

Quick
Turn
Around

Project



Forum

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

Additional Disability Data Collected by States

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Overview

This Quick Turn Around (QTA) report summarizes information gathered by Project FORUM at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) on state-level data collected on *additional disabilities*. The author defines an *additional disability* as a disability other than the one federal disability reported to the federal government that qualifies a student for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This activity was carried out as part of Project FORUM's Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

Background and Purpose

In order for a student to receive special education services under the IDEA, the student must meet eligibility criteria for at least one of the following 13 federal disability categories: Autism, Deaf-Blindness, Deafness, Emotional Disturbance, Hearing Impairment, Mental Retardation, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Speech or Language Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury or Visual Impairment [34 CFR §300.7]. The category Developmental Delay is also permitted through age nine, at the discretion of the state and local education agency (LEA) [34 CFR §300.7(b)]. Although a student may meet eligibility criteria for more than one disability, the IDEA regulations specify that the state education agency (SEA) may not report a child to the federal government under more than one disability category. However, the state may report using the category Deaf-Blindness, Developmental Delay or Multiple Disabilities in accordance with the proper procedures [34 CFR §300.751(e-f)]. SEAs or LEAs may require additional disability data that reflect a particular state's data collection needs.

The purpose of this Project FORUM inquiry was to gather information from SEAs on data collected on additional disabilities and to understand how SEAs use these data. As states continue to improve the collection and reporting of data on students with disabilities, it is valuable to know if additional disability data are collected, the challenges and successes related to this data collection, and how these data are used.

Methodology

In September 2003, a two-page questionnaire, developed by Project FORUM, was sent via e-mail to the state directors of special education in all of the 50 states and 11 non-state jurisdictions. Responses were received September through November 2003.

Report of Findings

Forty-three states and two non-state jurisdictions, hereafter referred to as SEAs, submitted questionnaire data to Project FORUM. The following is a summary of those data.

Collection of State-Level Data

Of the 45 SEAs, 18 collect additional disability data on students. For 12 of the 18, these data are required from LEAs; in six states it is optional. At least one of the 12 states has written instructions that LEAs must follow when reporting two or more disabilities for a student receiving services under IDEA.

Number of Additional Disabilities Per Student

Of the 18 SEAs that collect additional disability data, the number of categories per student permitted for reporting ranges from one to as many categories for which the student is eligible. Most common is one additional disability category. (See Table 1)

Table 1
Number of Additional Disability Categories Permitted for State Reporting

Number of Additional Disabilities	Number of SEAs
1	7
2	3
3	1
4	1
6	1
9	1
10	1
As many as eligible	3

Analysis of Additional Disability Data

SEAs analyze their additional disability data by a number of variables. All of the 18 analyze the data by race/ethnicity, age and gender of the student, and 17 analyze the data by grade. Thirteen SEAs also analyze additional disability data by other variables (e.g., primary home language, setting/placement and socio-economic status).

Uses of Additional Disability Data

SEAs use additional disability data for a variety of purposes. The most common uses are generating reports (17 SEAs) and allocating funds (8 SEAs). The least common uses are personnel training (4 SEAs), personnel recruitment and staffing (2 SEAs) and other miscellaneous reasons (3 SEAs).

Data on Birth to Five Population

The survey also included a question regarding additional disability data collection for the state's birth to five population. Of the 18 SEAs that collect additional disability data, all collect these data for all or some portion of their birth to five population. Ten SEAs collect these data for children three through five years of age, seven SEAs for children birth through five years and one SEA for children birth through two years. None of the reporting SEAs collect additional disability data for the birth to five population only.

Issues/Challenges Regarding Collection of Data

Eleven of the 18 SEAs provided feedback on the issues or challenges regarding data collection on additional disabilities. The primary challenges are ensuring that certain disabilities are not reported concurrently and that adequate edit checks are in place.

Summary

For students eligible for special education services under IDEA, most SEAs collect data on only one disability per student, as required by federal law. Less than one-third collects data on additional disabilities. States use additional disability data for generating reports, allocating money, personnel training, and personnel recruitment and staffing.

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