

How the Department Made Determinations under Section 616(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2011: Part B

In making our determination for each State under section 616(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), we considered the totality of the information we have available about a State. This includes the State's FFY 2009 Annual Performance Report (APR)/State Performance Plan (SPP) submission; information from monitoring visits, including verification reviews; and other public information, such as the State's performance under any existing special conditions on its FFY 2010 grant or a compliance agreement, longstanding unresolved audit findings, and other State compliance data under the IDEA.

FFY 2009 APR/SPP Submissions and Other Information

In reviewing a State's FFY 2009 APR/SPP submission, we considered both the submission of valid and reliable data and the level of compliance, including correction of noncompliance, as described below. We also reviewed other information (described below) that reflects the State's compliance with IDEA requirements.

With respect to data, for Indicators 1 through 5, and 7 through 19, we examined whether the State provided valid and reliable FFY 2009 data (i.e., the State provided all the required data, the data were for the correct year and were consistent with the required measurement and/or the approved SPP, and whether we had information demonstrating that the data were not correct or the State indicated that the data were not valid and reliable).

With respect to compliance, we examined Indicators 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, and 20. For each indicator, we looked for evidence that the State demonstrated substantial compliance either through reporting FFY 2009 data that reflected a very high level of compliance (generally 95% or better) or, for Indicators 9, 10, 11, and 12, if the State's FFY 2009 compliance data were 25% or below (for Indicators 9 and 10) or at or above 75% (for Indicators 11 and 12), whether it had fully corrected FFY 2008 findings of noncompliance. Indicator 15 evaluates the "timely" correction of FFY 2008 findings, so for this indicator we specifically examined both whether the State reported a high level of compliance (generally 95% or better) in timely correcting FFY 2008 findings of noncompliance, and whether the State verified the correction of FFY 2008 findings of noncompliance consistent with OSEP Memorandum 09-02, dated October 17, 2008 (OSEP Memo 09-02). We did not consider Indicators 16 and 17 if the State reported less than 100% compliance, but fewer than 10 complaints or 10 fully adjudicated hearings, in recognition of the inequities in basing decisions on small numbers.

Generally, and absent any other issues (see below), we considered a State to "meet requirements" if the State: (1) Provided valid and reliable FFY 2009 data consistent with, or substantially the same as, the measurement for each indicator and/or the approved SPP; (2) Demonstrated substantial compliance for Indicators 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, and 20; and (3) Reported under Indicator 15 both a high level of compliance (generally 95% or better) in timely correcting FFY 2008 findings of noncompliance, and that it verified correction of FFY 2008 findings of noncompliance consistent with the guidance in OSEP Memo 09-02. We determined that a State demonstrated substantial compliance if it provided data showing a very high level of compliance (generally at or above 95%) for these indicators, or if it had fully corrected previously identified findings of noncompliance for Indicators 9 and 10 (if the State's FFY 2009 compliance data for these indicators were 25% or below), and for Indicators 11 and 12 (if the State's FFY 2009 compliance data for these indicators were at or above 75%). As indicated in OSEP Memo 09-02, beginning with the Department's

determinations in 2010, for Indicators 9, 10, 11 and 12, we considered a State to have demonstrated correction of previously identified noncompliance for any findings identified in FFY 2007 and 2008 if the State verified correction of those findings consistent with OSEP Memo 09-02. In addition, we did not consider a State to be in substantial compliance for a compliance indicator based on correction if its reported FFY 2009 data were low (generally below 75%, or, for Indicators 9 and 10, above 25%), consistent with OSEP Memo 09-02. If a State did not meet these standards for substantial compliance for only one compliance indicator (including Indicators 15 and 20) and there were no other factors (see below), we considered the State to “meet requirements” if the compliance level for that indicator was high (generally at or above 90%, or, for Indicators 9 and 10, at or below 10%). In no case, however, did we place a State in “meets requirements” if it failed to provide valid and reliable FFY 2009 data (as defined above) for Indicators 1 through 5 and 7 through 19. We also considered whether the State, when it reported under Indicator 4A: (1) Made clear that, if it identified any districts as having significant discrepancies in the discipline of children with disabilities, it reviewed and, if appropriate revised (or required the LEA to revise) its policies, procedures, and practices related to the development and implementation of IEPs, the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and procedural safeguards, as required by 34 CFR §300.170(b); and (2) If the State identified any noncompliance in policies, procedures or practices in these areas as a result of this review, it corrected the noncompliance.

Generally, and absent any other issues (see below), we considered a State to be “in need of intervention” for one of three reasons that are explained further in this paragraph: very low compliance data, failure to provide valid and reliable data for a compliance indicator, or longstanding noncompliance that was the subject of Departmental enforcement for a key IDEA requirement. First, we identified a State as “in need of intervention” if the State’s compliance data demonstrated: (1) Very low performance for Indicators 9, 10, 11, 12, 16 or 17 (generally below 50%, or in the case of Indicators 9 and 10, above 50%, regardless of whether it reported correction of previously identified findings of noncompliance; or (2) Very low performance for Indicator 15 (generally below 50%) and the State did not report under Indicator 15 that it verified correction of FFY 2008 findings of noncompliance consistent with the guidance in OSEP Memo 09-02. Second, we identified a State as “in need of intervention” if it did not provide valid and reliable (as defined above) FFY 2009 compliance data for Indicators 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16 or 17. We also identified a State as “in need of intervention” if the State has been subject to Departmental enforcement for multiple years for failing to comply with key IDEA requirements, the noncompliance has been long-standing, and the State’s data demonstrate continued noncompliance.

We would identify a State as “in need of substantial intervention” if its substantial failure to comply significantly affected the core requirements of the program, such as the delivery of services to children with disabilities or the State’s exercise of general supervision, or if the State informed the Department that it was unwilling to comply with an IDEA requirement. In making this determination, we would consider the impact of any longstanding unresolved issues on the State’s current implementation of the program. We would also consider identifying a State “in need of substantial intervention” for failing to submit its APR/SPP.

Absent any other issues (see below), we determined that States that did not “meet requirements” and were not “in need of intervention” or “in need of substantial intervention” were “in need of assistance.”

Monitoring Data and Other Public Information

We also considered other public information available to the Department, including information from monitoring visits, verification reviews, and other public information, such as the State's performance under any existing special conditions on its FFY 2010 grant or a compliance agreement, longstanding unresolved audit findings, and other State compliance data under the IDEA. We did not consider a State to "meet requirements" if the State had unresolved special conditions that were imposed as a result of the State being designated as a "high risk" grantee, outstanding OSEP monitoring findings, including verification visit findings, longstanding audit issues, or a compliance agreement. In determining whether the State should be identified as "in need of assistance," "in need of intervention," or "in need of substantial intervention," we considered the length of time the problem had existed, the magnitude of the problem, and the State's response to the problem, including progress the State had made to correct the problem.

Finally, in making these determinations in 2011, we did not consider whether a State was in compliance with the requirement in section 612(a)(18)(A) to maintain State financial support for special education and related services. This is a key component of a State's eligibility for a grant under Part B of the IDEA. However, because the statute provides a specific remedy when a State is not in compliance with this provision (and the Department is taking action consistent with the statute) and recognizing that this is the first time that a number of States have failed to meet this requirement, the Department decided not to include compliance with this provision in the determinations process this year. The Department is actively considering including a State's compliance with this requirement in the 2012 determinations.