



How to Improve State-Submitted Data Notes – Part C (Revised February 2009)

OSEP publishes state-submitted data notes in the *Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*; the Data Accountability Center (DAC) posts them annually on www.IDEAdata.org and includes them with all published IDEA 618 data products. The notes provide information to assist data users in interpreting the data and understanding state-specific policies and practices that may influence the data. These notes represent an important source of information for those who use the Part C data. For this reason, it is essential that the notes be as clear as possible.

The purpose of this document is to describe common problems with state-submitted data notes and provide suggestions as to how to improve the notes.

1. Data note does not explain the change in the data.

Inadequate data note: The decrease in the number of children in the *other* category reflects the data as reported by local programs.

When you are asked to look more closely at large year-to-year changes in your data, first you should *further investigate* your local program data to determine if program reporting errors caused the large change in your data. If this investigation shows that the local data are accurate, look for a change in state policy or data collection methods that may have led to the large change in your state's data. Provide a detailed description of the changes your state made that led to the increase or decrease.

Improved data note: The state had a decrease in the number of children reported in the *other* category because service providers are now more likely to provide services in locations where infants and toddlers are typically found and less likely to provide those services as office visits. This shift in service setting is the result of training provided by the state to local programs, training that emphasized the importance of providing services in settings typical for children without disabilities.

2. Data note mentions a change in the definition, but does not specify what that change was.

Inadequate data note: The decrease in the number of infants and toddlers served is a result of a change in eligibility.

If your state definition changes or if clarification was given on a definition, provide information about the previous definition/clarification and the current definition/clarification.

Improved data note: The decrease in the number of infants and toddlers served is the result of changes to the state's eligibility criteria in 2002. Specifically, torticollis was moved from the list of diagnosed conditions, and the low birth weight criterion was redefined from under 1000g to under 750g.

3. Data note uses a state-specific term, abbreviation, or code without a definition.

Inadequate data note: Some children reported in the *other* settings category received their early intervention services in Mountain Homes.

A better data note would define/describe the state setting and specify how it links to a category provided in the *IDEA* data collection.

Improved data note: Some children reported in the *other* settings category received their early intervention services in Mountain Homes, a home for teenage mothers.

4. Data note provides information about a reporting change, but not the reason for the change.

Inadequate data note: Many children previously reported in the *other* settings category are now reported in the *community-based* category.

The state can improve the data note by providing information about *why* reporting practices changed.

Improved data note: Previously, the state reported infants and toddlers served in a daycare setting in the *other* settings category. After receiving technical assistance from the state, local programs report these children in the *community-based* category.

5. Data note attributes the change to an error in previous data, but does not specify the error.

Inadequate data note: The increase in the number of children served is the result of an error in last year's data.

The state can improve this data note by providing specific information about past reporting errors.

Improved data note: The increase in the number of children reported in the child count is the result of an error in the computer program used to produce past child count data. In the past, the program counted only those children with an IFSP in place on December 1 who had received at least one service as of that date. Now the program correctly counts all children with an active IFSP in place on December 1, even if the child has yet to receive services.

Other suggestions to improve state-submitted data notes:

- Specify age range (e.g., birth to 1, 1 to 2, 2 to 3) when describing a change in data.
- Specify when referring to an increase or a decrease in data.
- Do not try to explain too many changes with one data note.
- Use category names on the current *IDEA* data collection forms (e.g., refer to *community-based* category rather than regular nursery school/child care center).
- Specify the number of children for whom race/ethnicity was estimated, if applicable. If possible, specify the race/ethnicities of these children.
- Describe any data crosswalks used.
- Specify any settings and/or exiting categories not used.