

Introduction

During the two decades that the annual reports to Congress have been published, these documents have undergone several minor stylistic changes and one major substantive redesign and refocus. In 1997, OSEP adopted a policy-oriented approach to the annual report to Congress. The results of this shift were first seen in the 1998 annual report, which used a four-section modular format. The *2002 Annual Report to Congress* was the fifth volume to include four sections—Context/Environment, Student Characteristics, Programs and Services and Results—plus a separate appendix of data tables.

The implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act* beginning in 2002 amplified the importance of accountability and results in the annual report to Congress. As the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education* pointed out in 2002, this emphasis means that Congress and the public must know that federal funds are well spent.

The *2003 Annual Report to Congress* was redesigned to focus on results and accountability; make the report more useful to Congress, parents, each state and other stakeholders; and use a more readable and user-friendly style. It focuses on key state performance data in accordance with the recommendations of the President’s Commission.

The *2004 Annual Report to Congress* has two volumes. Volume 1 focuses on the children and students being served under IDEA and provides profiles of individual states’ special education environment. It contains three sections. Section I contains the child/student-focused material, presented in a question-and-answer format. It contains three subsections: infants and toddlers served under IDEA, Part C; children ages 3 through 5 served under IDEA, Part B; and students ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B. All information available about each group of children/students is presented in one section. Each subsection focuses on available results. To the extent possible, the data are presented through graphics, short tables[†] and bulleted text. Please note that throughout this report the terms “infants and toddlers with disabilities,” “children with disabilities,” and “students with disabilities” refer to recipients of services under IDEA, Parts C or B.

* U.S Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, *A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and Their Families*, Washington, DC, 2002.

[†] A number of figures and tables refer to data for “the four outlying areas.” These areas consist of American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and the Virgin Islands.

Section II of the report contains state-level performance data. These state profiles, which provide key information about a state on one or two pages, will be valuable to Congress and other stakeholders who are interested in individual state performance. The state profiles were a new feature of the 2003 annual report.

Section III presents tables of states rank-ordered by their reported data for exiting, dropout, educational environments, early intervention services and early intervention settings. OSEP uses these tables as part of its Continuous Improvement and Focused Monitoring System.

Volume 2 of the report contains the state-reported data tables developed from DANS. OSEP's goal in separating the text of the report from the extensive tables is to make the report usable to all readers. The tables are also posted on www.IDEAdata.org.