A Guide to Results-Driven Accountability for Parent Centers

A product of the
Center for Parent Information & Resources
April 2014, Links updated January 2018

The Current Context

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is currently revising how it holds States accountable for educating children with disabilities. To date, OSEP has focused most of its monitoring and enforcement on compliance-related requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Concerned that the achievement and graduation rates of students with disabilities have remained low for many years, OSEP is now refocusing its accountability system to emphasize achieving improved results for children with disabilities. This new approach is called **results-driven accountability—RDA**, for short.

We'll talk more about RDA in a moment. First, though, here's a bit of background.

Heard of the SPP, the APR, and OSEP's List of Indicators?

IDEA requires that OSEP monitor how States implement their systems of early intervention (Part C) and special education (Part B). IDEA requires each State to submit to OSEP:

- a six-year **State Performance Pla**n (known as the SPP), which identifies how the State will improve its implementation of IDEA; and

- an **Annual Performance Report**, or APR, in which the State reports its progress yearly to OSEP.

In their annual performance reports to OSEP, States are required to provide specific data for categories called **indicators**. Part C has different indicators from Part B, and States must report on both. In Part C, for example, States report by indicators such as the "settings in which

> ### Read this publication if you'd like to know more about:
>
> - results-driven accountability—what RDA is and why it's important;
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> - the three phases of RDA that will frame States' efforts to improve results for children with disabilities;
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> - the influential role that Parent Centers can play in the RDA process; and
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> - how to get involved in your State's RDA planning.

infants and toddlers receive early intervention services" and "early child outcomes." For Part B, States report on indicators such as graduation rates, dropout rates, and the percentage of the day that students with disabilities are served in regular classrooms or other settings.

Now, as OSEP and States move to a process that emphasizes improved results for children with disabilities, OSEP has included a new indicator for both Parts B and C. Each list now includes an indicator called the **State Systemic Improvement Plan**—the **SSIP**. The SSIP is an ambitious but achievable multi-year plan that each State must write describing how it will improve outcomes for children with disabilities served under IDEA. For Part C, Indicator 11 is now the SSIP. For Part B, it's Indicator 17.

With a deadline of 2015 for the first part of the SSIP, States are beginning to write their SSIPs for Part B and Part C—and they're using an RDA focus that's required by OSEP.

Which brings us back to RDA! What *is* it?

The Basics of RDA

It's easy to say what the letters of RDA stand for. But what does "results-driven accountability" actually *mean?* What does it involve? And why is it important to Parent Centers and to the children with disabilities and families they serve? This guide is written to help answer these questions.

RDA begins with a premise—that the **results** we want to achieve need to drive the **actions** we take, not the other way around. Simply put, if we want to achieve *X* goal, what actions must we take to get there?

In applying the RDA approach to improving results for children with disabilities, each State must now ask itself:

- What **improved results** for children with disabilities do we want to achieve?

- What **actions** must we take to achieve those results?

When deciding on what improved results to target and what actions to take, each State must:

- identify the specific area (or areas) it will target for improvement, and

- plan in detail how it will achieve that improvement.

As we mentioned, this process is currently underway—and Parent Centers can be important stakeholders and informants in the process.

RDA Principles

OSEP first announced its intention to move to a results-driven system of accountability in March of 2012. Since then, OSEP has worked with stakeholders to define what the RDA approach will involve. This has included defining its core principles. You'll find those principles listed in the box at the top right.

Developing and Implementing the SSIP

States will develop and implement their individual SSIPs for Parts B and C in three phases. Each phase needs to involve significant stakeholder input—and States must describe in their SSIPs how they will involve stakeholders in developing, implementing, and evaluating the SSIP. Here's a brief description of what else is involved in each phase.

Phase 1: Analysis (Components to be submitted by 2015)

Phase I must include the following:

- **Data Analysis:** The SSIP must describe how the State identified and analyzed key data in order to (1) select the area or result to be improved for children with disabilities (called *the State-identified Measurable*

Core Principles of RDA

A system that:

- is developed in partnership with stakeholders

- is transparent and understandable

- drives improved outcomes

- ensures protection of individual rights

- provides differentiated incentives, supports, and interventions

- encourages States to direct their resources to where they can have the greatest positive impact

- is responsive to the needs and expectations of the ultimate consumers

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Result for Children with Disabilities), and (2) identify root causes contributing to low performance. Key data to be analyzed include data from SPP/APR indicators, 618 data collections, and other available data (as applicable). This must be done for both Parts B and C.

- **State-identified Measurable Result for Children with Disabilities:** What result(s) for infants and toddlers with disabilities does the State intend to improve in its Part C systems? What result(s) for students with disabilities will be improved under Part B? This information about the "State-identified measurable result for children with disabilities" must be stated in the SSIP the State submits to OSEP in Phase 1.

- **Analysis of State Infrastructure to Support Improvement and Build Capacity:** States will need a strong infrastructure to build the capacity of LEAs and EIS programs to implement, scale up, and sustain the use of evidence-based practices that improve results for children with disabilities. To that end, States must analyze their infrastructure to determine if improvements are needed in systems of governance, fiscal oversight, quality standards, professional development, data capacity, technical assistance, and accountability.

The SSIP that each State submits to OSEP in Phase 1 must include a description of how the State analyzed

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the capacity of its infrastructure and the conclusions it drew regarding needed improvements.

- **Selection of Coherent Improvement Strategies:** What improvement strategies will the State use to achieve the desired result(s) for children with disabilities served under Part C or Part B? The SSIP must explain how the improvement strategies were selected; why they are sound, logical, and aligned; and how they will lead to measurable improvement in the State-identified result(s) for infants and toddlers in Part C and for students with disabilities under Part B.

- **Theory of Action:** The SSIP must include a graphic illustration of the State's "theory of action" for the improvement strategies it has selected. In other words, it must explain in its SSIP why doing *X* (improvement strategies) will improve *Y* (the State's capacity to lead meaningful change in LEAs and EIS programs and achieve improvement in the State-identified result for children with disabilities).

Phase 2 (Components to be submitted in 2016)

In Phase 2, each State fleshes out the details of the coherent improvement strategies identified in Phase 1 and makes each of its SSIPs (one for Part C and one for Part B) into actionable plans based on the State's theory of action.

- **How will the State improve infrastructure?** Based on the data analysis of infrastructure conducted in Phase 1, the State can now identify what system improvements are needed to build the capacity of LEAs and EIS programs to use the evidence-based practices identified as key to achieving the State-identified measurable result(s) for children with disabilities. How does the State propose to make those system improvements?

- **How will the State support local programs?** How will the State support LEAs and EIS programs in using the evidence-based practices identified as key to achieving desired results for children with disabilities? Phase II of the SSIP needs to detail this information, including activities and timelines.

- **How will the State evaluate implementation?** Each State must also describe how it will evaluate the implementation of its SSIP for Part B and Part C and determine progress toward achieving the State's desired results and improvements.

The **SSIP** is central to the RDA process in your State. It's meant to be developed in partnership with stakeholders.

As stakeholders, parents and Parents Centers have an important role to play in helping develop their State's **SSIP**.

Phase 3 (to be completed by 2017)

- **Evaluation!**—The evaluation of SSIP implementation continues. So does the State's reporting, including the extent to which its coherent improvement strategies were implemented in both Parts B and C.

- **Results?**—What progress has been made toward achieving the State-identified measurable result(s) for infants and toddlers with disabilities served under Part C? What progress, for students with disabilities served under Part B?

- **Revisions to the SSIP**—Based on data from the ongoing evaluation and with stakeholder involvement, the State may make revisions to its SSIP for Part B and/or Part C.

Coordination with Other Improvement Efforts

Throughout the three phases just described, the State's improvement efforts need to be coordinated and aligned with the improvement work of other initiatives in the State. And there can be quite a few of those!

Examples include:

- College- and career-readiness standards
- Race to the Top
- Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge
- Elementary and Secondary Education Act Waiver
- Response to Intervention (RTI)

- Investing in Innovation (i3)
- School Turnaround
- Your own State's initiatives

How Does RDA Affect Monitoring and Compliance?

Compliance with IDEA will always be an issue that States need to address. Procedural safeguards for children and families remain intact and unchanged.

Yes, OSEP will continue to monitor State performance—but now with a focus on helping States to improve results for children with disabilities. Technical assistance and support will be available to States from OSEP-funded TA projects. Differentiated levels of support will be provided based on State needs.

The Role of Parent Centers in RDA

Clearly, there's a great deal of data analysis, discussion, planning, writing, and action-taking that must occur in every State across the next three to six years. The remarkable thing is—**improving results for children with disabilities is the singular focus of all the work to be done.**

It's also a focus that Parent Centers strongly share, because children with disabilities are at the heart and soul of the work that PTIs and CPRCs do every day. This makes Parent Centers critical stakeholders in the RDA process unfolding in their State, including the development of the State's SSIPs for Part B and Part C.

Moreover, **OSEP expects each State to develop its SSIPs for Parts B and C with broad stakeholder input and public discussion.** The door is open for Parent Centers to contribute significantly to this process.

Connecting with Your State's RDA Activities

Consider the many steps and stages that RDA will involve in your State—data analysis, deciding what the State-identified measurable result(s) will be for infants and toddlers with disabilities and for school-aged students with disabilities, selecting improvement strategies based

on a coherent theory of action, building the State's infrastructure to lead meaningful change at the local level... Any and all of these are appropriate points for Parent Center involvement and family engagement.

How do you find out what's going on in your State and get involved? This will vary depending on your State. Here are some suggestions for where to start.

- Contact your State Department of Special Education or the lead agency for early intervention services. These are the agencies responsible for developing the State's plans for improvement on Parts B and C, respectively. Ask where the State is in the RDA process and its plans for developing the SSIP. Also ask how to be involved as a stakeholder and parent representative.

- Connect with your State's Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) for early intervention or the State Advisory Panel (SAP) for special education. These can be excellent points of connection to State-level activities and news.

- Visit your State's website for early intervention or special education. This is where event calendars, public notices, and invitations for stakeholder involvement are often posted.

Share what you find out about your State's point(s) of contact with other parents, the families you serve, and your colleagues in Parent Center work. The parent voice is a very important one to have at the SSIP table!

Resources of Additional Information

Because RDA is new as of 2014, there's actually not a lot of information online. Most of what is available repeats what OSEP has already said on RDA. Below we've listed several resources that will provide you with more information.

OSEP itself.
Visit OSEP's RDA page and browse the documents and information there for the most authoritative voice on this subject. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rda/index.html

Sample Approaches for Using Assessment Data as Part of a Results-Driven Accountability System.
Available on OSEP's RDA page, this document gives examples of how States might analyze their student and program data. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rda/sample-approaches.pdf

Leading by Convening: A Blueprint for Authentic Engagement.
This book describes what's called the "Partnership Way" and gives step-by-step guidance on how to use the strategy of partnership to build connections and foster authentic engagement with stakeholders. It's a product of the IDEA Partnership.
http://www.ideapartnership.org/building-connections/the-partnership-way.html

2014 SSIP Webinar series for Part C/Section 619.
For the schedule of webinars and the latest news and available resources on RDA, visit the ECTA Center, at:
http://ectacenter.org/~calls/2014/ssip/ssip.asp

Keep up to date at the ECTA Center as new resources emerge.
http://ectacenter.org/topics/ssip/

Need information for the parents and families you serve?
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