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Forum

QTA – A brief analysis of a critical issue in special education

**Family Involvement and Family Perceptions/Satisfaction:
SEA Data Collection**

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Overview

The regulations that implemented the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) prescribe ways that educators must involve parents of students with disabilities in their child's education, such as: being notified of meetings early enough to ensure attendance; being provided with appropriate information regarding purpose, time, location and who will be in attendance at meetings; and being included in individual or conference calls if unable to attend meetings [34 CFR §300.345 (a-b)]. These regulations also make it clear that parents are partners in the individualized education program (IEP) process and play an integral part in developing goals and objectives for their child [34 CFR §300.344(a)(1)].

After the reauthorization of the IDEA in 1997 that placed greater emphasis on improving results for children, the Office of Special Education Programs began to redesign its monitoring process. The Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process (CIMP) incorporated strategies designed to foster greater state accountability, increase parental involvement and establish a data-driven process to inform improvement planning and ensure public awareness and dissemination (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Part of the redesign of CIMP was the addition of a "cluster area" on parental involvement in the 2002 Biennial Performance Report (BPR) that states were required to submit to OSEP on May 31, 2002. This cluster area was also part of the Annual Performance Report (APR) due to OSEP on March 31, 2004. The 2004 APR training manual provides information about what types of parent data states are required to collect and how the data should be reported.

The purpose of this document is to describe how 10 states are currently collecting and using data on family involvement and/or family perceptions/satisfaction. This document was produced by Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) as part of its cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

Methodology

Data collection for this QTA was a multi-stage process. It began in September 2003 by identifying states that reported data on parental involvement in their 2002 BPRs – a total of seven states. Project Forum then developed a questionnaire to determine if other states and non-

state jurisdictions had collected Part B or Part C state-level data in the past five years on family involvement and/or family perceptions/satisfaction. The questionnaire was sent via e-mail in November 2003. Twenty-eight states and two non-state jurisdictions responded to the questionnaire, totaling 30 state education agencies (SEAs).

Following analysis of the questionnaire data, Project Forum developed a telephone interview protocol to obtain more detailed information from a sample of the states that were collecting data, either Part B or Part C, on family involvement and family perceptions/satisfaction. Project Forum selected the following 10 states: Iowa, Michigan, Maine, Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, Oregon, Wisconsin, Wyoming and the Virgin Islands. Interviews took place during the months of December 2003 and January 2004. Four of the 10 states (NC, OR, WI & WY) provided Project Forum with copies of their family surveys.

Report of Findings - Biennial Performance Report

Review of the 2002 BPRs from seven states (AL, AZ, CO, MN, MT, PA, WA) indicates that data are gathered on family involvement in special education, family perceptions/satisfaction with special education services and family awareness of services for children and youth with disabilities. The most common is family involvement data (5 states). Three of the seven states collect family perceptions/satisfaction data and two states collect family awareness data (see Table 1).

Table 1
Family Data Collected by States as Reported in the
2002 Biennial Performance Reports (N = 7 states)

State	Family Involvement	Family Perceptions/Satisfaction	Family Awareness
AL	x		
AZ	x		
CO			x
MN	x	x	x
MT		x	
PA	x	x	
WA	x		
Total	5	3	2

Report of Findings – State Questionnaire

Of the 30 SEAs that responded to the Project Forum questionnaire, 20 collect some type of information at the state level on family involvement and 19 SEAs collect information on family perceptions/satisfaction. Seventeen of the 30 SEAs collect both family involvement and family perceptions/satisfaction data (see Table 2).

Table 2
Family Data Collected by States as Reported in Project Forum’s Questionnaire
(N = 30 states)

State	Family Involvement	Family Perceptions/Satisfaction
AR		
CNMI	x	x
CT		
GA	x	x
HI		
ID	x	
IL		
IA	x	
KS	x	x
KY		
ME	x	x
MA	x	
Marshall Is.	x	x
MI	x	x
MS		
MO	x	x
NE	x	x
NV	x	x
NJ		x
NY		
NC	x	x
ND		x
OR	x	x
Palau	x	x
SC		
SD	x	x
VI	x	x
WV	x	x
WI	x	x
WY	x	x
Total	20	19

Report of Findings – State Interview Data

Data Collection Timeline

The length of time the ten states have been collecting family data ranged from one year to 20 years. Six of the states began collecting family data within the past five years, between 1999-

2004 (NC, NE, NV, WI, WY, VI). Three SEAs began collecting family data between 1995-1998 (ME, OR, MI) and one (IA) began collecting these data 20 years ago in the 1984-1985 school year.

Development of Survey Questions

Interviewees from all 10 SEAs explained that questions on family surveys are designed to elicit information that will help the states to better understand the issues and concerns of families. The development of questions varies somewhat from state to state; however, all of the 10 states solicit input from stakeholders. Three of the interviewees (NC, NE, VI) reported that state survey questions came from surveys used by other states. Two interviewees (ME, OR) reported that their family surveys were developed as a result of the feedback received during SEA monitoring of LEAs. One interviewee (NV) reported that survey questions were developed based on complaints received and investigated at the SEA level (see Table 3).

The interviewee from the Virgin Islands provided one example of stakeholder input. Telephone survey questions were formulated by a group of stakeholders that included special educators, school administrators, superintendents, members of the board of education and parents. The stakeholders also reviewed questions from other state surveys to get a sense of what would be pertinent to ask of parents.

Table 3
Development of State Surveys
(N = 10 states)

State	Stakeholder input	Questions from other states' surveys	Feedback from state monitoring process	Based on complaints received and investigated
IA	x			
MI	x			
ME	x		x	
NC	x	x		
NE	x	x		
NV	x			x
OR	x		x	
WI	x			
WY	x			
VI	x	x		
Total	10	3	2	1

Methods for Collecting Family Data

The most commonly reported method for collecting family data is mailing out surveys, while collecting data through focus groups and over the telephone are the least commonly used methods. Five of the 10 states gather family data through surveys that are mailed to families (IA, ME, NC, OR, WI). Three states gather family data through multiple methods – i.e., mailings,

focus groups, telephone surveys and/or on-line surveys (MI, NV, WY). One state gathers data through focus groups (NE) and one state (VI) gathers information over the telephone.

For example, Maine reported that data are gathered by mailing out surveys. Nevada reported that surveys are mailed out, but in Spring 2003, surveys were made available on-line. However, this was a one-time occurrence in an effort to collect more data to help write a set of guidelines for districts and schools to use to try to increase meaningful family involvement. Nebraska reported shifting to focus groups to gather family data, "...because the information that was obtained from this format was richer and deeper." The Virgin Islands reported that a survey is conducted via telephone because only a small group of families is contacted.

Family Samples

All 10 states interviewed reported that data are collected from a random sample of families of children with disabilities. For example, the interviewee from the Virgin Islands described collecting data from a random sample of 50 parents, 25 from each of its two LEAs. During the summer, for those students in an extended school year program, 10 parents are selected, five from each LEA.

In North Carolina, each LEA is required to send the state survey to a random sample of at least two percent of the families of students with current IEPs, but 15 to 20 percent of the LEAs collect data from more than two percent of the families. Families in Oregon are selected from programs serving children birth through age five – every third family on each program's mailing list receives a survey. In Maine, schools with more than 200 students receiving special education services send a survey to a random sample of 100 families. In schools with fewer than 100 students receiving special education services, all families are sent a survey.

Types of Family Data Collected

When interviewees were asked to describe the nature of family data collected, their responses fell into the following categories: family perceptions/satisfaction and family involvement. Of the ten states, only one was not collecting data in both categories.

In Wisconsin, for example, families are asked to rate their perceptions/satisfaction level using a five-point Likert scale for questions such as: *To what degree are you satisfied with the quality of special education and related services provided to your child in this district?* A question on family involvement is: *What is your opportunity for input about your child's strengths and concerns for your child's education?*

Oregon's family perceptions/satisfaction survey asks families to rate how strongly they agree and how important issues are to them. Two examples of statements are: *I am pleased with my child's progress in the program* and *I am satisfied with the quality of the staff that works with my child and my family.*

Wyoming’s survey asks for a true/false response to statements such as the following: *I am actively involved in the special education process for my child?* Families are also asked to respond to two short questions on family involvement.

Use of Family Data

Interviewees reported that data gathered from family surveys are used in a variety of ways. Seven of the 10 interviewees (IA, MI, ME, NE, NV, OR, VI) reported using the data to make program adjustments. Six of the interviewees noted that data are used to more meaningfully involve families in educational decision-making for their children; three interviewees reported that data are used to look for patterns of non-compliance; and two use data as part of their monitoring processes (see Table 4).

Table 4
Uses of Family Data
(N = 10 states)

State	Make Program Adjustments	Involve Families in Decision Making	Identify Patterns of Non-Compliance	Support the Monitoring Process
IA	x			
MI	x			x
ME	x			
NC			x	
NE	x	x		
NV	x	x	x	
OR	x	x		x
WI		x	x	
WY		x		
VI	x	x		
Total	7	6	3	2

Future Plans for Family Data Collection

Three of the interviewees offered information on future plans for family data collection, although this was not a formal question asked by Project Forum staff. In North Carolina, LEAs currently mail the state’s paper survey to families, but there are plans to develop a web-based survey in the future. Feedback from Wyoming families indicates that they do not want to fill out surveys; therefore, other options for obtaining family data are being examined. In the Virgin Islands, the goal is to improve telephone interview data by conducting interviews with a larger sample of families and to examine other methods of collecting family data (e.g., mailings, focus groups).

Concluding Remarks

Collecting meaningful data on family involvement and family perceptions/satisfaction continues to be a work in progress for most states. While mailing out surveys was the most commonly reported method for gathering information from families, states continue to search for other ways to collect information that is useful for program improvement and understanding the needs of families.

Analysis of the 2002 BPRs indicated that data on family involvement that was compliance-related was the most commonly reported. However, analysis of more recent interview data from 10 states indicated that nine of those states collect both family perceptions/satisfaction and family involvement data. Further exploration is needed to obtain a more complete picture of family data collection across the country.

Analysis of the state interview data also indicated that input obtained from stakeholders regarding family survey development was common across the 10 states. Stakeholders provide important information regarding the chief concerns and issues that families may have about special education services for their child. Data gathered through family surveys serve as a necessary means for deciding what changes need to be made to special education programs and for understanding how to improve family involvement.

The Annual Performance Reports (APRs) submitted in March 2004 that covered the 2002-2003 school year required more information from states about parent involvement. If a state reported results from a parent survey, it was required to submit a copy of the survey with a description of the sampling process and method used to analyze the data. The 2004 APR information will provide a better understanding of parent data collected by states and the nature of parent involvement.

Reference

U.S. Department of Education, Twenty-fourth annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Washington, D.C., 2002. Available on line at:
www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP

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