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IV. POLICIES

State Improvement and Monitoring

The Comprehensive Planning Process for the IDEA Part D
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The Office of Special Education Programs' National Assessment
Program

State Improvement and Monitoring

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has designed its Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process to support the central themes of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997: improved results for children with disabilities, parent involvement, and accountability.¹ OSEP has been working with States, parents, and other advocates to shape OSEP's accountability work in a way that drives and supports improved results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities without sacrificing any effectiveness in ensuring that the individual rights of children with disabilities and their families are protected.

OSEP has designed and implemented its Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process around the following critical themes:

Continuity. An effective accountability system must be continuous rather than episodic, it must be clearly linked to systemic change, and it must integrate self-assessment and continuous feedback and response.

Partnership with Stakeholders. OSEP must partner with parents, students, State and local educational agencies, and other Federal agencies in a collaborative process that includes stakeholders at every juncture. The process should include setting of goals and benchmarks; collection and analysis of self-assessment data; identification of critical issues and solutions to problems; and development,

¹ In the IDEA Amendments of 1997, Congress clearly defined the purposes of IDEA:

- (1) (A) to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living; (B) to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected; and (C) to assist States, localities, educational service agencies, and Federal agencies to provide for the education of all children with disabilities;
- (2) to assist States in the implementation of a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families;
- (3) to ensure that educators and parents have the necessary tools to improve educational results for children with disabilities by supporting systemic-change activities; coordinated research and personnel preparation; coordinated technical assistance, dissemination, and support; and technology development and media services; and
- (4) to assess, and ensure the effectiveness of, efforts to educate children with disabilities (§601(d)).

implementation, and oversight of improvement strategies to ensure compliance and improved results for children and youth with disabilities.

State Accountability. States must assume accountability for measuring and reporting progress, identifying weaknesses, and identifying and implementing strategies for improvement.

Self-Assessment. Each State must work with stakeholders to design and implement an ongoing self-assessment process that is focused on improving results for children and youth with disabilities and that facilitates continuous feedback and use of information to support continuous improvement. OSEP will periodically visit programs in the State to verify the self-assessment.

Data-Driven. The continuous improvement monitoring process in each State must be driven by data that focus on improved results for children and youth with disabilities. Each State collects and uses data on an ongoing basis, aligned with the State's performance goals and indicators and with regular OSEP review. States and OSEP will compare data across States, school districts, and early intervention service providers to identify needs and strategies for improvement. Some of the available data which can be critical to the self-assessment and validation process include those regarding graduation and dropout rates, performance of students with disabilities on state- and districtwide assessments, rates at which children with disabilities are suspended and/or expelled from school, and identification and placement of students from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds.

Public Process. It is important that the self-assessment and monitoring process be public and that self-assessment results, monitoring reports, and improvement plans be broadly disseminated.

Technical Assistance. Because the focus of the monitoring process is on continuous improvement, technical assistance is a critical component. OSEP therefore prioritizes the provision of such assistance as a component of its onsite work in each State. OSEP encourages States to include a technical assistance plan as part of their correction/improvement plan and to utilize the Regional Resource Centers (RRCs) and the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NECTAS) to provide and broker technical assistance throughout the continuous improvement process. The identification and dissemination of promising practices are critical components of effective technical assistance.

Evidence of Change That Improves Results for Children with Disabilities and Their Families. To be effective, the monitoring process must result in documented evidence of change that improves results for children with disabilities and their families, rather than just evidence of changes in State or local policies and documents.

The continuous improvement monitoring cycle is ongoing and consists of the following phases:

Self-Assessment. The State works with a steering committee of stakeholders with diverse perspectives to develop and implement a self-assessment to evaluate the State's effectiveness in achieving compliance and in improving results for children and youth with disabilities and their families.

Validation Planning. The steering committee, made up of representatives of stakeholder groups and selected by the State educational agency (SEA) and lead agency, works with OSEP staff to plan strategies for validating the self-assessment results, including, if appropriate, onsite collection of data by OSEP. The validation planning stage includes meetings conducted by the SEA to obtain focused public input, review the self-assessment, and develop a monitoring plan, which can include offsite and/or onsite strategies.

Validation Data Collection. During this phase, OSEP collects validation data, presents those data to the steering committee in a structured exit conference, and works with the steering committee to plan the reporting and public awareness processes. OSEP's data collection may include data collection at both the State and local levels.

Improvement Planning. Based upon the self-assessment and validation results, the steering committee develops an improvement plan that addresses both compliance and improvement of results for children and youth with disabilities. The plan includes timelines, benchmarks, and verification of improvement. OSEP encourages States to include their RRC and/or NECTAS in developing the improvement plan, in order to facilitate the effective inclusion of technical assistance in both planning and implementation of the improvement plan.

Implementation of Improvement Strategies. The State implements and evaluates the effectiveness of the improvement plan.

Verification and Consequences. Based upon documentation that it receives from the State and steering committee, OSEP verifies effectiveness of the actions taken in implementing the improvement plan. As explained above, evidence of change that improves results for children with disabilities is critical. Where the State has been effective in achieving verifiable improvement, positive consequences may include public recognition. If a State does not implement the improvement plan or if implementation is not effective, OSEP may need to impose sanctions. These could include OSEP's prescription of improvement actions, special conditions on grant awards, a compliance agreement, or withholding of funds.

Review and Revision of Self-Assessment. Based on the results of the previous improvement planning cycle, the State reviews the self-assessment and revises it as appropriate.

OSEP customizes its Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process to meet the needs of each State. OSEP uses data from each State’s self-assessment, together with other available data (including, for example, past monitoring findings, data that States submit under Section 618 of IDEA, annual Part C and biannual Part B performance reports) to determine the kind and intensity of OSEP intervention that is appropriate for that State. In States where there is evidence of substantial compliance with IDEA requirements and/or evidence that the State has self-identified areas in which improvement is needed and strategies to ensure such improvement, OSEP’s focus is on the identification and implementation of promising practices and on working with the State to ensure that the improvement strategies are effective. In States that do not effectively identify areas of noncompliance and other areas needing improvement, OSEP may need to collect substantial data to determine the level of compliance in the State and the areas in which improvement is needed. In States that are not demonstrating compliance, OSEP works with the State to develop improvement strategies. States that fail to correct identified deficiencies may be subject to enforcement actions such as prescription of improvement actions, special conditions on grant awards, a compliance agreement, or withholding of funds.

OSEP has focused its Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process on those areas that are most closely associated with positive results for children with disabilities. To help OSEP and States focus on those areas throughout the process, OSEP has created “cluster charts” that organize IDEA requirements into the following nine clusters:

For Part C (services for children ages birth through 2):

- General Supervision,
- Child Find and Public Awareness,
- Early Intervention Services in Natural Environments,
- Family-Centered Systems of Services, and
- Early Childhood Transition.

For Part B (services for children ages 3 through 21):

- Parent Involvement,
- Free Appropriate Public Education in the Least Restrictive Environment,
- Secondary Transition, and

- General Supervision.

The self-assessment and monitoring process incorporates use of the cluster areas through the following steps:

- Identifying indicators for measuring progress in the implementation of IDEA,
- Identifying potential data sources and gathering data pertinent to the indicators,
- Analyzing the data to determine the positive and negative differences between the indicators as stated and their status, and
- Identifying promising practices and developing improvement and maintenance strategies.

During the summer of 2000, OSEP conducted self-assessment institutes in Chicago and Salt Lake City. States brought teams that represented both the Part B and Part C systems to these institutes. The institutes focused on how States can use their steering committees to make data-based decisions regarding the State's strengths and weaknesses and to design needed improvement strategies. OSEP will conduct institutes in Atlanta and Seattle during the summer of 2001 to improve planning and continue the dialogue on self-assessment.

As shown in table IV-1, OSEP conducted six reviews during the 1999-2000 school year and three additional reviews during the first half of the 2000-01 school year. In addition, in 1999-2000 OSEP made a visit to Illinois for Part B focus and Part C follow up and two corrective action follow-up visits to California.²

OSEP's monitoring reports are, like the self-assessment, validation planning and data collection processes, focused around the five Part C and four Part B clusters described above. The following is a summary of the strengths and areas of noncompliance that OSEP has identified through its monitoring reviews.

² Monitoring reports are available online at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP> or by writing to the OSEP Director at the Department of Education.

Table IV-1
Schedule of 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 Continuous Improvement Monitoring Reviews

Illinois September 1999 (Part B focus/C follow-up)	Florida December 1999/February 2000
Ohio August/October 1999	New Jersey February/September 2000
Maryland September/October 1999	Pennsylvania March/October 2000
Louisiana November 1999/February 2000	California January/April 2000/January 2001 (CAP visits)
Colorado November 1999/January 2000	Hawaii October 2000/February 2001

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Division of Monitoring and State Improvement Planning.

The information from monitoring reports presented below represents information from 11 monitoring reports issued between September 1999 and October 2000. For a strength or problem to be cited below, it was noted as present in close to half or more of these monitoring reports. OSEP views the areas discussed below to be critical areas in ensuring improved results for children with disabilities, therefore any strengths or problems in these areas are noteworthy.

Part C: General Supervision and Administration

The State lead agency is responsible for developing and maintaining a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency early intervention system. Administration, supervision, and monitoring of the early intervention system are essential to ensure that each eligible child and family receives the services needed to enhance the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities and to minimize their risk for developmental delay. Early intervention services are provided by a wide variety of public and private entities. Through supervision and monitoring, the State ensures that all agencies and individuals providing early intervention services meet the requirements of IDEA, whether or not they receive funds under Part C.

While each State must meet its general supervisory and administrative responsibilities, the State may determine how that will be accomplished. Mechanisms such as interagency agreements and/or contracts with other State-level or private agencies can serve as the vehicle for the lead agency's implementation of its monitoring responsibilities. The State's role in supervision and monitoring includes: (1) identifying areas in which implementation does not comply with Federal

requirements; (2) providing assistance in correcting identified problems; and (3) as needed, using enforcing mechanisms to ensure correction of identified problems.

Many of the States that OSEP has monitored during the past 3 years do not yet have effective systems for identifying and correcting noncompliance with Part C requirements. Although most of these States provide ongoing technical assistance to early intervention service providers and agencies that coordinate these services at the local level, they do not have a systematic way to determine the extent to which all of the agencies and individuals that help the State implement its Part C system are actually complying with Part C requirements regarding, for example, public awareness, timely and effective child find, evaluation and assessment, service coordination, individualized determination of child and family needs, and provision of services in natural environments.

There is wide variation in how far States have progressed in developing an effective monitoring system. Some States have not yet conducted a systematic monitoring and evaluation of their Part C program. Other States that have conducted monitoring activities have not included important components of Part C, such as monitoring for natural environments and family-centered practices; ensuring that eligible children and families are receiving all needed services, timely evaluation and assessment activities, and individualized family service plan (IFSP) development; ensuring distribution of public awareness materials by primary referral sources; and a variety of other aspects of Part C requirements. States that identify noncompliance issues frequently have ineffective improvement actions or enforcement strategies, and the noncompliance therefore persists. Some States do not yet have procedures in place to monitor all programs and activities used to carry out Part C, including other State agencies and agencies that do not receive Part C funds.

Some States exhibited particular strengths in how they work with their State Interagency Coordinating Councils, how they collect and use data regarding the effectiveness of the Part C system, and in other areas, such as providing technical assistance to support early intervention service delivery.

Part C: Child Find/Public Awareness

The needs of infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families are generally met through a variety of agencies. However, prior to the enactment of Part C of IDEA, there was little coordination or collaboration for service provision, and many families had difficulty locating and obtaining needed services. Searching for resources placed a great strain on families. With the passage of Part C in 1986, Congress sought to ensure that all children needing services would be identified, evaluated, and served, especially those children who are typically underrepresented (e.g., minority, low-

income, inner-city, American Indian, and rural populations), through an interagency, coordinated, multidisciplinary system of early intervention services.

Each State's early intervention system must include collaborative child find and public awareness activities that are coordinated with all other child find efforts in the State. Part C recognizes the need for early referral and short timelines for evaluation because development occurs at a more rapid rate during the first 3 years of life than at any other age. Research in early brain development has demonstrated what early interventionists have known for years—that children begin to learn and develop from the moment of birth. Therefore, the facilitation of early learning and the provision of timely early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities are critical.

A number of States that OSEP has visited in the past 3 years have weaknesses in their systems for public awareness and child find. Some States have not yet found an effective way to ensure that physicians and other primary referral sources make timely referrals to the Part C system. Some have not been effective in ensuring that the system locates, identifies, evaluates and serves infants and toddlers with disabilities in isolated parts of the State or those from minority or non-English speaking families. A number of States cannot complete a comprehensive evaluation and assessment within Part C timelines and therefore either develop an IFSP before completing the evaluation and assessment or delay the development of the IFSP (and therefore the provision of services) beyond the Part C timeline.

OSEP also found strengths in some States that have developed very effective public awareness and outreach systems that ensure the timely identification of infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families and provision of early intervention services to them.

Part C: Early Intervention in Natural Environments

In creating the Part C legislation, Congress recognized the urgent need to ensure that all infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families receive early intervention services according to their individual needs. Three of the principles on which Part C was enacted include: (1) enhancing the child's developmental potential, (2) enhancing the capacity of families to meet the needs of their infant or toddler with disabilities, and (3) improving and expanding existing early intervention services being provided to children with disabilities and their families.

To assist families in this process, Congress also required that each family be provided with a service coordinator to act as a single point of contact for the family. The

service coordinator ensures that the rights of children and families are protected, arranges for assessments and IFSP meetings, and facilitates the provision of needed services. The service coordinator coordinates required early intervention services as well as medical and other services that the child and the child's family may need. With a single point of contact, families are relieved of the burden of searching for essential services, negotiating with multiple agencies, and trying to coordinate their own services.

Part C requires the development and implementation of an IFSP for each eligible child. The evaluation, assessment, and IFSP process are designed to ensure that appropriate evaluation and assessments of the unique needs of the child and of the family related to enhancing the development of their child are conducted in a timely manner. Parents are active members of the IFSP multidisciplinary team. The team must take into consideration all the information obtained through the evaluation and child and family assessments in determining the appropriate services needed to meet needs.

The IFSP must also include a statement of the natural environments in which early intervention services will be provided for the child. Children with disabilities should receive services in community settings and other places where normally developing children would be found, so that they will not be denied opportunities to be included in all aspects of our society. In 1991, Congress required that early intervention services be provided in natural environments. This mandate was further reinforced by the addition of a new requirement in 1997 that early intervention can occur in a setting other than a natural environment only when early intervention cannot be achieved satisfactorily for the infant or toddler in a natural environment. In the event that early intervention cannot be satisfactorily achieved in a natural environment, the IFSP must include a justification of the extent to which the services will not be provided in a natural environment.

In the past 3 years, OSEP has found in several States that many families do not receive required service coordination, that IFSPs do not include all of the early intervention services that infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families need, that not all services in IFSPs are provided, and that some children do not receive services in natural environments. The lack of effective service coordination results in denial of needed early intervention services and is often the result of insufficient training and/or excessive caseloads.

Part C: Family-Centered Services

Research has shown that improved outcomes for young children are most likely to occur when services are based on the premise that parents or primary caregivers are

the most important factors influencing a child's development. Family-centered practices are those in which families are involved in all aspects of the decisionmaking, families' culture and values are respected, and families are provided with accurate and sufficient information to be able to make informed decisions. A family-centered approach keeps the focus on the developmental needs of the child while including family concerns and needs in the decisionmaking process. Family-centered practices include establishing trust and rapport with families and helping families develop skills to best meet their child's needs.

Parents and other family members are recognized as the lynchpins of Part C. As such, States must include parents as an integral part of decisionmaking and service provision, from assessments through development of the IFSP, to transition activities before their child turns 3. Parents bring a wealth of knowledge about their own child's and family's abilities and dreams for the future, as well as an understanding of the community in which they live.

In 1986, Part C of IDEA was recognized as the first Federal legislation to specifically focus attention on the needs of the family related to enhancing the development of children with disabilities. In enacting Part C, Congress acknowledged the need to support families and enhance their capacity to meet the needs of their infants and toddlers with disabilities. On the cutting edge of education legislation, Part C challenged systems of care to focus on the family as the unit of services, rather than the child. Viewing the child in the context of her/his family and the family in the context of its community, Congress created certain challenges for States as they designed and implemented a family-centered system of services.

OSEP found that States used a variety of methods to ensure and enhance family participation in the provision of early intervention services for infants and toddlers. Several states have organized and systematized programs for parent involvement, including local family liaisons, parent-to-parent support networks, programs to assist parents in navigating the system, and a program to train parents to be advocates and to participate on local and State government committees. In these States, parents assist in the development of training materials and public awareness materials. The State Interagency Coordinating Council moves its meetings to various locations around the State to allow more parents to attend and participate in the activities of the Council. These States also provide information in family friendly language and in a variety of dialects to assist families to be able to participate.

Part C: Early Childhood Transition

Congress included provisions to ensure that preschool or other appropriate services would be provided to eligible children leaving early intervention at age 3. Transition

is a multifaceted process to prepare the child and the child's family to leave early intervention services. Congress recognized the importance of coordination and cooperation between the educational agency and the early intervention system by requiring that a specific set of activities occur as part of a transition plan. Transition activities typically include: (1) identification of steps to be taken to prepare the child for changes in service delivery and to help the child adjust to a new setting, (2) preparation of the family (i.e., discussions, training, visitations), and (3) determination of other programs and services for which a child might be eligible. Transition planning for children who may be eligible for Part B preschool services must include scheduling a meeting, with approval of the family, among the lead agency, the educational agency, and the family at least 90 days (with parental permission up to 6 months) prior to the child's third birthday. Transition of children who are not eligible for special education also includes making reasonable efforts to convene a meeting to assist families in obtaining other appropriate community-based services. For all Part C children, States must review the child's program options for the period from the child's third birthday through the remainder of the school year and must establish a transition plan.

In the past 3 years, OSEP has found that the States' Part C systems and school districts do not work effectively together to ensure that toddlers with disabilities receive the preschool special education or other services they need when they exit the Part C system at age 3. The IFSPs in some of these States do not include steps to support the child's transition, and some do not convene the required meeting to address transition and/or invite the school district to the meeting.

OSEP found strengths in some States that have gone beyond the Part C requirements to develop especially strong linkages between parents, the Part C system, and school districts to support smooth and effective transition.

Part B: Parent Involvement

A purpose of the IDEA Amendments of 1997 is to expand and promote opportunities for parents and school personnel to work in new partnerships at the State and local levels. Parents must now have an opportunity to participate in meetings with respect to the identification, evaluation, and educational placement of their child and the provision of a free appropriate public education to their child. Parental involvement has long been recognized as an important indicator of a school's success, and parent involvement has positive effects on children's attitudes and social behavior. Partnerships positively affect achievement, improve parents' attitudes toward the school, and benefit school personnel as well.

With the enactment of the IDEA Amendments of 1997, OSEP's work in shaping its accountability in a way that drives and supports improved results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities intensified. In order to ensure compliance with the amendments, which support positive results for people with disabilities, OSEP designed a multifaceted process. Among the Part B requirements that provide the strongest links to improved educational results for students with disabilities are those addressing the participation of parents and students and general and special education personnel in the development and implementation of educational programs for children with disabilities. One of the four major areas in which Part B requirements are clustered for children ages 3 through 21 is parent involvement.

In the past 3 years, OSEP has found that some States do not ensure that parents are part of the group that determines eligibility or the group that reviews existing data as part of the evaluation process.

Some States have shown strengths in providing especially effective training for parents, including joint training that includes both parents and educators.

Part B: Free Appropriate Public Education in the Least Restrictive Environment

The provision of a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment is the foundation of IDEA. The provisions of the statute and regulations (evaluation, individualized education program (IEP), parent and student involvement, transition, participation in large-scale assessment, eligibility and placement decisions, service provision, etc.) exist to achieve this single purpose. It means that children with disabilities receive educational services at no cost to their parents and that the services provided meet their unique learning needs. These services are provided, to the maximum extent appropriate, with children who do not have disabilities and, unless their IEP requires some other arrangement, in the school they would attend if they did not have a disability. Any removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

The reports of the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources and the House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce for the 1997 amendments emphasized that too many students with disabilities are failing courses and dropping out of school. Those reports noted that almost twice as many children with disabilities drop out as compared to children without disabilities. They expressed a further concern about the continued inappropriate placement of children

from minority backgrounds and children with limited English proficiency in special education. The committees stated their intention that “once a child has been identified as being eligible for special education, the connection between special education and related services and the child’s opportunity to experience and benefit from the general curriculum should be strengthened. The majority of children identified as eligible for special education and related services are capable of participating in the general curriculum to varying degrees with some adaptations and modifications. This provision is intended to ensure that children’s special education and related services are in addition to and are affected by the general curriculum, not separate from it.”

In the past 3 years, OSEP has found that although the percentage of children with disabilities placed in less restrictive settings has generally increased, least restrictive environment findings persist in a number of States. While some States have moved many students who were previously served in separate schools for children with disabilities to regular school campuses, receiving special education in a regular education classroom without removal is still not an option considered for many children with disabilities. Often, personnel are not available to provide the supplementary aids and services that children with disabilities need to succeed in regular education classrooms.

In many States, positive behavioral supports, including psychological counseling, are not available to meet the needs of children with emotional or behavioral disabilities. As a result, many of these children are unnecessarily removed from the regular education classroom, are suspended or expelled, or drop out before completing the requirements for a diploma.

Because of personnel shortages, in a number of States either IEP teams do not include all needed related services in students’ IEPs, or students do not receive all of the related services in their IEPs.

Some States have, however, shown strengths in providing ambitious and effective training about best practices in inclusion or positive behavioral supports.

Part B: Secondary Transition

The National Longitudinal Transition Study found that the rate of competitive employment for youth with disabilities out of school for 3 to 5 years was 57 percent, compared to an employment rate of 60 percent for youth in the general population. The study identified several factors that were associated with postschool success in obtaining employment and earning higher wages for youth with disabilities. These

include completing high school, spending more time in regular education, and taking vocational education in secondary school. The study also shows that postschool success is associated with youths who had a transition plan in high school that specified an outcome, such as employment, as a goal. The secondary transition requirements of IDEA focus on the active involvement of students in transition planning, consideration of student's preferences and interests by the IEP team, and the reflection, in the IEP, of a coordinated set of activities within an outcome-oriented process which promotes movement from school to postschool activities. Through parent and student involvement, along with the involvement of all agencies that can provide transition services, student needs can be appropriately identified and services provided that best meet those needs.

In the past 3 years, OSEP has found that noncompliance regarding transition requirements persists in many States. Although more IEPs for students age 16 or older now include some transition content, the statements of needed transition services in those IEPs do not meet Part B requirements. In many such IEPs, there is no evidence of a coordinated set of activities, designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to postschool activities.

Some States showed especially effective coordination with other State agencies, partnerships with industry and school-to-work initiatives, the establishment of State Transition Coordinating Councils and Transition Task Forces to address transition from secondary to postsecondary education, grants to expand self-advocacy, and other exemplary system supports for effective transition.

Part B: General Supervision

IDEA assigns responsibility to SEAs for ensuring that its requirements are met and that all educational programs for children with disabilities, including all such programs administered by any other State or local agency, are under the general supervision of individuals in the State who are responsible for educational programs for children with disabilities and that these programs meet the educational standards of the SEA. State support and involvement at the local level are critical to the successful implementation of the provisions of IDEA. To carry out their responsibilities, States provide dispute resolution mechanisms (mediation, complaint resolution, and due process), monitor the implementation of Federal and State statutes and regulations, establish standards for personnel development and certification as well as educational programs, and provide technical assistance and training across the State. Effective general supervision promotes positive student outcomes by promoting appropriate educational services to children with disabilities, ensuring the successful and timely correction of identified deficiencies, and providing

personnel who work with children with disabilities the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to carry out their assigned responsibilities.

OSEP found in the past 3 years that many States still do not have effective systems for identifying noncompliance, or, when they do identify noncompliance, they do not implement effective follow-up or enforcement strategies to ensure that the public agencies correct the noncompliance. These failures allow the noncompliance discussed above regarding parent involvement, the provision of a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, and transition to persist.

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The Comprehensive Planning Process for the IDEA Part D National Activities Program: Challenge and Opportunity

The United States Congress presented the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) with both a challenge and an opportunity in 1997 when it expanded the strategic planning requirements for Part D of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Part D authorizes vital national work in research and development, personnel preparation, technical assistance, information dissemination, studies and evaluations, systems change, parent training and information, technology and media services, and program improvement. The purpose of this work is to enhance the provision of special and regular education and related services to children with disabilities under Parts B and C of IDEA. Congress viewed it as essential that activities sponsored under the IDEA Part D National Activities Program support State, district, community, and parent capacity to implement fully and effectively Parts B and C of IDEA by developing an infrastructure that links useful research to practice. Congress also directed that activities funded under Part D be based on a comprehensive plan developed in collaboration with individuals with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, professionals, and representatives of State and local educational agencies, institutions of higher education, and disability advocacy organizations to reflect their issues and needs. OSEP, as the Federal agency that administers IDEA, was charged with coordinating the plan's development and implementation.

The IDEA Part D National Activities Program Comprehensive Planning Process

OSEP has a long history of involving stakeholders in planning, having engaged individuals with disabilities and professionals from the field in developing programmatic agenda for most of the nine discretionary programs folded into Part D of IDEA. OSEP designed a planning process that:

- Solicits direct input on the plan from large numbers of individuals with disabilities, parents, family members, and professionals in communities across the country;

- Extends OSEP's collegial relationships with the education community, particularly individuals and organizations who carry out Part D activities, while bolstering the community's confidence in OSEP as an agency that responds to consumers' issues and needs;
- Produces a National Activities Program plan that reflects consumers' most pressing issues and needs, extends the knowledge base through useful research, improves the translation of research findings to practice, and makes real long-term contributions to improving the lives of children with disabilities and their families; and
- Gives OSEP effective new ways to work with consumers and stakeholders throughout the plan's implementation to share progress and make mid-course corrections as new issues and needs arise.

OSEP conducted long-term planning sessions with staff, gathering information about the lessons learned from prior planning efforts and recommendations for the new process. OSEP officials asked similar questions in meetings with members of key consumer groups. OSEP also commissioned an examination of model strategic planning efforts conducted in the public and private sectors to find effective mechanisms relevant to the Part D process.

The result is a three-part process that improves previous efforts to involve the broad education community. The process incorporates collaboration with regular education and other Federal offices and agencies as well as direct input from grassroots consumers at the family, school, community, and State levels. Parts of the planning process overlap in implementation and include: (1) soliciting the opinions of key consumers of Part D activities on how to improve results for children with disabilities and their families, (2) soliciting expert opinions on the key issues associated with consumers' priorities and how the Part D National Activities Program might respond, and (3) combining the results of (1) and (2) with other relevant planning information into a comprehensive National Activities Program plan.

Part One: Soliciting the Opinions of Key Part D National Activities Program Consumers

While a variety of public and private nonprofit organizations carry out National Program activities, the consumers of the work are children with disabilities and their families and the teachers, administrators, and other personnel who work with them. These stakeholders comprise the key consumer groups whose needs and preferences must drive the Part D National Activities Program plan. Reaching out to large numbers of these consumers was critically important to OSEP's planning process.

The Comprehensive Planning Process for the IDEA Part D National Activities Program: Challenge and Opportunity

In May 1999, after considerable preparation and conversation, more than 40 national organizations whose members are drawn from the key Part D consumer groups joined OSEP in launching a nationwide effort to engage consumers in the National Activities Program planning process. The membership of participating organizations included people with disabilities, parents and family members, regular education and special education teachers, early intervention service providers, related service providers, district and school administrators, State administrators, business leaders, and policymakers. Executives of each organization met together with OSEP to frame the results of their individual consumer inquiries as lists of consumers' potential issues and needs. Partnerships were formed, and plans were made to solicit direct input from members of each national organization. The organizations promised to reconvene to discuss portions of the proposed plan and share the consumer opinion data gathered in this part of the process.

OSEP's role at this point in the planning process was to combine the lists of potential issues and needs compiled by the national organizations into a user-friendly format for consumers. OSEP used the input from the national organizations to develop a Special Education Consumer Survey³ that consumers could complete on paper or on a dedicated OSEP planning web site. The opinion survey asked consumers how best to (1) improve the lives of infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities and (2) improve school services and the broad service delivery system. National organizations actively advertised the opportunity to their members and encouraged their participation.

More than 14,900 consumers—including 9,660 individuals with disabilities, parents, and family members—completed the survey between April and September 2000. The viewpoints expressed across various groups—from individuals with disabilities to teachers, related service providers, and administrators—were strikingly similar and clear.

Consumers' Opinions About How To Improve the Lives of Infants, Toddlers, and Children with Disabilities

Consumers reported that the lives of children with disabilities of all ages would be significantly improved if they could experience:

- Greater participation and success in the general curriculum;
- Higher achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics;

³ The Special Education Consumer Survey was not a survey of a representative sample of the population. All interested persons were encouraged to respond.

- Greater participation in general education nonacademic or extracurricular activities;
- Greater access to psychosocial and mental health services (for children who need these services); and
- Greater access to information and support for themselves and their families.

In consumers' opinions, infants, toddlers, and preschool children with disabilities also need:

- Greater access to high-quality infant and toddler programs;
- Effective transition into and out of preschool; and
- Greater access to quality health care for themselves and their families.

Similarly, consumers noted that high school-aged and older youth with disabilities require:

- Greater participation in high school transition programs that include community-based work experience as well as college preparation and college mentoring programs;
- Higher rates of high school completion;
- Higher rates of participation after high school in vocational training, community college, and college programs; and
- Greater access to employment support and assistance.

Consumers' Opinions on How To Improve Service Delivery and Performance

Consumers agreed with OSEP and the national organizations that results for children with disabilities and their families are linked to the availability and quality of various services from a broad service delivery system. Consumers identified the most overwhelming improvements needed in service provision and performance as:

- More and better qualified professionals (teachers, therapists, and other), paraprofessionals and assistants to serve infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities;

The Comprehensive Planning Process for the IDEA Part D National Activities Program: Challenge and Opportunity

- Smaller class sizes or case loads of professionals serving children with disabilities;
- Better identification of infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities or those who are at risk for developing a disability;
- Effective collaboration between general and special education personnel and between professionals and individuals with disabilities and their families; and
- Better understanding of the requirements of Federal legislation regarding the rights of individuals with disabilities and their families, (i.e., IDEA, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973)⁴.

Plans for the Future

OSEP staff and executives of the national organizations will meet later this year to discuss the implications of consumers' opinions along with the results of expert panels' work in part two of the National Activities Program planning process. The dialogue will continue as the Part D National Activities Program plan is further developed and implemented.

Part Two: Soliciting Expert Opinions on the Key Issues Associated with Consumers' Priorities and How the Part D National Activities Program Might Respond

OSEP believed it could improve upon previous planning efforts that established directions which were not global enough and often left the agency with insufficient information and guidance in directing its finite resources. Therefore, OSEP designed part two of this planning process to focus on a few key issues that must be resolved in order to address the needs of consumers and improve results for children with disabilities and their families. OSEP used its work with the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) to frame this part of the process. The agency grouped its GPRA goals and objectives into five broad Part D planning areas that, in turn, reflect major provisions of IDEA. The five broad planning areas are:

- Students with disabilities' access to and participation and progress in the general curriculum;
- Standards-based reform and students with disabilities;

⁴ Westat (2001). *Implementing a strategic approach for setting a federal agenda for the discretionary program: Special Education Consumer Survey results*. Durham, NC: Author.

- Positive behavioral intervention, social/emotional, and life skills supports and services for students with disabilities;
- Early childhood programs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities and their families; and
- Secondary education, transition, and employment for students with disabilities.

OSEP convened an expert panel in each area to expound upon the implications of the Special Education Consumer Survey and other planning information, key issues requiring resolution in order to respond to consumers' priorities, and possible Part D strategies.

As OSEP was receiving consumers' responses to the Special Education Consumer Survey, the agency again reached out to the national organizations to appoint consumer authorities to the five expert strategy panels. Forty organizations sent a representative to a panel of their choice. The agency also turned to another expert opinion source at this critical point in the planning process—individuals considered by the education community to be knowledgeable about the five broad planning areas and the application of the various National Activities Program strategies, such as research and development, personnel preparation, and technical assistance. OSEP invited 40 such National Activities Program experts to serve on the five panels, along with staff of other Federal offices and agencies concerned with results for children with disabilities.

As a result, between 15 and 20 nationally recognized research, training, personnel preparation, and technical assistance authorities, as well as consumers, served on each panel. Panels worked intensively from September through November 2000. The charge to the panels was to define the few key issues that influence the making of significant progress in improving results for children with disabilities and that respond to consumers' priorities. Panels then determined the most critical gaps that needed to be bridged in order to address each issue and plausible strategies OSEP might incorporate into the IDEA Part D National Activities Program plan. A brief summary of the key issues identified by each panel follows.

Students with Disabilities' Access to and Participation and Progress in the General Curriculum

Consumers chose greater participation and success in the general curriculum as a priority for improving the lives of children with disabilities. IDEA places significant emphasis on helping children with disabilities, at an individually appropriate level,

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participate and progress in the general curriculum. The individualized education program (IEP) must include accommodations, modifications, and any related services that the child needs to access the general curriculum, as well as identify the supports that service providers need to carry out the child's program. The panel's consensus was that the following three issues are most influential in students' access to the general curriculum and must be addressed if access, participation, and progress are to increase.

Definitions Are Needed for the Terms Access, Participation, and Progress in the General Curriculum

Regular education and special education stakeholders do not have a shared understanding of the IDEA provisions related to access, participation, and progress in the general curriculum. The terms access, participation, and progress have not been operationally defined in practice; there is great variation in how these terms currently are being used. The absence of a clear consensus of meaning is undermining efforts to develop sound policy, conduct research, and improve practice. Moreover, professionals disagree about what constitutes the general curriculum. For some, curriculum refers strictly to the district- or State-mandated academic study. Others view curriculum more broadly as instruction not just in academics, but in other areas (e.g., social, communication, orientation and mobility, life, and self-determination skills).

The Individualized Educational Needs of Students with Disabilities Must Be Met by the General Curriculum To the Maximum Extent Appropriate

Although some progress has been made, many students with disabilities do not have sufficient access to general curriculum and instruction. The barriers vary. In some cases, it is an overall matter of not providing instruction appropriate to curriculum standards. Instructional practices and materials may be outdated, inappropriate for the curriculum goals, and not reflect current research on best practices. Assessment practices may be inappropriate or inadequate as well. In other cases, it is a matter of not addressing the instructional needs of a diverse group of learners, including students with disabilities. Instructional methods and materials may be insufficient to accommodate multifaceted needs. Textbooks, instructional materials, and assessments often are not available in the medium or format required by many students nor do they accommodate for cultural and linguistic differences. In some instances, supplemental aids and services necessary for participation may not have been adequately provided to a child. The issue is compounded further because little is known about how students with disabilities acquire, maintain, and apply knowledge and skills in general curriculum settings, and what teaching strategies may, in fact, lead to better outcomes. For students who do not make adequate progress in

the general curriculum and who require more intensive, individualized instruction, few strong empirically documented practices have been identified for ensuring that important skills are acquired, maintained, and transferred.

More School-Based and District-Level Support Is Needed To Support Students with Disabilities in Accessing, Participating, and Progressing in the General Curriculum

Progress for students with disabilities in the general curriculum requires a system in which all stakeholders within the classroom, school, and community work together for the students' benefit. However, schools and school districts typically are not organized to facilitate collaborative practices among students, professionals in the school, parents and families, and the community. Regular education school and district leaders often do not perceive themselves as having primary responsibility for students with disabilities—and subsequently, lack the knowledge, skills, understanding, and commitments necessary for building a unified student body. Special education-related tasks often are left to special education personnel to complete. Collaboration is at the core of ensuring that students with disabilities access, participate, and progress in the general curriculum.

Standards-Based Reform and Students with Disabilities

To ensure that children with disabilities are included in reform efforts and are able to demonstrate performance in the general curriculum to the maximum extent appropriate, IDEA provides that the performance results of children with disabilities shall be reported to the public just as performance results are reported for all children, so long as the reporting method will not result in identifying the performance of individual children. IDEA places significant emphasis on ensuring that children with disabilities participate in general state- and districtwide assessment programs, with appropriate accommodations if necessary as determined by the IEP team. IDEA also provides that alternate assessments be developed and provided for students for whom the regular assessment is considered inappropriate.

OSEP selected standards-based reform and students with disabilities as a broad Part D planning area even though consumers did not report it as a high priority in part one of the planning process. The panel decided that this lack of understanding, is, itself, a key issue.

The Regular Education and Special Education Communities, as well as the General Public, Do Not Understand the Relevance of Including Students with Disabilities in Standards-Based Reform

A mindset of universal access to standards-based reform is necessary if students with disabilities are to be equally included in accountability systems. However, the general public does not understand standards—what they are, their purpose, and how to gauge progress using them. Nor is the public convinced that students with disabilities should be included in large-scale assessments of achievement that are part of standards-based reform. Some educators oppose including students with disabilities in reform efforts based on a belief that doing so would, in fact, be harmful to students. As a consequence, the supports necessary to create a learning environment in which all students, including those with disabilities, meet high expectations for learning are absent. For example, knowledge of appropriate instructional and assessment supports, modifications, and accommodations that enable students with disabilities to participate in standards-based reform is not reaching teachers, families, and the general public.

Current Policies Do Not Support Participation of Students with Disabilities in Standards-Based Reform Initiatives

Standards-based reform for all children is just one of many policy decisions facing educational decisionmakers. Tension exists between the traditional special education focus on individual student achievement and the corresponding regular education focus on group achievement—with neither side in full agreement as to the complex interaction of the components within standards-based reform. Many students continue to be excluded from accountability systems; in fact, some State policies encourage exclusions and exemptions. Including students with disabilities in standards-based reform initiatives requires that policies are coordinated and coherent.

Resolve Issues Related to Accountability and Assessment

Technical and equity issues complicate the ease with which students with disabilities may participate in large-scale assessment and accountability systems, resulting in large numbers of these students that continue to be exempted. Often, when students do participate, data are not disaggregated, accessible, or timely. Confusion also exists regarding accommodations and modifications in the administration of large-scale assessments. For example, State policies vary with regard to the use of accommodations, and there is a lack of consistent applications of accommodations on statewide assessments. Moreover, there continues to exist an unclear relationship

between the use of assessment accommodations on large-scale tests and their use in daily instruction.

Positive Behavioral Intervention, Social/Emotional, and Life Skills Supports and Services for Students with Disabilities

Consumers participating in part one of the National Activities Program planning process want students with disabilities suspended or expelled less frequently. Consumers believe that effective intervention and supports exist and should be available to students with disabilities. IDEA provides that children with challenging behaviors receive instruction and services, including preventive measures, to help them achieve a quality education. The expert panel summarized consumers' points of view into four issues that, when addressed, promise to help alleviate the negative consequences of students' challenging behaviors.

Children Need Early Access to Comprehensive Support

Early access to comprehensive, intensive, individualized prevention and behavior supports is key to improving results for children with challenging behaviors. Yet traditionally, the mode for addressing the challenging behaviors of children is reactive—that is, punishing or removing a child after a problem or crisis has occurred. Moreover, school interventions for problem behavior may be based on unproven strategies and be implemented by staff who lack the training needed to deal appropriately with the child and situation. Although some services exist, coordination may be lacking among schools and other agencies. Too often, primary responsibility for behavior is placed on families, with little support.

Children With or At Risk for Delinquent or Antisocial Behavior Need Specialized Services

A comprehensive, interagency system of services that meets the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of children and youth is necessary to prevent delinquent and antisocial behavior and to improve programs for youth. Some pockets of effective practice exist currently, but coordinated efforts are lacking. Overall, policies and strategies for this population of children tend to be characterized by punitive and reactive measures, ranging from total neglect to those that are applied too late to have an impact on the problem. Once in the juvenile justice system, children do not fare well. Juvenile and adult court officers, including judges, often are unaware of disability issues, including the characteristics and needs of children and youth with disabilities. A free appropriate public education rarely is made available to children with disabilities in detention and correctional programs. Most youthful offenders

emerge from correctional programs without basic literacy, vocational, or adaptive behavior skills.

There Is a Shortage of Schoolwide Support Systems

Systems of multidimensional prevention that encompass the individual, family, school, and community require human and fiscal resources. Schools must have a sufficient supply of skilled and knowledgeable personnel who are positively disposed toward children and youth with challenging behaviors—and these staff must have the resources they need to implement fully and effectively IDEA provisions. Further, linkages with families, neighborhoods, businesses, and community agencies are needed to provide coordinated, comprehensive systems of care across all levels of students' emotional/behavioral problems and needs. Presently, schools are faced with an insufficient supply of personnel and a widespread concern about the preparation of those who are now being asked to teach children with complex, challenging behaviors and emotional disabilities. While there are relatively greater resources available for schoolwide support, there is a critical shortage of resources for comprehensive, intensive intervention systems.

Many Disenfranchised Children with Challenging Behaviors Are Unserved or Underserved

A number of children with emotional/social needs—such as those with autism, developmental disabilities, and those who are homeless, migrant, and/or in foster care and psychiatric facilities—are not being served or are underserved. Lack or fragmentation of services may result from a variety of reasons, including lack of understanding and training on the part of service providers, differing eligibility requirements, misdiagnosis, and poor outreach to families. Comprehensive and coordinated interagency service systems are needed to address the complex behavior and life skills needs of these disenfranchised children.

Improving Results in Early Childhood for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers with Disabilities and Their Families

Consumers stressed that infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities need to be identified as having or at-risk of developing a disability as early as possible and then have greater access to high-quality programs and health care if results for young children are to improve. Positive early childhood results typically refer to improved development for children in their first 5 years, as well as improved family capacity for supporting their children's development. Early intervention services are meant to enhance children's functional development through effective, family-focused services

provided in natural environments. Preschool services should allow children to participate in regular education settings with nondisabled age-appropriate peers, preparing children with disabilities for elementary school success. The expert panel identified the following issues influencing the quality of early childhood results.

Early Identification Must Be Expanded and Improved

Gaps in information, tools and practices, training, and policy inhibit the early identification of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with special needs. Many children are not referred because families and professionals, as well as community members in general, are unaware of screening, evaluation, and early intervention services. To improve referral, intake, and access to early intervention and preschool programs for families with children with disabilities, efforts must be made to broaden parent information as well as public and professional awareness.

More and Better Qualified Personnel Are Needed To Serve the Needs of Young Children with Disabilities

There is a shortage of personnel qualified to work with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, including a lack of pediatricians in many communities. These shortages pose a significant threat to the quality of programs for young children with disabilities. Great disparities in personnel development exist across States, professions, and employers. In general, training for infant/toddler caregivers is minimal, which contributes to overall personnel problems. The need for more and better qualified providers cuts across a range of disciplines, professions, and agencies.

Collaboration Among All Stakeholders Is Needed

While all States have developed early intervention programs, and several States have developed specific preschool policies involving the use of individual family service plans (IFSPs), service delivery still lacks the collaboration needed to ensure that an appropriate variety of services are available to children age birth through 5. There is a continued need to develop models that support the development of community-based collaboration among agencies, families, and service providers at State and local levels. The purpose of such models is to enhance services, foster transition, and coordinate funding of high-quality early intervention and preschool programs.

Outcomes and Indicators To Guide Early Childhood Services Must Be Developed

Presently, there is a lack of agreement about outcomes and indicators for effective early childhood services. Available data tend to describe numbers of children, service hours and dollars, but not child and family outcomes. There is a critical need to develop meaningful process and outcome indicators to guide early childhood services for children, families, and communities.

Students with Disabilities' Secondary Education, Transition, and Employment

Congress viewed the reauthorization of IDEA as an opportunity to prepare children with disabilities better in order to make a successful transition to adult life. Promoting increased options and opportunities for students with disabilities requires that they participate in a rigorous and relevant curriculum that will provide them with the skills and competencies needed in order to achieve their postsecondary goals. Consumers participating in part one of the National Activities Program planning process pointed out that youth with disabilities need to participate in greater numbers in secondary school transition programs that include work experiences as well as preparation for college. After secondary school, youth with disabilities need to participate in vocational training, community college, and college programs. Long term, youth need access to employment support and assistance as necessary. The expert panel articulated four key issues it believed would have to be resolved to realize improved results for students with disabilities.

Students with Disabilities Need Training in Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy Skills, as Well as Opportunities To Use Those Skills in Meaningful Contexts

Self-determination and self-advocacy are critical to the successful transition of students with disabilities from secondary education to postsecondary environments, including continuing education, employment, and community living. Students need opportunities to develop and use these skills in a variety of meaningful contexts. Presently, many students with disabilities have limited opportunities to make significant choices as part of their secondary school experience, leaving them unprepared to communicate, solve problems, and advocate for themselves in postsecondary environments. Emphasis during the transition years on developing and applying decisionmaking, communication, and advocacy skills to promote self-determination must be viewed as critical components of each student's IEP/transition plan.

Secondary-School-Aged Students with Disabilities Must Be Able To Access, Participate, and Progress in a Rigorous and Relevant General Curriculum

All secondary-school students must participate in a rigorous and relevant general curriculum to the maximum extent appropriate if they are to experience success in postsecondary settings. For students with disabilities, this includes access to and participation in curricular and extracurricular activities that promote academic success, independence, and multiple options for postsecondary learning, employment, and community participation and learning. However, many secondary-school students with disabilities are tracked into low-level academic courses. Those who do participate in regular education classes may find that teachers are unprepared to diversify instruction or make the types of accommodations and modifications students with disabilities need to succeed in a rigorous curriculum.

Service Coordination and Collaboration Must be Enhanced

While improving interagency collaboration has been an important focus for more than two decades, its benefits have yet to be realized by many individuals with disabilities, particularly after they lose the protections of IDEA (i.e., a free appropriate public education) when they exit school. Too often, education and workforce development systems remain separate, with participation of workforce development agencies (e.g., vocational rehabilitation) limited to IEP meetings.

More Accountability Is Needed for Results and Postsecondary Outcomes

The collection, analysis, and use of postschool measures for all students, including students with disabilities, are critical elements in expanding the concept of accountability from school graduation rates to indicators of postschool success. The use of such measures is essential to improving secondary/transition programs and expanding options and opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Unfortunately, there are a number of barriers to achieving postschool accountability for students with disabilities at the secondary level. At the outset, there tends to be little agreement regarding the value of school and postschool data as a guide to school reform and improvement. Accountability for students tends to end when students graduate or exit school. Postschool data are seldom collected, and when they are, there is little sharing between the school and other agencies.

Plans for the Future

Explicating the key issues associated with consumers' opinions is a major contribution to the National Activities Program planning process, giving OSEP a

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sense of focus and priority the agency lacked from prior planning activities. But panels went beyond defining key issues. They explored the major gaps separating current practice from what is needed to ensure better results for children with disabilities for each issue, and they reflected on the National Activities Program strategies that might best bridge the gap. Strategies focused most frequently on research and knowledge production, capacity building, and generating public awareness and support. All five panels highlighted personnel preparation and professional development as a prominent capacity-building strategy.

OSEP looks upon the expert-based opinion provided by the five panels thus far in the National Activities Program planning process as the beginning of an ongoing conversation between the agency and stakeholder representatives. OSEP intends that the expert panelists remain active in National Activities Program planning along with the agency staff and executives of national organizations concerned with better results for children with disabilities and their families.

Part Three: Using the Planning Process To Develop the IDEA Part D National Activities Program Plan

OSEP has made immediate use of consumers' opinions and the work of the expert panels as information from parts one and two of the planning process has become available. Agency-wide staff workgroups have chronicled the agency's activities in each of the five broad Part D planning areas and found that projects aligned with several key issues are already under way. Staff have consulted specific recommendations of individual panels in developing work scopes for upcoming projects and initiatives. These internal planning workgroups are now a part of the agency's permanent operations and will assume responsibility for integrating the results of the planning process with other planning information to develop long-term research-to-practice Part D National Activities Program strategies.

The results of this comprehensive process are a significant resource and are expected to influence the Part D National Activities Program plan. However, they are not the only knowledge source. Consistent with Congress' instructions, the agency is analyzing the findings of its Parts B and C monitoring and oversight efforts to ensure that the Part D National Activities Program plan responds to the critical implementation and compliance concerns. Similar analyses are targeting needs expressed by States in State Improvement Grant program proposals, submitted under Part D, Subpart 2 of IDEA. Once these analyses are complete, the agency will map long-term research-to-practice strategies in each of the five broad Part D planning areas. As always, choices will have to be made to comply with resource limitations. OSEP intends to select strategies that:

- Take advantage of the agency's current activities relevant to consumers' opinions and the key issues associated with responding to consumers' needs;
- Have the greatest potential to contribute to improved results for children with disabilities in the next decade;
- Optimally combine several types of Part D activities in research, technical assistance, capacity building, and public awareness and support; and
- Leverage OSEP's involvement to bring about more attention to the issue by other public agencies at the Federal, State, and local levels and other private nonprofit agencies and organizations.

OSEP will publish drafts of the Part D National Activities Program plan for discussion and comment by stakeholder representatives including, at a minimum, the national organizations and experts collaborating with the agency in the planning process. OSEP will also invite public comment before presenting a proposed National Activities Program plan to Congress for approval later this year.

The Office of Special Education Programs' National Assessment Program

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is undertaking a comprehensive program of national assessment to provide information on a wide range of issues related to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended in 1997, and its effect on States, districts, schools, and children with disabilities and their families. Section 674(b) of IDEA requires OSEP to conduct a national assessment of special education to determine the effectiveness of the Act in achieving its purposes to provide information to the President, Congress, States, local educational agencies (LEAs), and the public on how to implement the Act more effectively and to provide the President and Congress with information that will be useful in developing legislation to achieve the purposes of the Act more effectively. In addition, the national assessment will provide OSEP with information to use in measuring indicators of program effectiveness as part of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), in program planning, and in response to information requests from its many constituencies.

The national assessment described below includes a set of child-based studies that assess the experiences and outcomes of children with disabilities across the age range. It also includes three studies that focus on States, districts, and schools to address questions of special education policy and program implementation, staffing, and costs.

Child-Based Longitudinal Studies

National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study (NEILS)

In 1996, OSEP began funding a multi-year study of infants and toddlers and their families who are receiving early intervention services through Part C of IDEA. This study, conducted by SRI International and its subcontractors (the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, Research Triangle Institute, and the American Institutes for Research), follows a nationally representative sample of 3,338 families and children from the time they enroll in early intervention programs, through their time in these programs, and finally through the transition out of early intervention and into other settings. The study is answering a variety of questions about (1) the characteristics of program participants; (2) the type and level of services they are receiving, and who is providing them; (3) the outcomes realized by children and

families during Part C participation and in the years that follow; and (4) the association of characteristics of the participants and services received with outcomes.

Data are currently available from this study, which is expected to be completed in 2005. (See the *Twenty-second Annual Report to Congress* and the following modules in this report: Results Experienced by Children and Families Entering Early Intervention, Characteristics of Children and Families Entering Early Intervention, and Services Received by Children and Families Entering Early Intervention.) For more information, see www.sri.com/neils.

Pre-elementary Education Longitudinal Study (PEELS)

OSEP has commissioned SRI and its subcontractors, Research Triangle Institute and Westat, to design this longitudinal study of children who are ages 3 to 5 and receiving special education services during the first year of the study. PEELS will involve a nationally representative sample of approximately 3,100 children in special education who will be followed into early elementary school. Information will be collected from parents, preschool and elementary school teachers, preschool directors, and school principals regarding children's characteristics, household contexts, school programs and related services, and outcomes in several domains. Indicators from various relevant sources will permit examination of the factors that contribute to positive outcomes and of these children's growth and change in academic and social domains. The critical transition between preschool and kindergarten will be a particular aspect of the study. The study features direct assessment of children, focusing on early reading development in these crucial formative years.

PEELS is currently in the design phase with implementation planned to begin in the spring of the 2001-02 school year and continue through 2008. A web site with information on this project is located at www.sri.com/peels.

Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS)

To begin to fill the information gap for elementary and middle school students in special education, OSEP awarded a contract for the SEELS to SRI International and its subcontractor, Westat, in February 2000. SEELS will include a nationally representative sample of approximately 14,000 students in special education who were age 6 and in first grade through age 12 in the 1999-2000 school year. The students will be followed as they transition from elementary to middle and middle to high school. Key research questions for the study will address the characteristics and functional abilities and disabilities of students in special education; the characteristics

of their households; characteristics of their schools, school programs, and classroom experiences; as well as aspects of their lives out of school. Data are being collected from students, parents, teachers, and principals. Findings will generalize to special education students in this age range as a whole, to students in each Federal special education disability category, and students in each single-year age cohort. The study features direct assessment of students, focusing on growth scores in the areas of reading and mathematics.

Initial SEELS data were collected during the spring of 2000 and became available in spring 2001. A year of reporting will complete the study in 2004-05. (See the module Family Involvement in the Education of Elementary and Middle School Students Receiving Special Education in this report.) For additional information, see www/sri.com/seels.

National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)

The implementation contract for NLTS2 was awarded to SRI International and Westat, its subcontractor, in January 2001. The study will involve a large, nationally representative sample of 13,000 students who will be ages 13 to 16 at the outset of the study. Data will be collected on their individual and household characteristics; achievement scores on standardized assessments; aspects of their schools, school programs, and classroom experiences; secondary school performance and outcomes; adult services and supports; and early adult outcomes in the employment, education, independence, and social domains. The study will be conducted over a 10-year period, following the oldest cohort of students for 9 years or until age 26. The length of the study will allow us to examine postschool outcomes during the early adult years so that experiences, such as employment after college, can be assessed.

Initial data for this study will be available in spring 2002 with subsequent waves of data collected through 2009. A year of reporting will complete the study in 2010. For additional information, see www.sri.com/nlts2.

Issue-Based Studies

Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE)

In February 2000, OSEP contracted with Westat to conduct SPeNSE, a study involving extensive interviews with a national sample of 8,000 school personnel, including regular and special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, preschool special education teachers, and paraprofessionals serving students with disabilities. The study focuses on the adequacy of the workforce and attempts to

explain variation in workforce quantity and quality based on State and district policy, working conditions, preservice education, and continuing professional development. In addition, SPeNSE examines other indicators of teacher quality such as tested ability, teaching credentials, professionalism, demographic representation, and classroom teaching practice.

Data from SPeNSE were available in spring of 2001. (See the module Special Education Teacher Recruitment and Hiring in this report.) The study will conclude with a series of reports and dissemination activities in 2002. Further information is available at www.spense.org.

State and Local Implementation of IDEA (SLIIDEA)

This study was designed to evaluate the implementation and impact of IDEA. The SLIIDEA study, awarded in April 2000 to Abt Associates and its subcontractors, Westat and SRI, will provide information annually on the status of the implementation of the law and its effects on policies and practices at the State, district, and school levels, with a focus on implementation issues in six cluster areas of IDEA: improved student performance, including graduation rates; supporting least restrictive environment; successful transitions for preschool children; successful transitions to postschool life; positive behavioral supports; and positive parent involvement.

Repeated large-scale surveys and special topical studies that include case studies and focus groups are planned. Data on State-level policies will be disseminated starting in fall 2001; subsequent data collection and analysis will focus on the district and school levels. (See the module Using Implementation Data to Study State, District, and School Impacts in this report.) SLIIDEA will be completed in 2005. Further information is available at www.abt.sliidea.org.

The Special Education Expenditure Project (SEEP)

Through a contract awarded to the American Institutes for Research in February 1999, this study examines how Federal, State, and local funds are used to support programs and services for students with disabilities, with special attention to the fiscal provisions enacted under the IDEA Amendments of 1997. In addition to determining the total and per pupil amounts spent on special education and related services throughout the United States, SEEP will collect data in such a way as to increase understanding of the overall patterns of allocation of educational dollars to students with disabilities.

Initial data for this study were available in summer 2001, with information disseminated through OSEP's Center for Special Education Finance. The study will conclude in 2004. For additional information, see <http://csef.air.org>.

Status of the National Assessment Program

The majority of studies in the National Assessment Program completed a design phase that included several complex tasks, including sample selection, instrument development and testing, OMB clearance of instrumentation, and recruitment of the sample. As a result, most of the studies have just finished the first wave of data collection or are still in the field.

Table IV-2
Summary Table for OSEP's National Assessment Program

Project Name	Focus	Start Date	First Data Available	End Date	OSEP Staff Contact
Child-based Studies					
NEILS	Services and outcomes for infants in Part C, ages 0-3	January 1996	Data currently available	2005	Scott Brown
PEELS	Services and outcomes for students with disabilities, ages 3-5	Projected-December 2001	Spring 2003	2008	Lisa Holden-Pitt
SEELS	Services and outcomes for students with disabilities, ages 6-12	February 2000	Data currently available	2005	Judy Holt
NLTS2	Services and outcomes for students with disabilities, ages 13-16	January 2001	Spring 2002	2010	Patricia Gonzalez
Issue-based Studies					
SPeNSE	Quality and quantity of school personnel serving students with disabilities	February 2000	Data currently available	2002	Patricia Gonzalez
SLIIDEA	Implementation and impact of IDEA (policy)	April 2000	Fall 2001	2005	Kelly Henderson
SEEP	Special education expenditures	February 1999	Fall 2001	2004	Scott Brown