

Investigative Questions to Help Look at Performance and Guide Technical Assistance (TA) Decisions for Indicator B-1 (Graduation)

Percent of youth with IEPs graduating from high school with a regular diploma. [Sec. 612(a) (15) (A) (iii)]

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 1 data
- Data summaries for indicators related to school completion (B-1, B-2, 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 graduation, 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. Review state graduation policies and practices and describe potential effects and considerations for students with disabilities.
 - a. What is the state's definition of graduation? What diploma options are offered?
 - b. What are the state's minimum requirements for graduation?
 - c. Have any of the districts in the state put into place more rigorous standards for graduating? If so, how are these standards impacting youth with IEPs who move or transfer from district to district?
 - d. 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?
 - e. Does the state require that students pass a minimum competency exam in order to receive a regular diploma? If so, is there data to indicate the impact of the exam on graduation rates for youth with IEPs? Dropout rates?
 - f. How does the state define graduation or calculate graduation rates?
 - g. What is the trend in the state's overall graduation rate over the last three years?

- h. Can the state's database track individual students as they move through high school (even if they move to another school or district)?

Data Collection

1. Describe the method used to calculate graduation rates.
 - a. Did the state compare the all-student rate with that for students with IEPs (even though that requirement was removed from the text of the indicator)? If so, were the same calculations used to arrive at both rates the same?
 - b. How long have state and local district data been collected using the current definitions and calculations?
2. Describe the approach used to collect the state and local district data. How did the state and local districts ensure that the data were accurate, valid and reliable?
3. What questions or focused monitoring probes does the state use to "drill down" in graduation issues within districts that did not meet state targets? Are the questions/probes part of the state's continuous improvement monitoring process? If so, how were questions chosen? Have they been approved by MSIP?
4. 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?
5. Are there clear and easily read procedures for each task associated with the data collection/consolidation process at the state level? ... At the district level?
6. 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. 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 your performance targets to date? If there, have been any changes, why do you think they occurred?
 - a. If the graduation rate improved or slipped, can you explain why?
 - b. Are there other state and/or district data available that explain the 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 graduation, how many districts:
 - a. met or exceeded 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. How do the data vary across districts (e.g., geographic regions, district/program size, subgroups, etc.) in the state? What factors might vary to influence the data? What variations exist when looking at the aggregated results for each district?
6. 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 the graduation rate is low, are rates of dropout, suspension and expulsion and/or poor academic performance correspondently high? Is the rate of parental engagement low?
7. When district data are sorted based upon indicators that correlate with graduation (e.g., dropout, proficiency on assessments, suspensions, transition, and parent involvement), is the state able to discern patterns between districts that are meeting targets and those 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?
8. 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 understand the results better?

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 do the State and local districts 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 and addresses school completion, dropout prevention, intervention, and or reentry at both the state and local levels?
 - c. 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)?
 - d. 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 these practices were evidence-based?
 - e. What is the implementation status of each activity based on the progression and timelines stated in the SPP/APR?
 - f. What outcomes were targeted for these activities?
 - g. How have the State and local districts evaluated the impact of the improvement efforts undertaken to date? Did the planned activity result in meeting the state's target? How is data used to identify or modify improvement activities?
 - h. What practices, strategies, resources appear to be most effective in accomplishing the desired outcome? What, if any, changes are needed?
 - i. How does the plan leverage resources and align improvement activities to address multiple indicators as appropriate?
 - j. 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 graduation and dropout challenges as well as evidence based practices and strategies that are available
 - iv. Lack of capacity to implement evidence based practices
 - v. Other
3. How do your improvement activities for Indicator 1 relate to Indicators 2, 3, 4, 8, 13 and 14?
4. Given your responses to the above questions, what areas of focus are needed to improve performance on Indicator 1?
- a. Do you need to improve collection or the use of data?
 - i. Data collection process?
 - ii. Data cleaning and aggregation process?
 - iii. Data analysis process?

- iv. Data reporting process?
 - v. Data use process.
 - b. Do you need to improve implementation of major areas that affect Indicator 1?
 - 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, particularly in Algebra, English, and Science.
 - 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 TA to districts for development of evidence-based initiatives to assist youth with IEPs in completing school (e.g., career academies).
 - viii. 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 1?
- 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 school completion 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 school completion and dropout prevention efforts (e.g., linking attendance policies to credit accrual and out of school removal for tardiness).
 - h. Re-allocate/re-structure resources and staffing.
 - i. Other (specify).
6. What assistance, if any, does your state need to demonstrate improvement in Indicator 1?