

Investigative Questions to Help Look at Performance and Guide Technical Assistance (TA) Decisions for Indicator B-2 (Dropout)

The percent of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school compared to the percent of all youth in the state dropping out of high school. [20 U. S. C. 1416 (a) (3) A]

The following information should be available when using these questions to guide TA decisions:

- The State Performance Plan
- The Annual Performance Reports
- Letters of Determination with accompanying Tables
- Tools used to gather Indicator 2 data
- Data summaries for dropout related indicators (B-1, B-3, B-4, B-8, B-13, and B-14).

Background Information

1. Describe what is happening now in your state and local districts relative to dropout prevention, intervention, and reentry for students with disabilities. Are there, or have there been, any:
 - a. Changes in legislation or policy?
 - b. Changes in definitions, calculations, or procedures?
 - c. Parent advocacy?
 - d. Program initiatives, including initiatives in general education?
 - e. Stakeholder involvement?
 - f. Collaboration with other agencies, programs, etc?
 - g. Leadership changes?
 - h. Critical press or publicity?
2. Describe the method, including definition of dropout, used to calculate dropout rates.
 - a. Is the method used to determine dropout rates for students with IEPs the same as that used for all students?
 - b. Does the state's attendance policy establish the amount of time that a student has to miss school with unexcused absences before the student is dropped from district rolls and considered a dropout?
 - c. If the state is not using a cohort, are there plans to change during the next APR reporting cycle?
 - d. How long has the state and local district data been collected using the current definitions and calculations?
3. Can the state's database track individual students as they move through high school (even if they move to another school or district)?
4. What is the trend in the overall dropout rate over the last three years in the state?

Data Collection

1. Describe the approach used to collect the state and local district data. How did the state and local district ensure that the data were accurate, valid, and reliable?
2. What questions or focused monitoring probes does the state use to “drill down” dropout issues within districts that did not meet state targets? Is the questions/probes part of their continuous improvement monitoring process? If so, how were questions chosen? Have questions been approved by MSIP?
3. What type of training was/is provided to the state and local district data collectors? To whom was/is it provided? How often? How is new staff trained?
4. What other steps are taken to ensure accuracy and reliability of your data?
 - a. Review district data to assess reliability,
 - b. Ensure consistency across the state in the use of definitions and instructions,
 - c. Clean up state exit codes (e.g., dropped out, graduated, moved not known to be continuing), and
 - d. Institute procedures to track youth who have moved or transferred.

Data Reporting

1. Describe the approach used to report the required data and information.
 - a. Did the state and local district report the required data for the indicator? If not, why not?
 - b. If not, what implications does this have for improvement planning?
2. What are the best formats for conveying the information to ensure that reporting requirements are met and that data are transparent and easily understood. Are data presented in ways that are visually appealing, unambiguous and clear (i.e., using keys/legends and clear labels), efficient by conveying the ideas in tables, charts, or graphs, and user-friendly?

Data Analysis

- 1) Describe how the state analyzed the data to determine performance on Indicator 2.
- 2) Have revisions been made to the State’s measurement of the Indicator, baseline year, targets for improvement, improvement activities?
- 3) What is the status of performance targets to date?
 - a. If improvement or slippage has been noted, what could be considered the causes or explanation for the noted change?
 - b. Are there other state and/or district data available to explain data variations noted?
 - c. What changes are likely to be made in the targets for the next reporting cycle?

- 4) When district level data are analyzed and measured against the SEA's targets for dropout, how many districts:
 - a. met or exceed the designated target;
 - b. did not meet the target;
 - c. did not meet the target, but made significant improvement;
 - d. did not meet the target, and made no improvement; or
 - e. did not meet the target and reported slippage

- 5) In looking at the data, how does the data vary across districts (e.g., geographic regions, district/program size, subgroups, etc.) in the state? What variation factors might influence the data? What variations exist when looking at the aggregated results for each district?
 - a) Does the state analyze data across multiple indicators and use the findings as a basis for causal analysis at the district level? For example, if dropout rates are high, are suspensions and expulsions and/or academic performance correspondently high? Are graduation rates and parental engagement low?
 - b) When district data are sorted based upon indicators that correlate with dropout (e.g., graduation, proficiency on assessments, suspensions, transition, and parent involvement) is the state able to discern patterns between districts who are meeting targets and those who are not meeting targets? If yes, how will the state use the information to guide improvement planning, identify the districts that need the most help, and/or target districts for focused monitoring?

- 6) What conclusions can be drawn from the data analyses? What are the areas of strength? What new issues have emerged? How will the state address these issues? What additional information is needed to better understand the results?

Data Use & Improvement Planning

1. How does the State use the data to improve state and district level practices?
 - a. For systemic problems at the state or local level, what steps or actions are taken to address those systemic problems?
 - b. What program and TA resources can the state re-align to leverage improvement efforts?
 - c. What new or existing resources have been allocated to address the systemic problems (at the state and local level)?

2. How does the State and local district use the data to improve results?
 - a. Describe your improvement plan and the improvement strategies used to date, specifically including the activities/strategies and resources used.
 - b. Does this plan include improvement activities that specify action steps, timelines, responsible parties, and resources?
 - c. Do you have a plan that addresses dropout prevention, intervention, and or reentry at both the state and local levels?
 - d. Did the development of this plan include a variety of stakeholders including local teachers and administrators, parents, students, adult agency representatives (rehabilitation services), other state/local agencies serving students with disabilities (e.g., mental health, juvenile justice, child welfare and foster care

- e. What improvement activities for graduation and dropout were targeted for implementation during the 2008 APR cycle? What mechanisms were used by the state to ensure that improvement practices were evidence-based?
 - f. What is the status of each activity based on the progression and timelines stated in the SPP/APR? Were they implemented as described in the plan? If not, what adjustments were made and why?
 - g. What outcomes were targeted for these activities? Did the planned activity result in meeting the state's target? What practices, strategies, resources appear to be most effective in accomplishing the desired outcome? What, if any, changes are needed?
 - h. What is the state's plan to leverage resources and use improvement activities to address multiple indicators as appropriate?
 - i. How has the State and local district evaluated the impact of the improvement efforts taken to date?
 - j. How are this information and the data collected used to identify or modify improvement activities?
 - k. Explain what you plan to do to continue efforts that worked and change efforts that did not work
 - l. What might be the barriers to improved performance?
 - i. State and district policies and regulations
 - ii. State and district funding
 - iii. Lack of understanding about dropout challenges and evidence based practices and strategies that are available
 - iv. Lack of capacity to implement evidence based practices
 - v. Other
3. How are your improvement activities for Indicator 2 aligned with other APR indicators?
4. Given your responses to the above questions, what areas of focus are needed to improve performance on Indicator 2?
- a. Do you need to improve collection or use of data?
 - i. Data collection process?
 - ii. Data analysis process?
 - iii. Data reporting process?
 - iv. Data use process.
 - b. Do you need to improve implementation of major areas that affect Indicator 2?
 - i. Utilize data systems that support a realistic diagnosis of the number of students who drop out and that help identify individual students at high risk of dropping out.
 - ii. Develop and implement programs that provide and train adult mentors and monitors for students at risk of dropping out.
 - iii. Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide the skills needed to graduate and to serve them after they leave school.
 - iv. Provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance of marginalized students.

- v. Implement programs to improve students' classroom behavior and social skills.
 - vi. Conduct efforts that build and sustain home school partnerships, especially with parents of high school youth.
 - vii. Provide training and TA to districts on how to personalize the learning environment and instructional process to create a sense of belonging, and improve school climates.
5. What strategies might you use to improve your performance on Indicator 2?
- a. Provide targeted TA and/or training?
 - b. Produce and disseminate or post (on the web) guidance documents, reference materials, training modules and/or other tools?
 - c. Develop and promote model sites?
 - d. Develop new inter- or intra- agency agreements, plans and communication protocols?
 - e. Align efforts to address dropout within the broader context of school improvement initiatives?
 - f. Conduct efforts to strengthen parent and community relations?
 - g. Examine, clarify, develop, or revise regulations, policies and practices that are counterproductive to dropout prevention efforts (e.g., attendance policies that are linked to credit accrual and out of school removal for tardiness)
 - h. Re-allocate/re-structure resources and staffing?
 - i. Other (specify)
6. What, if any, assistance do you need to demonstrate improvement with Indicator 2?