



ITCA Comments and Recommendations on IDEA Part C Results Data in Determinations *December 12, 2014*

These comments are being submitted on behalf of the IDEA Infant & Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA) regarding the request for feedback on the proposed approach for including results data in the Part C determinations process. The ITCA represents member states and other jurisdictions implementing Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for infants and toddlers with and at risk for developmental delays and disabilities and their families.

Since learning that OSEP would be including child outcome data in the determinations process, one of ITCA's highest priorities has been to work with members to prepare recommendations to OSEP. In total, 74 percent of the membership (37 states) participated and/or provided input on these recommendations through the following activities:

- Devoted a substantial part of our annual meeting to discussing this issue with members;
- Had representatives in attendance at the focused meeting convened by OSEP in September, and transmitted notes on OSEP's proposed approach to all members for their information and to request their input on key issues and recommendations;
- Conducted several polls of state members to ask questions specifically related to the proposal particularly regarding children who are not in Part C for at least 6 months;
- Convened a work group of the Data Committee to assist with preparation of ITCA comments and recommendations and model how the proposed approach using their states' data to assess the impact on states;
- Convened multiple joint meetings with the data and legislative committees of ITCA, that included representatives of 24 states.
- Engaged the ITCA board in three meetings on this issue;
- Surveyed member states to determine their support and receive comments on ITCA's proposed recommendation on this proposal;
- Shared proposed recommendations with partner associations and others; and
- Finalized the attached ITCA letter of recommendations, which have been approved by the Board and strongly endorsed by an overwhelming majority of ITCA members who participated in this process.

ITCA recognizes and supports state determinations as an important part of OSEP's Results Driven Accountability (RDA) process for Part C. ITCA agrees that increasing efforts to focus on improved results for young children and their families, thereby facilitating a better balance between compliance and results as envisioned in IDEA 2004, is wise. ITCA strongly supports

the use of results in the determinations process and is committed to working with OSEP to shape the determinations process in a manner that will help states move forward in improving child outcomes, while recognizing the difficulties inherent in the measurement process and ensure a process that is equitable to all states.

Ensuring the data are of high quality and used in a way that accurately reflects child performance is critical. ITCA must note that no additional federal funds were provided for this very costly investment in a child outcomes measurement process. States have had varying resources to work on data quality. In addition, the focus on early childhood data systems has redirected data efforts beyond IDEA. We note this because states have limited resources with which to work to improve the quality of child outcome data and states would benefit from opportunities to compete for grants to improve child outcome data and results in the future. ITCA offers a number of recommendations to support achievement of this goal.

First, we offer a few observations to support our recommendations:

ITCA believes it is important to recognize that there are many factors that influence child outcome data which need to be considered and provide the context for use of results in the determination process for states. First, states use different methods, as approved by OSEP, for collecting and interpreting assessment data to measure and report child outcomes, which make comparison of data across states difficult. Eligibility criteria are established by states within the federally required framework, and therefore the population of children served by Part C is heterogeneous. There are many social, demographic, and individual child and family circumstances that influence child development, and the length of time children and families participate in Part C programs is relatively short. The evidence base for developmental progress which can be made by children in Part C programs is growing and Part C programs are pleased to be in a leadership position to have and contribute to child outcomes data. At the same time, more evidence-based knowledge and experience is needed to establish expectations for the level of progress that can be achieved by children participating in Part C programs.

Since baseline data for Indicator 3 child outcomes were reported in each state's APR five years ago, state Part C systems have been working to improve data quality to ensure that reliable conclusions can be made regarding child outcomes. These ongoing improvement activities also help explain why a state's data may not be in line with the national data and may continue to change as the improvement activities are implemented. These changes will affect the results of an individual state as well as the national data and therefore should not be used for such high-stakes. State efforts include:

- Increasing the number of children whose exit scores are available (completeness of the data);

- Providing training and technical assistance to improve the accuracy of the measurement of child achievement;
- Making adjustments, with input from stakeholders, in their approaches to measuring child outcomes, including changes in assessment approaches, tools, procedures and business rules used to derive progress categories for reporting purposes; and
- Engaging in data analysis activities at the state and local level to enhance data quality and to use the data to inform strategies to improve results for infants and toddlers.

States are now actively engaged in completing intensive analyses on their child outcomes data as a part of the required State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) process. As a part of these efforts, states are drilling down on data quality issues and designing improvement activities to respond to any data quality issues identified. These efforts will systematically increase the quality of the data over the SSIP life span. As these efforts continue over the coming years, data will become more stable and be of higher quality.

States have had varying resources to work on data quality. At one point OSEP had competitive grants for enhancements to data systems. In addition, the focus on early childhood data systems have redirected data efforts beyond IDEA. We note this because states have limited resources with which to work to improve the quality of child outcome data and states would benefit from opportunities to compete for grants to improve child outcome data and results in the future.

ITCA offers the following recommendations:

1. Compliance and results data should not be weighted equally in June 2015 determinations.

States have necessarily focused on the compliance indicators for the past six years, leading to significant improvement over time in state compliance. For the initial year of using Part C results data, compliance scores should be 70 percent of a state's determination, with results data weighted at 30 percent of the determination. States will similarly need time to identify and implement effective strategies to improve child outcomes. The use of results data should be increased by 5 percent per year over 6 years until compliance and results are weighted equally. This phase-in period also will allow additional and necessary time for states' data to become more stable and of higher quality.

2. Data quality and child achievement data should not be weighted equally in June 2015 determinations.

For the initial year of using Part C results data, data quality should be 70 percent of the results calculation, with child achievement weighted at 30 percent. The use of child achievement data should be increased by 5 percent over 6 years until results are weighted

equally. Over the 6 years, state data will become more stable as accuracy and quality increases.

3. **Only comparisons of each state’s performance to its own targets should be used during the initial years of incorporating results data into determinations.**

As discussed above, states’ data are not yet stable enough to be used for comparison across states. In addition, state differences such as eligibility criteria and decision rules for compiling child outcome results into progress categories, and making comparisons using the current data, could potentially impact an individual state’s performance when compared to a national aggregation of all data. As Indicator 3 child outcomes data collection and the SSIP process continues and the quality of states’ outcome data improve, it is more likely that a valid process can be designed to compare child achievement data across states.

4. **“Completeness” of the data should be determined based on a denominator supplied by the state with accompanying rationale and documentation.**

The 618 exiting data used in the OSEP proposal do not represent an accurate count of the number of children for whom child outcomes exit ratings should be available. ITCA recommends that states be asked to provide the denominator from which the “completeness of the data” will be calculated. States should be expected to have necessary documentation of this denominator, including adjustments made to the total number of children exiting the program. OSEP historically has allowed states to “adjust” raw data reported in compliance indicators to account for family circumstances impacting state performance. There are several factors that contribute to the availability of child outcome data on exit from the Early Intervention Program including:

- According to OSEP directions, states are required to report outcomes data only for children who received at least six consecutive months of services in the Part C system. According to ITCA data from a number of states, between 20-45% of children who exited Part C do not receive at least 6 consecutive months of services. States should be permitted to subtract the number of children who leave Part C who did not receive services for at least 6 months from the denominator used to calculate “completeness” of the data.
- States experience a variety of exceptional family circumstances that impact on the number of children for whom exit ratings are available. States should be permitted to subtract documented examples of exceptional family circumstances from the denominator as well.
- Finally, one state continues to sample and should only be accountable for the number of children included in the OSEP-approved sample methodology used in the state. States that sample should be permitted to use the number of children in the state’s approved sample as the denominator.

5. **Use only “a” and “e” progress categories to measure “out-of-range” scores for data quality.**

ITCA supports the standards as indicated for expected patterns and ranges in progress categories “a” and “e.” This is consistent with a standard practice of consideration for outliers. However, we do not support the use of expected patterns for progress categories “b,” “c,” and “d” as there is no empirical evidence for this.

6. **States’ performance data in child outcomes should be considered in determinations even if the state’s data quality does not meet all the standards for data quality.**

According to the proposal, a state’s child achievement data would only be considered if the state scored at least a 2 out of a possible 4 in the data quality component. A score of 0 or 1 would automatically score the state with a zero in child achievement. ITCA recommends that a state’s data be used in the calculation of its determination regardless of its score in the data quality calculation.

7. **A different method for comparing state to state child achievement data should be developed over the next several years by OSEP through the federally-funded contractors with active stakeholder involvement.**

ITCA is concerned about the current proposal’s use of percentiles to compare state to state performance on child achievement. The 90th percentile seems too high a standard and it seems to contradict the proposed data quality standard that “e” should not be too high. ITCA recommends that while states continue to work on enhancing data quality, OSEP work with their contractors to consider alternate methods using actual state data as it is reported over the next several years. Stakeholder input is necessary for this process as it proceeds.

The use of percentiles is, in a way, arbitrary. States could be quite close to each other on child achievement measures and yet receive fewer points because the state is not in the 90th percentile. Using an approach such as summary statement percentage ranges provides states with a benchmark to strive to achieve which is absent using a percentile approach. One example using percentage ranges is:

Summary statement percentage ranges would be used for each summary statement for each outcome area, similar to the process for the “missing data” under data quality. These ranges might differ for the two summary statements, as shown in the example. The cut scores here are for example only to illustrate the concept.

Summary Statement #1, outcomes A, B, and C. <30% = 0; 30-65% = 1; >65% = 2.

Summary Statement #2, outcomes A, B, and C. <25% = 0; 25-45% = 1; >45% = 2.

There is strong sentiment nationally that the variability in state systems makes it impossible to reliably compare performance across states. This additional time period during which alternate methods are considered can be used to carefully consider how these state variables, including state differences such as tool and methods used to measure child outcomes, eligibility criteria, population, system of payments, etc., should be taken into account. This careful process with stakeholder input and transparent data runs will result in a methodology that, once implemented, is considered valid and reliable and an accurate way of comparing states' performance.

8. For the first two years, use only each state's performance compared with the state's targets as the measure of child achievement and exclude the "change over time in summary statements" measure.

Nationally, states' current performance data are not stable enough to be used for comparing states to each other or to the state's own performance over time. Using a concept of statistically significant change will not be valid until the data have more stability. As states are working to increase the accuracy of their child outcomes measurement process, it is not unlikely that performance will fluctuate. Targets are set with stakeholder input and with consideration of the important state variables that impact on data quality and performance. ITCA recommends that until the data are more stable, at least in the first few years, a state be compared against its state targets.

Either FFY 2013 performance could be compared to FFY 2012 targets or consideration should be given to initiating this measure in the June 2016 determinations when state's FFY 2014 performance can be compared to the state's 2014 targets.

Regardless of what decision is made, going forward, it will be important to establish evidence-based expectations for the percent of children who will demonstrate substantial progress or achieve age-typical development as a result of participating in Part C programs. Part C programs provide services to children with a wide range of disabilities (and in some states risk factors) with impact on development and functioning ranging from mild to severe. Logically, there will be a "ceiling" which will be reached in states for both summary statements. Perhaps a percentage threshold should be set, after which increases would not be expected.

9. A methodology for considering family outcomes should be developed in the next several years and incorporated into the Part C determinations process.

ITCA believes that both child outcomes and family outcomes should be considered in the Part C determinations process, consistent with the purposes of Part C as stated in the statute. There is strong and unequivocal research demonstrating the relationship between families' self-perceptions, knowledge, skills, and supports, and the developmental progress of their

children. Including family outcomes in the determinations process reflects the primary role of the family in the achievement of positive child outcomes. ITCA recognizes that there is no acceptable way of incorporating family outcomes into the June 2105 process but we request that work begin now on determining an accurate way of accomplishing this in the next several years.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the use of results in the determinations process. As always, ITCA is available and willing to provide any additional information or clarification that may be needed. ITCA looks forward to working closely with the Department as you proceed to incorporate results into the determinations process for Part C. Feel free to contact us by email at ideaitca@aol.com if we may be of further assistance.

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