

NOTES ON OVAE'S MEETING WITH STATE DIRECTORS ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE NRS, AUGUST 4-5, 2010.

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Document Sections:

I. Issues/Recommendations Discussed (excerpted from OVAE Issue Summary Papers)

- Issue
- OVAE Recommendation
- Summary of State Director Responses

II. General Observations/Misc. Notes

III. Next Steps

The shaded material below was taken from issue papers prepared by OVAE in advance of this meeting. I've posted the full text of these papers here:

Issue 1 - Employment Goals.doc

<http://docs.google.com/document/edit?id=1UdRkLb5UA9vpIg0rqiKbXPV7VZiy3TqmgNqrrG7qLeI&hl=en&authkey=CIP96J8O>

Issue 6 - Postsecondary Success and IET.doc

<http://docs.google.com/document/edit?id=11OhEefTDQV9Z40NDOMeb6o1TKExwDJfNMZiRs1qGGAA&hl=en&authkey=ClyFurAF>

Issue 3 - HS Completion.doc

http://docs.google.com/document/edit?id=1dZbtDcp4MrAS-R-C8mW6kw4KJ6ezEqHumweJdJFQ_rI&hl=en&authkey=CKSN6eYJ

Issue 5 - GED Prep Track.doc

<http://docs.google.com/document/edit?id=1ntYDuWuUvf6vM6NFsSw9vIvNrGdCi28ONG4Mr85-uPA&hl=en&authkey=CNzQiuwH>

Issue 2 - Postsecondary Follow-up.doc

<http://docs.google.com/document/edit?id=1cIZDTBWSyv0JE5nyhsJnSBq9Hrc7RUqded9KzjAgx2E&hl=en&authkey=CNOIj6AN>

Issue 4 - Other Educational Skill Gains.doc

<http://docs.google.com/document/edit?id=1OVXtNDqkbR2niqvEYehpBzbtzZ-2zu0CHYjy9fvQwUA&hl=en&authkey=CMnu0J4H>

ISSUES/RECOMMENDATIONS DISCUSSED

Issue 1: Identifying Learner Cohorts for Employer-Related Outcomes

The National Reporting System (NRS) requires local program staff to identify who among their unemployed students has a goal of “entered employment” and to follow up only with these students after they exit the adult education program to determine whether they have entered employment.

The data over the last three program years (PYs) indicate that states are under setting the employment goals. The national percentage of unemployed students who exited the program with employment goals currently ranges from 18 percent to 22 percent. Many States have reported substantially lower percentages of students with employment goals. For example, in PY 2008–2009, one State reported that less than 4 percent of its unemployed students who exited the program had a goal of entering employment.

Furthermore, the number of students with employment-related goals set and met over the last several years fluctuates greatly within individual States. This variation suggests instability in the data that likely is due to problematic goal setting and data collection practices rather than differences in the student population over the years. Consequently, it appears that the policy that allows local programs to set individual student goals related to employment results in outcome data that is of limited use as a measure of accountability.

OVAE Recommendation:

Automatically designate *all* students who are unemployed and in the labor force as the cohort for which “entered employment” must be tracked. Automatically designate *all* students who enter the program employed as the cohort for which “retained employment” must be tracked.

Summary of State Director Responses:

State directors were generally very supportive; some are concerned about additional data collection burden/cost.

Issue 2: Identifying Learner Cohorts for Postsecondary Education Follow Up

The National Reporting System (NRS) requires States to report student entry into postsecondary education or training for the students who set this outcome as a goal. Local programs must follow up with these students after they exit the adult education program to determine whether they entered postsecondary education.

The data indicate that local programs may not be effective in setting the postsecondary entry goal. Over the last three program years, the national percentage of students with this goal averaged about 27 percent of students at the high adult secondary education (ASE) level and about 12 percent of all ASE students. Many States have reported less than 30 percent of students in ASE have postsecondary entry goals.

In addition, the number of students with postsecondary entry goals set and met over the last several years fluctuates greatly within individual States. This variation suggests instability in the data that is likely due to problematic goal-setting and data-collection practices rather than differences in the student population over the years. Consequently, it appears that the data on postsecondary entry are of limited use as a measure of accountability.

OVAE Recommendation:

Automatically designate *all* students who have earned a GED, have a secondary credential, or are enrolled in a class specifically designed for transitioning to community college (e.g., bridge program, college readiness), as the cohort for which “entry into postsecondary education” must be tracked.

Summary of State Director Responses:

State directors were generally supportive of the concept, but there was a lot more concern here about how you identify the cohort. Many expressed concern that the cohort will be too large, for example, because many of these students are not interested in entering postsecondary, and/or that it may exclude students who end up in postsecondary without obtaining a secondary credential. Also, some argued that they should look at other transition pathways, such as apprenticeship programs, not just post-secondary.

There was also a lot more concern here about the timing and cost of data collection.

Issue 3: Identifying Learner Cohorts for Secondary Credential Follow-Up

The National Reporting System (NRS) requires States to report attaining a secondary credential or passing the GED tests for students who set this outcome as a goal. Local programs must follow up with these students after they exit the adult education program to determine whether students obtained the credential.

OVAE is considering eliminating goal setting in the collection of the other NRS follow up measures (employment and postsecondary entry) because data indicate that local programs may not be effective in setting goals, thus resulting in measures of questionable utility.

Although goal setting and reporting for the secondary credential measure appears to suffer less from this tendency, to achieve consistency and simplify reporting, OVAE is also considering eliminating goal setting for the secondary credential attainment measure.

OVAE Recommendation:

Match GED test records for all students who take tests during the year to calculate a pass rate. For States with adult high schools, report the number of students in high ASE who obtain a high school diploma. For States with EDP, report the number of students enrolled in the assessment phase who obtain a high school diploma.

Summary of State Director Responses:

State directors were very supportive. No major issues.

Issue 4: Using Additional Measures of Educational Skill Gains

For this issue, OVAE did not present a recommendation for consideration by state directors, but instead outlined the challenges related to developing additional methods of measuring educational gain, including a presentation by Dwayne Norris of AIR on testing issues. I recommend reviewing the entire paper that OVAE prepared, but I will attempt to summarize the issues they raised below.

Two concerns have been raised consistently about the educational functioning level framework for measuring students' skill gains: (1) the levels are too broad, so that many students—especially low-level students—cannot show progress when they make gains within levels; and (2) students who enter close to the top of the level can advance a level without making a meaningful gain.

According to OVAE, no studies have systematically examined whether the broad nature of the levels adversely affects low-level students. However, examination of national NRS data over the last 3 years reveals that completion rates by low-level students are not adversely low and are similar to performance at other levels.

Nevertheless, OVAE did discuss the following possible changes or additions to existing measures:

(1) Require states to report student test scores in addition to completions of NRS levels. This option maintains the current framework of educational levels, while providing data that allow a finer analysis of student progress.

Problems cited by OVAE to this approach:

- States use different tests and, even within a state, may use multiple tests. OVAE would need to develop methods for standardized test reporting, and the methods discussed provide difficulties due to the different tests that are used across states. Not impossible, but challenging.
- OVAE also stated that, regardless of how test scores are standardized, the use of different tests within states would make cross-state comparisons difficult—**and national comparisons that include all States would be impossible**. This is one reason why they believe eliminating educational functioning levels and reporting only test scores is not an attractive option.
- A further disadvantage of eliminating reporting with NRS levels is that state and federal longitudinal performance data on educational gain, using the level system, would end, and it would take years to build a new set of data—in other words, longitudinal data collecting would essentially have to start over.

(2) Create additional educational functioning levels by splitting the current beginning and intermediate levels. This approach would allow reporting of level completions for smaller gains and potentially provide more information on states' and programs' success in helping learners develop skills.

Problems cited by OVAE to this approach:

- The research cited above indicated that—at least for the high-intermediate level—dividing levels would have a negligible impact on national performance rates.
- Dividing levels also has the potential to dilute the meaning of educational gain if levels are too small to be educationally meaningful.
- In addition, data provided by publishers indicates that tests are less reliable for measuring finer gains at these levels. Studies would be needed to identify cut points for new levels and to validate new levels.

- Finally, current tests are approved through a regulated review process tied to current levels and would have to be re-reviewed for the new levels.

Finally, OVAE noted that all of the proposed changes considered—reporting test scores and further dividing educational functioning levels—would require changes to State systems, testing policies, data collection, training of staff, and development of performance benchmarks for States with performance-based funding.

Issue 5: Refining NRS Outcome Measurement for GED Prep Students

Students who enroll in adult education to obtain a secondary credential often have skills at the adult secondary education (ASE) level. These students attend only long enough to receive remedial training in some areas that enable them to pass the GED tests. Consequently, these “GED prep” students do not attend long enough to be post-tested, and programs cannot count them as having completed an educational functioning level in NRS reporting. As a result, education gain measures may be deflated for some levels. In addition, because these students attend only to obtain a secondary credential, educational gain may not be an appropriate outcome measure for them.

OVAE Recommendation:

Create a separate level for GED prep students that includes all students who score at the secondary level on any NRS-approved test battery. Educational gain is not reported for these students, and they are not counted in calculation of education gain for any NRS level. The only reportable NRS outcome for these students is attainment of a secondary credential.

Summary of State Director Responses:

State directors were mostly supportive of the concept, but some significant issues were raised. First, again, there was some concern about how the cohort would be identified: in particular, there was concern that students with skills too low would be included, and that they will need to account for those students who already have a secondary credential. They were also concerned that ESL students would not be included.

There was also some concern that this might place too much emphasis on GED attainment and not on other pathways to secondary credential.

Finally, there was significant concern about the changes that would need to be made to MIS systems to implement this change. Many thought this would not be feasible by the

next program year.

Issue 6: Exploring Progress and Success in Postsecondary Education

The National Reporting System (NRS) requires States to report student entry into postsecondary education or training for students who set this outcome as a goal. States are not required to track and report student performance after entrance in postsecondary education. The increased focus on entrance into, and successful completion of, postsecondary education is leading states to implement new models of adult education that rely on concurrent enrollment strategies. There is a need to explore if and under what conditions adult education programs should be held accountable for measuring progress and success in postsecondary education.

OVAE Recommendation:

Require programs with IET models to track progress toward and completion of a credential in the program of study in which the student is enrolled.

Summary of State Director Responses:

Responses were generally negative, citing the need for more study, clearer definitions of success, guidance on types of credentials, how long to follow up, etc. Also some expressed concern that accountability on postsecondary success should be shared by other stakeholders, such as community colleges.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

Throughout the sessions, state directors expressed concern that to implement many of these recommendations, there would need to be clear definitions of all measures and terms.

Most expressed skepticism that several of these changes proposed could be implemented in their states by the July 2011 program year. I heard this more in later sessions, perhaps due to the cumulative effect of thinking about implementing all of the recommendations as a group, rather than considering them one at a time.

There was discussion of the additional training and preparation that program staff would need if these changes would require, but not a lot of discussion on the additional burden that these changes would have on programs. Some participants raised this issue, but there was not a lot of discussion about this in the groups I observed. Several states were represented by state directors and by people who identified themselves as MIS staff – I do not know how many people there were responsible for professional development in their states, but I wonder if more of the attendees were professional developers if this

issue would have been raised more often.

I don't think this was stated explicitly, but in reviewing the recommendations, it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that most of them are concerned about strengthening the measures that show that the adult education system is moving students into obtaining secondary degrees, postsecondary education, and into employment.

NEXT STEPS:

OVAE is will take the information gathered at this meeting and produce a new set of draft recommendations that will then be reviewed by a smaller subset of state directors. Once that process is complete, it must be submitted to OMB for clearance and public comment. They estimated that this process would take 5 months at a minimum, likely longer.

They also stated that they may not necessarily go forward with *all* of the recommendations.