

# Tip Sheet for SEAs: Engaging Parents and Family Members in Post-School Outcome Stakeholder Groups

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Involving parents and other family representatives in the Indicator B-14 Post-School Outcomes (PSO) Survey activities can help State Education Agencies (SEAs) develop strategies to increase annual response rates, communicate results to stakeholders, and build support for program improvement and systems change.

Perspectives expressed by families of transition-age youth with disabilities offer valuable information and a unique consumer viewpoint to State data collection efforts. With firsthand experience, parents and youth know how well in-school experiences prepare youth with disabilities for successful PSO (e.g., enrolling in further education, working). Input from family focus groups, parent advocates, parent centers, and family organizations can help states design more user-friendly, accessible survey tools. These groups can also help the State develop (a) approaches for contacting hard-to-reach youth, and (b) marketing strategies to encourage youth and families to take part in the PSO survey.

Parent centers and family organizations can also help SEA personnel organize, disseminate, and use State PSO data with families and other stakeholders at the state and district levels. Parents and family members do not need to be education experts to ask good questions and provide quality input. Informed parents and families can also play a key role as advocates who can identify issues, influence policy decisions, and help improve school programs.

## Questions to Ask Parents

When looking at the graduation, dropout, and PSO data from the State, ask parents to consider the following:

- What patterns can be seen in the State graduation, dropout, and PSO data when you look at the categories of (a) disability type, (b) gender, (c) method of exit, and (d) race/ethnicity?
- What are the trends in State graduation, dropout, and engagement for each disability category?
- Is there a region or geographic area in the State where youth are (a) graduating, (b) dropping out, or (c) engaged at higher rates? What is contributing to the higher rates in this area?
- What State policies and/or procedures might be contributing to graduation, dropout, and engagement outcomes for youth with disabilities?
- What actions can the State take to improve or maintain current outcomes for graduation and engagement rates?
- What can the State do to support districts to decrease dropout rates?

## Sharing Indicator 14 or PSO data with families & community stakeholders

- *Make sure your State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR) are easy to find on the SEA webpage by providing a link to the reports on the main page of the State's special education program website.*
- *Maintain a page on the school district website devoted to Indicator 14 activities and findings.*
  - *Post a one-page summary of the State's process for collecting PSO data. Avoid the use of jargon.*
  - *Post the State's annual post-school outcomes survey questions.*
  - *Present data visually, through charts, such as those featured in NPSO's Data Use Toolkit: Sharing State PSO Data. Graphs can promote interpretation of data and minimize misinterpretation.*
  - *Post "Be A Superstar," a NPSO family-friendly YouTube video explaining the purpose of the state PSO data collection .*
- *Create an e-mail list for communication with parents, staff, and other stakeholders.*
- *Offer to make a presentation on PSO findings to school boards, parent centers, and on local cable TV.*
- *Host annual conference calls to discuss annual survey results with families and other stakeholders.*

## Recruiting Parent and Family Representatives

Strategies to find parent and family representatives interested in serving on SEA committees related to secondary transition and PSO:

- Identify family members of youth with disabilities in direct or indirect contact with your organization that would consider participating in a stakeholder group.
  - Ask your state parent center(s) for recommendations of youth and families.
  - Ask local education agency (LEA) special education transition specialists, SEA and LEA cultural liaisons, and building principals for recommendations of youth and families
- Identify ways to encourage participation.
  - Consider when and where meetings will be held. Participation will grow if potential volunteers do not need to take time off work to attend meetings.
  - Identify ways to provide stipends to cover childcare or transportation expenses.
  - send a personal invitation to potential committee members.

Be prepared to answer questions that parents may have about the volunteer commitment. For many families of youth with disabilities, it can be difficult to take on more responsibility. They may ask:

- What is the purpose of the committee?
- What has the committee previously accomplished?
- What are the member roles and responsibilities?
- Who, besides parents, serves on the committee?
- When, where, and how often are meetings held?
- How long do the meetings last?

Not every person will be able to serve, so be sure to obtain names of others who might make good committee members.

## Retaining Parent/Family Representatives on Committees

Once parents and family members join the committee, be sure to welcome them and provide the tools they need to be effective by

- Creating a mentor program to help parent and youth representatives understand data collection terms and methods.
- Creating an orientation book with the following information:
  - List of committee members and their contact information
  - List of commonly used acronyms for reference during meetings
  - Definition of Indicator 14 Post-School Outcomes
  - One-page summary of the State's process for collecting PSO data
  - Copy of survey questions used in the State's annual PSO survey
  - Definitions of the advisory role and responsibilities

### Create a One-Pager on Your Indicator 14 Program

*Create a one-page summary of your State's process for collecting Indicator B-14 PSO data. Put it on your SEA website to inform community stakeholders, use it to help orient new parent/ family committee members, and distribute it at public meetings. You can include key information such as:*

- *Was a statewide census used or a representative sample?*
- *Who contacted the former students?*
- *How were data obtained? (by phone or mail for example)*
- *When were data collected?*
- *What questions were asked?*
- *Definitions of competitive employment and post-secondary education/school*
- *Glossary of relevant terms*



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