

Questions and Answers on the Part B Educational Environments Data Collection for Children Ages 3 – 5

Section 618(a)(1)(A) of IDEA requires that states report the number and percentage of children with disabilities who are: “(i) Receiving a free appropriate public education; (ii) Participating in regular education; (iii) In separate classes, separate schools or facilities, or public or private residential facilities.” Consistent with section 618(a)(1)(A), categories for reporting the number and percentage of preschool-aged children with disabilities by educational environment have been revised to more accurately reflect the extent of the children’s participation in regular education. Thus, the primary focus of the preschool educational environments data collection has shifted from an emphasis on where the child receives special education and related services to an emphasis on the percentage of time the child spends in an environment with typically-developing age peers.

Inasmuch as regular public preschool education programs are not consistently available through local educational agencies across the country, nor are 3 through 5 year olds generally included in states’ mandatory school age range, it is necessary to look to other settings where preschool-aged children are typically found during the day, and to use those settings as proxies for “regular education” settings.

As of SY2006-07, the preschool educational environments data table contains two major categories: (A) children attending a regular early childhood program; and (B) children not attending a regular early childhood program or kindergarten. Category (A) reflects early childhood settings where typically developing children are found during the day in the community and is considered, for data collection purposes, the preschool counterpart of school-aged regular education environments.

OSEP understands the concern that the new reporting requirements may reflect circumstances where parents pay for their child to attend an early childhood program, and that the LEA’s preschool educational environments data may be enhanced because of those parental choices. OSEP emphasizes that the revised data collection does not relieve States or local educational agencies of their obligation to meet the least restrictive environment requirements for preschool children with disabilities in accordance with 34 CFR §§300.114 –300.120.

- 1. If a child attends a regular early childhood program for 30 hours per week, but is pulled out of the regular classroom to receive special education services for 3 hours each week, how should the percentage of time in a regular early childhood program be calculated?**

Scenario

The child attends a regular early childhood program for 30 hours a week (5 days a week at 6 hours per day), but is pulled out of the regular early childhood classroom for 3 hours each week to receive special education services.

Calculation

Hrs in Reg EC/Total hrs in Ed Env = $27 \div 30 = 0.9 * 100 = 90\%$

Result

Report the child in the regular early childhood program at least 80% of time.

Note that although the child may spend a full day in a regular early childhood program, if the child is taken out of the regular classroom in order to receive special education services, the time spent receiving those services is not included in the numerator. In this scenario, while the child participates full-time in a regular early childhood program, the child receives special education services in a segregated environment.

- 2. In the above scenario (Question 1), a child receives 3 hours of special education services each week outside of the regular early childhood program and is reported as spending 90% of the time in a regular early childhood program. A child who attends only a 3-hour morning preschool program (5 days a week), and is also pulled out of the early childhood classroom for 3 hours each week for special education services, would be calculated as spending only 80% of the time in a regular early childhood program. Why is the child in this second scenario, who receives the same amount of special education services as the child in the first scenario, reported in a less inclusive category?**

In this scenario, although the child is receiving the same amount of special education services, the child is spending less time in a regular early childhood environment. Although both children are spending the same amount of time in a segregated environment, the child in the second scenario is spending a smaller proportion of the time in an educational environment with typically-developing peers. In accordance with IDEA 2004, this data collection seeks information on the extent to which children with disabilities are having opportunities to interact with peers who are developing typically. At this point in time, this data collection is not seeking information on the number of hours that the child is receiving special education services.

- 3. While it is relatively straightforward to define the length of a standard school day for school-aged children, what does OSEP consider to be a standard school day for a preschool-aged child?**

While OSEP recognizes that the amount of time that a preschool-aged child may spend in an educational environment will vary widely, in order to enhance comparability of these data, it is important to set a standard. OSEP has determined that, for the purposes of this data collection, a standard school day for children ages 3 through 5 will be capped at a maximum of 8 hours per day. The hours are limited to Monday through Friday. If a child is in an educational environment for longer than 8 hours per day, such as in the example below, the amount of hours should be capped and the percentage should be calculated as if the child was only in an educational environment 8 hours per day.

Scenario

The child attends a regular early childhood program 27 hours a week (3 days a week at 9 hours per day) and receives special education and related services in a special education program for an additional 12 hours a week (2 days a week at 6 hours per day).

Begin by reducing the number of hours that the child spends in a regular early childhood environment on the days that the total amount exceeds 8 hours per day:

Calculation

Hrs in Reg EC/Total hrs in Ed Env = $24 \div 36 = 0.60 * 100 = 67\%$

Result

Report the child in the regular early childhood program 40% to 79% of time.

- 4. If a cap is needed for number of hours the child is in an educational environment, what hours should be reduced; the number of hours the child is in a regular early childhood program or the number of hours the child is in a special education early childhood program?**

The number of hours that the child spends in a regular early childhood environment on the days that the total amount exceeds 8 hours per day should be reduced, not the number of hours spent in a special education early childhood program. The hours should be limited to Monday through Friday and should not include education programs, which take place on the weekend.

- 5. In defining the maximum number of hours spent in an educational environment to be 8 hours per day, is OSEP suggesting that this is the optimal amount of time that children with disabilities, ages 3 through 5, should spend in an educational environment?**

OSEP is not recommending the number of hours a child should be in an educational environment. OSEP recognizes that the needs of children with disabilities vary widely and that the best environment for any child should be determined on an individual basis. The purpose of this cap is solely to standardize these calculations and enhance the interpretability of the resulting data.

- 6. How is the state supposed to determine if an educational program has more or less than 50 percent typically developing children?**

OSEP expects states to rely on parents to report to IEP teams about the child's educational environment and classroom composition. In turn, the LEA should obtain this information from the appropriate program contact and relay the information to the state.

- 7. What if the parent does not know whether the child's educational environment includes a majority of typically developing children?**

If the parent does not know whether the child is in an educational environment that includes a majority of typically developing children, the IEP team should ask the parent to report whether the program is designed for typically-developing children or children with disabilities. If the program is designed for typically-developing children, then the IEP team should document that the child is attending a regular early childhood program.

8. Are the parents or IEP teams expected to calculate the percentage of time that a child spends in a regular early childhood program?

No. The parents and IEP teams are expected to report how many hours a child spends in a regular early childhood program each week and the number of hours that a child spends receiving special education and related services outside of a regular early childhood program. The state is responsible for performing the calculations on the percentage of time the child is in a regular early childhood program, using the information provided by the parents and IEP teams through the LEAs.

9. If a child is in a Head Start classroom, is it necessary to ask the parent to report classroom composition? On the form, Head Start is provided as an example of an early childhood program where the majority of the children in the program are typically developing.

Although the data form instructions list Head Start as one example of a regular early childhood program, the reporter must first consider classroom composition. While Head Start is not specifically designed to serve children with disabilities, there may be programs in operation with classrooms that have a majority of disabled students. Discussing the classroom composition with the parent is crucial to determining whether or not the majority of children are typically developing. Below are two examples of how calculations should be done.

Scenario 1

The child is in a Head Start program, where the majority of children are typically developing, for 15 hours per week (3 days a week at 5 hours per day) and receives special education services in the Head Start classroom.

Calculation

$$\text{Hrs in Reg EC/Total hrs in Ed Env} = 15 \div 15 = 1.0 * 100 = 100\%$$

Result

Report the child in the regular early childhood program at least 80% of time.

Scenario 2

The child is in a Head Start program, where the majority of children have disabilities, for 15 hours per week (3 days a week at 5 hours per day) and receives special education services in the Head Start classroom.

Calculation

$$\text{Hrs in Reg EC/Total hrs in Ed Env} = 0 \div 15 = 0.0 * 100 = 0\%$$

Result

Report the child in the regular early childhood program less than 40% of time.

10. If a child is in a reverse mainstream classroom, is it necessary to ask the parent to report classroom composition? On the form, reverse mainstream is provided as an example of an early childhood program where the majority of the children in the program are typically developing.

A reverse mainstream program is listed in the data form instructions as one example of a regular early childhood program. The OSEP Data Dictionary defines a reverse mainstream program as one that is designed primarily for children with disabilities, but includes a majority of typically-developing children. If the parent reports classroom composition as being majority typically-developing children, then the child should be classified as attending a regular early childhood program. If the parent does not know classroom composition, the next criterion would be program design. In that case, this same example would be classified as a segregated setting. Below are three examples of how calculations should be done.

Scenario 1

The child is in a reverse mainstream program, where the majority of children are typically-developing, for 25 hours per week (5 days a week at 5 hours per day) and receives special education services in the reverse mainstream classroom.

Calculation

$$\text{Hrs in Reg EC/Total hrs in Ed Env} = 25 \div 25 = 1.0 * 100 = 100\%$$

Result

Report the child in the regular early childhood program at least 80% of time.

Scenario 2

The child is in a reverse mainstream program, where the majority of children have disabilities, for 25 hours per week (5 days a week at 5 hours per day) and receives special education services in the reverse mainstream classroom.

Calculation

$$\text{Hrs in Reg EC/Total hrs in Ed Env} = 0 \div 25 = 0.0 * 100 = 0\%$$

Result

Report the child in the regular early childhood program less than 40% of time.

Scenario 3

The child is in a reverse mainstream program, but the parent does not know the composition of the classroom. The parent reports that the program is designed to serve children with disabilities. The child attends this program for 25 hours per week (5 days a week at 5 hours per day) and receives special education services in the reverse mainstream classroom.

Calculation

Hrs in Reg EC/Total hrs in Ed Env = $0 \div 25 = 0.0 * 100 = 0\%$

Result

Report the child in the regular early childhood program less than 40% of time.

11. If a child is in a kindergarten classroom, is it necessary to ask the parent to report classroom composition? On the form, kindergarten is provided as an example of an early childhood program where the majority of the children in the program are typically developing.

A kindergarten classroom is listed in the data form instructions as one example of a regular early childhood program. If the parent reports classroom composition as being majority typically-developing children, then the child should be classified as attending a regular early childhood program. If the parent does not know classroom composition, the next criterion would be program design. Below are three examples of how calculations should be done.

Scenario 1

The child is in a kindergarten program, where the majority of children are typically developing, for 25 hours per week (5 days a week at 5 hours per day) and receives special education services in the kindergarten classroom.

Calculation

Hrs in Reg EC/Total hrs in Ed Env = $25 \div 25 = 1.0 * 100 = 100\%$

Result

Report the child in the regular early childhood program at least 80% of time.

Scenario 2

The child is in a kindergarten program, where the majority of children have disabilities, for 25 hours per week (5 days a week at 5 hours per day) and receives special education services in the kindergarten classroom.

Calculation

Hrs in Reg EC/Total hrs in Ed Env = $0 \div 25 = 0.0 * 100 = 0\%$

Result

Report the child in the regular early childhood program less than 40% of time.

Scenario 3

The child is in a kindergarten program, but the parent does not know the composition of the classroom. The parent reports that the program is designed to serve typically-developing children. The child attends this program for 25 hours per week (5 days a week at 5 hours per day) and receives special education services in the kindergarten classroom.

Calculation

$$\text{Hrs in Reg EC/Total hrs in Ed Env} = 25 \div 25 = 1.0 * 100 = 100\%$$

Result

Report the child in the regular early childhood program at least 80% of time.

12. If a child is in a public or private preschool program, is it necessary to ask the parent to report classroom composition? On the form, preschool is provided as an example of an early childhood program where the majority of the children in the program are typically developing.

A preschool program is listed in the data form instructions as one example of a regular early childhood program. If the parent reports classroom composition as being majority typically-developing children, then the child should be classified as attending a regular early childhood program. If the parent does not know classroom composition, the next criterion would be program design. Below are three examples of how calculations should be done.

Scenario 1

The child is in a preschool program, where the majority of children are typically developing, for 25 hours per week (5 days a week at 5 hours per day) and receives special education services in the preschool program.

Calculation

$$\text{Hrs in Reg EC/Total hrs in Ed Env} = 25 \div 25 = 1.0 * 100 = 100\%$$

Result

Report the child in the regular early childhood program at least 80% of time.

Scenario 2

The child is in a preschool program, where the majority of children have disabilities, for 25 hours per week (5 days a week at 5 hours per day) and receives special education services in the preschool program.

Calculation

$$\text{Hrs in Reg EC/Total hrs in Ed Env} = 0 \div 25 = 0.0 * 100 = 0\%$$

Result

Report the child in the regular early childhood program less than 40% of time.

Scenario 3

The child is in a preschool program, but the parent does not know the composition of the classroom. The parent reports that the program is designed to serve typically-developing children. The child attends this program for 25 hours per week (5 days a week at 5 hours per day) and receives special education services in the kindergarten classroom.

Calculation

$$\text{Hrs in Reg EC/Total hrs in Ed Env} = 25 \div 25 = 1.0 * 100 = 100\%$$

Result

Report the child in the regular early childhood program at least 80% of time.

13. What does group childcare mean? How does a parent or state determine if a child is in a group childcare program?

To determine whether a child attends a group childcare program, IEP teams should ask the parent if the child is in a non-residential setting where the other children in care are not related to one another. If the child is in a setting like this, the child should be reported as being in a group childcare program.

If the child is in a home setting where the other children in care may be related to one another, then the child should be reported in the home category. Group childcare would not be the same as in-home babysitters, nannies, caregivers, au pairs, or the home of a neighborhood babysitter or a relative providing childcare.

14. Is it necessary for the state to gather data retroactively to determine the child's primary educational setting?

The revised preschool LRE collection will apply to data as of the 2006 child count date (which may be anywhere from October 1 to December 1, at the state's discretion).

If a state chooses December 1 as its 2006 child count date, the state will need to categorize all children, ages 3 through 5, receiving services on December 1, 2006, according to their educational environment, as indicated in the most current IEP in place on the child count date.

The LEA would be responsible for looking at the most current IEP in place on the child count date and reporting the appropriate information to the state to facilitate the calculations as specified for Table 3. This report is not retroactive, as the LEA will be looking at the most current IEP for each child, although that IEP will have been developed at some point in the past. The LEA will have to go as far back as is necessary in order to get information from the most current IEP.

15. Will OSEP be providing a crosswalk between the existing environmental categories and the new categories so that determining the new categories would be easier for states?

OSEP has found that it is not feasible to provide a crosswalk, because the context of the old versus the new categories is entirely different (the old categories reference where the child is receiving special education and related services, whereas the new categories use a broader basis of reference). However, if an individual state is unsure as to how to categorize a particular setting, they can contact Westat for individual technical assistance. If there are commonalities in the requests that come from the field in this regard, Westat and OSEP will add them to the posted Question and Answer document.