good example. You're looking at discipline, attendance rate, credit earned, opportunity and access to courses. So all of those things that go into making a good graduation rate is what you need to be looking at, now don't wait to get your graduation data. And that's what we tried to do with the root cause analysis, is to help them identify those pieces that they do have control over and and changes that they can make.

**Susan Hayes 34:54**

I love that you all think and talk in metaphors. It's, it's beautiful, not only the work that you all do, but the way you communicate it, is just so accessible and it tells such a beautiful story. Something else you all both do and have done as long as I've known you organically, is you, you capture those lessons learned as you're telling your story. And that was our final question, which I'll rephrase a little bit. But just in, as I was jotting down notes, as you all were talking, I've heard a couple lessons that you shared. One, that message clearly and consistently and often. I love the redundancy builds fluency. We could put that on the backside of our embroidered pillow, I think, it feels like a, another quote, that's, that's really important. I also heard that notion of being intentional about supporting your own state-level staff and really empowering them to help shape this work, which I think was really powerful. That notion of engaging stakeholders and really listening to them and not being afraid to make changes to your system or your timing, based on what you're hearing from them. I also heard this notion of there being value. Sometimes I think you all were strategic about when to do this, but there being value sometimes in making things voluntary, incentivizing participation, instead of requiring it. So some incredible gems there. I think with our little bit of time left, we wanted to ask, are there any other lessons learned or advice that you might offer other states who are just beginning this work that can benefit from your experience having maybe gone first?

**Beckie Davis 36:26**

I think for me, it's, it's a firm commitment and this is the right thing to do for kids. I mean, improving outcomes or focusing on outcomes is the right thing to do. And when you look at, at due process data, dispute resolution data, most of the time, you don't have a parent who's unhappy, just because you forgot to check a box or send a form, you have parents that are unhappy because their child is not making progress. And so, if you've got a commitment that you can firmly get behind, and clearly articulate and communicate to people, you just need to do it.

**Nicole Adams 37:07**

We know that our current system wasn't changing student outcomes, not to say that it was wrong, but it wasn't changing outcomes. And so we needed to make change now. And also, if everything in the world is changing, it also kind of helped that, well let's just do it now. They won't, they won't even notice we're changing, they're, there's stuff going on. But you can no longer, you can't fear change anymore when we know what we're doing isn't working. And by not working, I mean, not changing outcomes. So we knew what we were doing wasn't working, and we had reached a point where, it's never going to be perfect, and it's never going to be right. So let's do it right now.

**Susan Hayes 37:51**

That's great. Thank you all for those really, really insightful lessons learned and just in general, for your generosity of spirit. From the beginning, you have both been and your whole team has been so willing to share with our RBAS community, and share in such a transparent way, the successes, the wins, and the challenges. And I know that's helped so many people learn from your experience. So, we express our sincere gratitude to you all, for not only doing this complex work and walking this difficult road at times, but being willing to pause and sort of check in with us and let us know how it's going and let your state colleagues know as well.

**Beckie Davis** 38:30

We would not be a 10th as far down the road as we are with anything, especially with the little bit of sanity we've been able to retain, if it wasn't for NCSI.

**Susan Hayes** 38:41

Back at you friends. We learned so much from you all. And we always feel like it's such a privilege when we get invited in to be a part of your work. We always are kind of floating in, a lot of us have worked in in state government and federal government. It's just such a, it's such an honor when we get to do the work with you all. So thank you for, for the privilege, for letting us walk this road with you. And thank you all as well for embracing our General Soup theme. We are gonna close each of our episodes with some soup jokes. So surprisingly enough, if you google soup jokes, there're quite a few websites of, I don't know who these people are that compile niche jokes, but there are, there are several. And so we've chosen two today and we thought that rather than record these jokes in a vacuum with just me and Sara and our lovely tech friends Melissa and Sanjay, we thought we would try these jokes out on you all to see if they elicit a laugh and if they don't, then maybe we won't include them.

**Beckie Davis** 39:37

They can be edited out.

**Susan Hayes** 39:41

Are you ready for some soup jokes?

**Beckie Davis** 39:44

I am ready. Nicole?

**Nicole Adams** 39:46

Beckie likes it cheesy. So...

**Beckie Davis** 39:49

I do, I love puns. Yes, yes.

**Susan Hayes** 39:51

Okay, prepare. I'll do the first one Sara and then you can do the second one. So, here's a question for you. How do the New England Patriots eat their soup?

**Beckie Davis** 40:04

Not too well recently with...

**Nicole Adams** 40:08

Well I was trying to figure out if there's, I was trying to figure out a chowder pun. I can't think of a chowder pun.

**Beckie Davis** 40:15

And all I can think is the losing season they're having right now.

**Susan Hayes** 40:17

Let's, let's not talk about that.

**Beckie Davis** 40:23

No. How do the New England Patriots eat their soup?

**Susan Hayes** 40:25

I will tell you Beckie — they eat their soup in a Super Bowl. Or at least they used to. Okay, good. We're laughing. Ok, Sara's turn.

**Sara Dautre** 40:38

Here's our soup joke. The, sorry, I'm not sure, delivery on this one's tough Susan. Ok.

**Susan Hayes** 40:45

I know. I took the easy one.

**Sara Dautre** 40:47

Here's our soup joke. So, the, a person in the restaurant says to the waiter, waiter, there's a dead fly in my soup. The waiter responds, yes, sir. It's the hot water that kills them.

**Susan Hayes** 41:00

I think that's funny.

**Sara Dautre** 41:05

Read it too many times.

**Nicole Adams** 41:09

The fall flat was the funny part.

**Sara Dautre** 41:13

This has been a great hour. Anyway, I could do this every week with the two of you. Anyway.

**Susan Hayes** 41:19

Oh, we needed a laugh. Thank you guys so much. So to wrap this up today for our dessert/cheese plate, on all of our episodes, we will highlight a resource available from NCSI or maybe from another TA Center that we think might be helpful to our community. So today, we would like to highlight our RBAS results-based accountability and support team–developed Fast Fives. And these Fast Fives it's a series of short briefs designed to provide you all with bite-sized information on a key topic related to general supervision, accountability, or support systems. And we have a new Fast Five that we would like to tell you about today. And that is one focused on risk assessments. So this particular Fast Five answers five questions that you all may have about risk assessments, including what they are, whether or not states are required to use a risk assessment as part of your monitoring of LEAs, as well as different ways that state education agencies are using risk assessments to guide their LEA monitoring, some examples of how states have chosen to organize their risk assessments, as well as some sample data points that SEAs have chosen to include in their risk assessments. So again, this is a new resource from NCSI. It's only two pages, we've gotten a lot squeezed into two pages. And it's our new Fast Five, five questions answered about risk assessments, which you can find on the NCSI website in our resource library.

**Sara Doutre** 42:53

Thank you, Susan. We're working on more Fast Five documents, Fast Five resources and appreciate any requests you have for topics or any of your resources you would like us to share on the podcast, so please contact us with requests for additional resources or resources you would like us to share in this segment.

**Susan Hayes** 43:15

Well, thanks for joining us today on this episode of the General Soup podcast. This production was brought to you by the National Center for Systemic Improvement and funded by the Office of Special Education Programs in the US Department of Education.

**Sara Doutre** 43:28

Special thanks to our audio editor Sanjay Pardnani and our producer Melissa Cheung . See you next time when we get together again to dish on General Soup.