

Preschool grants

State grants: Preschool grants

(Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Part B, Section 619)

PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Performance Measures

This section presents selected program performance information, including, for example, GPRA goals, objectives, measures, and performance targets and data; and an assessment of the progress made toward achieving program results. Achievement of program results is based on the cumulative effect of the resources provided in previous years and those requested in fiscal year 2014 and future years, as well as the resources and efforts invested by those served by this program.

Goal: To help preschool children with disabilities enter school ready to succeed by assisting States in providing special education and related services.

Objective: *Preschool children with disabilities will receive special education and related services that result in increased skills that enable them to succeed in school.*

Three of the performance measures for the Preschool Grants program look at the percentage increase in growth by preschool children with disabilities in specific areas — positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships), acquisition and use of knowledge and skills, and use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs — as measured from the point of time on entering a program to the time the child exits the program.

Measure: The percentage of children who entered the program below age expectations in positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships) who substantially increased their rate of growth by the time they exited the program.

Year	Target	Actual
2010		80
2011	80	79
2012	81	
2013	82	
2014	83	

Measure: The percentage of children who entered the program below age expectations in acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language/communication and early literacy) who substantially increased their rate of growth by the time they exited the program.

Year	Target	Actual
2010		78
2011	80	79
2012	81	
2013	82	
2014	83	

Measure: The percentage of children who entered the program below age expectations in the use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs who substantially increased their rate of growth by the time they exited the program.

Year	Target	Actual
2010		78
2011	80	78
2012	81	
2013	82	
2014	83	

Additional information: Through their Annual Performance Reports (APRs), States report on the cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral development of children with disabilities served through the Preschool Grants program. The Department, with the assistance of its grantee, the Early Childhood Outcomes Center, uses these data to assess outcomes for children served through this program. Measuring growth in these outcomes, especially for preschool aged children, is a complicated endeavor that requires a significant investment of time and technical assistance at both the Federal and State levels to ensure that the data collected are valid, reliable, and meaningful.

The Department has been deliberate in developing these measures due to the challenges of assessing program performance based on growth in early childhood outcomes, especially for children with disabilities. In 2005, States began developing systems for collecting entry and exit data on children with disabilities who receive services through the preschool program and remain in the program for at least 6 months. While four States have received approval from the Department to collect data for a representative sample of the children they serve through the Preschool Grants program, all other States are responsible for reporting data on all children served. The APRs submitted by States in February 2010 were to include, for the first time, complete entry and exit data for a full cohort of children with disabilities aged 3 through 5, but the Department did not publish these data because a large number of States had high percentages of missing data or other data quality concerns.

However, the quality of the data States reported in their APRs since February 2011 has demonstrated marked improvement, and the sample of States with the highest quality data increased from 33 to 36 out of 59 States and jurisdictions in 2012. To help determine an appropriate baseline for these three measures, a weighted data set was derived from these 36 States, excluding from the percentage calculation all States that had high proportions of missing

data, anomalous outcomes, or were known to have other data quality or collection issues. The weighted data showed that, of this smaller sample of States, more than 80 percent of preschoolers substantially increased their rate of growth by the time they exited the program in each measure category: 81 percent in the acquisition and use of knowledge, 81 percent in positive social-emotional skills, and 81 percent in the use of appropriate behavior. These results represent a slight decrease from the 2011 school year and do not meet the targets set for each category; however, this decrease may be attributed to a larger sample and increased reporting. The targets for these measures were set based, in part, on the outcomes of this sample of States with higher quality data. As States have improved their data collection, the number of children served by this program for whom outcome data are reported has increased substantially each year. Since outcomes have generally improved as data are reported for more children and States are better able to target program improvement, the Department is optimistic that, within the next few years, the national data will demonstrate that the children served by the program are improving at levels similar to the children in States with the best data quality.

States are engaged in implementing quality control systems to identify and improve the accuracy of local data, and have indicated that they believe the data will be useful in their program improvement efforts. The Department acknowledges that some data quality issues still exist, particularly with regards to missing data. The extent of missing data is difficult to determine precisely because States do not report on the number of children exiting the program. Furthermore, States may be unable to collect exit data for all children (e.g., due to a move to another State, withdrawal from the program without prior notice, or death). Through its technical assistance investments, the Department continues to work with the States to resolve implementation issues, improve the validity and reliability of reported data, and use these data to inform program improvements.

Measure: The percentage of children with disabilities (aged 3 through 5) who receive special education and related services in a regular early learning program at least 80 percent of the time.

Year	Target	Actual
2009	43	51
2010	43	53
2011	48	
2012	48	
2013	50	
2014	52	

Additional information: Actual performance in fiscal year 2010, the most recent year for which data are available, increased slightly from fiscal year 2009, and exceeded the target for this measure for the third year in a row. This measure replaced a previous measure on the extent to which children with disabilities receive their special education services in regular education settings. The earlier measure did not provide any information on where the child spends the bulk of his or her day and the extent to which the child has opportunities to interact with nondisabled peers.

States began using a revised data collection between October 1 and December 1, 2006, inclusive. These data were reported and are reflected in the fiscal year 2007 data. Under the

revised data collection, States must report children under one of two categories. Category A includes children attending a regular early learning program, which is defined as a program in which at least 50 percent of the children are not disabled. The category has three reporting subsets based on the amount of time the child spends in the regular early learning setting: (1) at least 80 percent, (2) 40 percent to 79 percent, or (3) less than 40 percent. Category B covers children who are not attending a regular early learning program or kindergarten and has two reporting options: (1) attending a special education program or (2) not attending a special education program (e.g., getting services in the home or a provider’s office).

In July 2007, the Department published a Federal Register notice requesting comments on a proposal to add another reporting category that would disaggregate the data so as to show children in programs in which 70 percent or more of the children are not disabled. SEAs and other interested parties submitted extensive comments regarding the proposal and the general validity and reliability of this measure. States reported that they had a great deal of difficulty implementing the new system because they must collect information on where children with disabilities spend their day, not just where they receive special education and related services. The Department reviewed these comments and revised the data collection forms. One change was to eliminate the need for parents to provide information on the percentage of children with disabilities in settings where the parent has enrolled or placed the child when the child is not in special education. We further simplified the collection and reduced the reporting burden by removing the requirement to report the proportion of time that a child spends each week in a regular early learning classroom. The form now will only require the parent to indicate whether the child’s usual daily routine includes attending a regular early learning program and, if yes, if it is less than or more than 10 hours a week. The revised data collection will also obtain information on where children receive the majority of their special education services. The first collection of preschool settings data using the new form was the 2010-11 school year, with the first data reported in the Annual Performance Reports due in February 2013.

The Department is using technical assistance providers such as the Data Accountability Center, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, and the Regional Resource Centers to assist States in collecting the preschool educational environments data and is providing additional technical assistance through mechanisms such as presentations at the annual State data managers’ conference and other meetings and the provision of “Frequently Asked Questions” documents and a data dictionary (<http://www.ideadata.org/docs/bdatadictionary.pdf>).

Measure: The number of States with at least 90 percent of special education teachers of children with disabilities aged 3 to 5 who are fully certified in the areas in which they are teaching.

Year	Target	Actual
2009	40	39
2010	40	43
2011	41	45
2012	41	
2013	42	
2014	45	

Additional information: The Department exceeded its target for fiscal years 2010 and 2011, with 2011 being the most recent year for which data are available. As of 2007, 11 additional

States have met the 90 percent requirement ensuring their special education teachers are fully certified in the areas in which they are teaching. This measure includes the 50 States, D.C., Puerto Rico, the Outlying Areas and the Bureau of Indian Education.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has made a number of investments designed to assist States in preparing a sufficient number of qualified preschool special education personnel. In 2012, the Department established an Early Childhood Personnel Center to improve professional development for personnel working with children with disabilities birth through age 5 and their families. This Center will help address State-identified needs for highly qualified personnel in special education, related services, early intervention, and regular education to work with infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities and ensure that those personnel have the necessary skills and knowledge, derived from practices that have been determined through scientifically-based research and experience, to be successful in serving those children.

The Department also created the National IDEA Technical Assistance Center on Early Childhood Longitudinal Data Systems in 2012. This center will provide technical assistance on developing and expanding statewide, longitudinal data systems that incorporate data required under Sections 616 and 618 of IDEA. The center will work intensively with 10-12 States in four main areas of data collection: defining data elements, acquiring data, validating data, and using data to examine validity and program improvement. The center will coordinate with other Department initiatives related to data systems and early learning, including Race To the Top – Early Learning Challenge Fund and the Statewide Longitudinal Data System Grant Program.

Efficiency Measure

Measure: The average number of workdays between the completion of a site visit and the Office of Special Education Program's (OSEP) response to the State.

Year	Target	Actual
2009	90	87
2010	88	66
2011	86	
2012	86	
2013	86	
2014	75	

Additional information: In 2010, the most recent year for which data are available, the Department completed 16 site visits. OSEP responded to States, on average, within 66 days of a site visit. This result surpasses the target for this measure in 2010 and is an improvement over the prior 3 years. In 2012, the Department modified its accountability system to improve efficiencies and balance its focus on improved results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities and compliance with the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. We are developing a modified efficiency measure and anticipate it being operational for the FY 2014 data collection. In the meantime, OSEP continues to meet its statutory monitoring responsibilities through the SPP/APR process, fiscal monitoring, and its work with State dispute resolution systems.

Other Performance Information

Pre-Elementary Longitudinal Study (PEELS): The PEELS study involves a nationally representative sample of children, 3 to 5 years of age when they entered the study, with diverse disabilities who are receiving preschool special education services in a variety of settings. The study will answer questions such as:

- What are the characteristics of children receiving preschool special education?
- What services do they receive and in what settings? Who provides these services?
- What child, family, community, and system factors are associated with the services children receive and the results they attain?
- What are their transitions like between early intervention (programs for children from birth to 3 years old) and preschool, and between preschool and elementary school?
- To what extent do the children participate in activities with other children their age who are not receiving preschool special education services? To what extent are preschool special education graduates included in general elementary education classes and related activities?
- What short- and long-term results do children achieve in preschool, kindergarten, and early elementary school?

In October 2010, the National Center for Special Education Research released the report, *Access to Educational and Community Activities for Young Children with Disabilities*. As reported in parent interviews, participation in community activities such as sports, organized clubs, art, and music varied significantly by type of disability and by household income. Children from households with annual incomes greater than \$40,000 participated in sports with greater frequency than children from households with lower incomes. Children of parents who perceived their neighborhood to be unsafe or who reported that their transportation did not meet their families' needs were significantly less likely to participate in extracurricular activities. Parents also reported on educational settings, and 69 percent said they sent their children to full day kindergarten. Children from high wealth districts and those from suburban settings were less likely to attend full-day kindergarten than their peers.

In a survey of kindergarten teachers, 73 percent of teachers reported that the regular education classroom was the main setting for children receiving special education services. This inclusion rate was significantly higher in very large districts (91 percent) than districts of other sizes, and significantly higher in rural districts (86 percent) than in suburban or urban districts. Children in very low wealth districts were less likely to have regular classrooms as their main setting (59 percent) compared to all other districts. On average, children spent 17.1 hours per week in regular classrooms and 7.1 hours in special education settings.

Teachers also reported on modifications and accommodations provided to children with disabilities. Overall, teachers reported using unmodified grade-level materials in 44 percent of cases, while 14 percent of children received specialized materials or curricula. There was no significant variation in these data across district size or wealth. The study also found that children who received special education services in a regular classroom were in classrooms in which, on average, 82 percent of students were nondisabled (<http://www.peels.org>).

In August 2011, the latest report from this study was released, *A Longitudinal View of the Receptive Vocabulary and Math Achievement of Young Children with Disabilities*. This report was designed to address two PEELS specific research questions:

- How do children who received preschool special education services perform over time on assessments of receptive vocabulary and math skills?
- How does their receptive vocabulary and math performance vary over time by primary disability category?

Children who received preschool special education services showed growth each year in vocabulary and mathematics; however, growth slowed in both math and vocabulary as they got older. Children's performance varied across assessments and across subgroups defined by disability. At age 3, children with a speech or language impairment had higher average scores than those with developmental delays. At age 10, the gap between these subgroups persisted, and there were no statistically significant differences in growth rates between subgroups.

Other Studies: The Department also is conducting the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study program through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). This program involves two complementary cohort studies, a Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) and a Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), that focus on children's early school experiences. The ECLS-K has followed the kindergarten class of 1998-99 through eighth grade. The ECLS-K provides descriptive information on children's status at entry to school and their transition into school, and their progression through middle school. The ECLS-B is designed to follow children from 9 months through kindergarten. It focuses on health, development, early care, and education during the formative years of children born in 2001. These studies also are providing some data on outcomes experienced by children with disabilities participating in preschool programs and baseline data on outcomes experienced by nondisabled children.

OSEP, and subsequently the National Center on Special Education Research, have sponsored a special education questionnaire for teachers in the ECLS-K Study and the collection of more extensive data on children with disabilities and their programs, including the identification of, receipt of services for, and use of special equipment for a number of disabling conditions that may interfere with a sampled child's ability to learn. The children in the ECLS-K cohort were 5 years of age in school year 2006-07, when the first kindergarten data collection was conducted. During this collection, the majority of the children in the cohort were age-eligible for kindergarten, although all sample children were evaluated, regardless of kindergarten enrollment status. Since about a quarter of the cohort were not age-eligible for kindergarten until fall 2007, a second kindergarten data collection was fielded in 2007 to measure the kindergarten experiences of these children. The ECLS-K followed children through the cohort's eighth grade year in school year 2008-09. The final data for the 8th and final year of data collection was released in July 2009. A new study, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010-11 (ECLS-K:2011) replaces the ECLS-K and will be an ongoing study sponsored by NCES. The ECLS-K: 2011 will provide descriptive information on children's status at entry to school, their transition into school, and their progression through the elementary grades.

Data from ECLS-K on demographic and school characteristics indicate that for the cohort of students beginning kindergarten in 1998, specific learning disabilities and speech or language impairments were the most prevalent primary disabilities over the grades studied. The percentage of the student cohort receiving special education grew from 4.1 percent in kindergarten to 11.9 percent of students in fifth grade. The results also indicate that higher

percentages of boys than girls and of poor students than nonpoor students received special education. About 12 percent of students receive special education in at least one of the grades: kindergarten, first, and third grade, including 16 percent of boys, 8 percent of girls, 18 percent of poor children, and 10 percent of nonpoor children. One in three students who receive special education in early grades, first receive special education in kindergarten. Half of those who begin special education in kindergarten are no longer receiving special education by third grade. In addition to students' gender and poverty status, results are presented separately for other student and school characteristics, including race/ethnicity and school control, urbanicity, region, and poverty concentration.