

RESULTS-DRIVEN ACCOUNTABILITY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

SUMMARY—4-5-12

Background Points

- The educational outcomes of America’s children and youth with disabilities have not improved as much as expected, despite significant federal efforts to close achievement gaps through federal programs such as *No Child Left Behind* and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*.
- Children with disabilities are part of, not separate from, the general education population. Special education accountability should strengthen and compliment other ED reform initiatives, including ESEA flexibility.
- An emphasis on compliance over results in special education fails to acknowledge those States where children with disabilities are achieving and being prepared for a range of college and career options appropriate to their individual needs and preferences.
- To measure improvement in the Part C and preschool programs, we need high quality early childhood outcomes data. State early Intervention and early childhood programs need time to focus on improving the quality and extent of these data.
- The accountability system under the IDEA should provide meaningful information to the public regarding the effectiveness of State and local educational agencies in educating children with disabilities.

Vision

The Office of Special Education Programs’ (OSEP) vision for Results-Driven Accountability (RDA) is that all components of accountability will be aligned in a manner that best supports States in improving results for infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities, and their families. The IDEA requires that the primary focus of IDEA monitoring be on improving educational results and functional outcomes for children with disabilities, and ensuring that States meet the IDEA program requirements. The current system places heavy emphasis on procedural compliance without consideration of how the requirements impact student learning outcomes. In order to fulfill the IDEA’s requirements, a more balanced approach to determining program effectiveness in special education is necessary.

Plan for Reform

During the coming year, OSEP will engage staff and stakeholders in a careful assessment and revision, as necessary, of the critical components of OSEP’s work in order to support State improvement efforts and change the trajectory of student learning outcomes. All previously scheduled on-site visits are suspended, which includes formula grant verification visits and discretionary grant monitoring visits. OSEP will fulfill its statutory responsibility to monitor states through the Annual Performance Reports and monitoring of compliance with fiscal requirements. The IDEA requires OSEP to monitor States, but it does not require on-site monitoring.

Major components of the accountability system to be aligned within RDA include the following:

- **Annual Performance Report (APR)—**
The IDEA requires States to submit annual reports that include data relative to specific areas addressed in the statute. Most, but not all, indicators are specifically prescribed by the statute; however, ED does have flexibility in how some of the indicators are structured and reported. APR indicators will be designed to measure outcomes most closely aligned with improving results, to the greatest extent possible.
- **State Status Determinations—**
The Department is required to annually make determinations of each State’s performance status using data from the APR and other publicly available data. The designation “meets requirements” should acknowledge a State’s effectiveness in improving outcomes for children with disabilities relative to other states and to the nation. Determinations under RDA will be based on States’ overall performance on a set of priority indicators and other relevant data rather than only on compliance indicators.
- **Monitoring and Technical Assistance—**
A differentiated system of monitoring and technical assistance (TA) will support States with the most significant needs for improvement. Performance of States relative to other States and to national data will be determined using data on priority indicators, and will be used to determine the appropriate level of monitoring and technical assistance.

Next Steps

- Develop and implement communication strategy
- Develop and implement procedures for engaging stakeholders in conceptualizing RDA
- Redesign internal work processes to better support States in improving results