
An Analysis of States' Annual Performance Report Data for Indicator 1 (Graduation)

**A Report Prepared for the
U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs
by the
National Dropout Prevention Center
for Students with Disabilities**

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INDICATOR 1: GRADUATION

INTRODUCTION

The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD) was assigned the task of analyzing and summarizing the data for Indicator 1—Graduation—from the 2006–07 Annual Performance Reports (APRs) and amended State Performance Plans (SPPs), which were submitted by states to OSEP in February of 2008. The text of the indicator is as follows.

Percent of youth with IEPs graduating from high school with a regular diploma.

In the APR, each state reported its graduation rate for special education students, compared its current graduation rate with the state target rate for the 2006-07 school year, discussed reasons for its progress or slippage with respect to the target rate, and described any improvement activities it had undertaken during the year.

In the amended SPP, states revised their baseline data, measurement of the indicator, targets for improvement, and improvement strategies/activities, as was deemed necessary by the state or by OSEP. A breakdown of those revisions is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Revisions to the State Performance Plans, as submitted in February 2008

Type of revision made	Number of states
Baseline data	9
Measurement of graduation rate	9
Improvement targets	18
Improvement activities	33
None	15

This report summarizes the NDPC-SD’s findings for Indicator 1 across the 50 states, commonwealths and territories, and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), for a total of 60 agencies. For the sake of convenience, in this report the term “states” is inclusive of the 50 states, the commonwealths, and the territories, as well as the BIE.

The evaluation and comparison of graduation rates for the states was confounded by several issues, which are described in the context of the summary information for the indicator.

The definition of graduation

The definition of graduation remains inconsistent across states. Some states offer a single “regular” diploma, which represents the only true route to graduation. Other states offer two or more levels of diplomas or other exiting document, (For example, some states offer a Regular

Diploma, a High School Certificate, and a Special Education Diploma). Some states include General Education Development (GED) candidates as graduates, whereas the majority of states do not. Until a consistent definition of graduation can be established and effected, making meaningful comparisons of graduation rates from state to state will be difficult, at best.

COMPARING GRADUATION RATES – CALCULATION METHODS

Comparisons among the states are not easily made because the method of calculation varies from state to state. The graduation rates included in the APRs generally were calculated using one of three methods: an event rate calculation, a leaver method or a true cohort method.

Event rate

Event rate calculations used by states generally followed the form below.

$$\frac{\text{\# of special education graduates receiving a regular diploma}}{\text{Total special education enrollment (usually from 618 Table 4)}}$$

Leaver rate

The leaver rate calculation provides a graduation rate that takes into consideration students who exited by receiving a regular diploma, a certificate, or GED; dropped out; reached the maximum age to receive services; or died. Leaver rate calculations used by states generally follow the form below.

$$\frac{\text{\# of graduates receiving a regular diploma}}{\text{\# of graduates + \# of GED + \# of certificates + \# of dropouts + \# that maxed out in age + \# deceased}}$$

Cohort rate

The cohort rate calculation provides a graduation rate for a 4-year cohort of students. It considers transfers in and out of the cohort. This method, as applied in the APRs, generally followed the form below.

$$\frac{\text{\# Sp Ed graduates receiving a regular diploma who entered HS as 1st time 9th graders in 2003}}{\text{\# Sp Ed students who entered HS as 1st time 9th graders in 2003 + transfers in – transfers out}}$$

Graduation rates calculated using these three methods cannot properly be compared with one another. Event rates tend to over-represent the graduation rate, providing a snapshot of the graduation rate for a particular year that ignores attrition over time; leaver rates provide a good measure of a graduation status rate in the absence of individual student data; whereas the

cohort method provides a more realistic description of the number of students who made it through four years of high school and graduated.

Twenty states (33%) used the cohort method for calculating their special-education graduation rates. Fifteen states (25%) used the event method and twenty-three states (38%) computed a leaver rate. One state (2%) did not specify how this rate was calculated; and the Bureau of Indian Education used the methods employed by states in which their schools are located.

Some states adopted the use of a cohort rate several years ago and were able to report a cohort rate for 2007-08. Other states, however, reported that they were in the process of adopting a cohort-based graduation calculation and would not have their first complete set of cohort data until one or more years from now.

2006-07 GRADUATION RATES

Across the 60 states, the highest reported graduation rate for special education students was 100% and the lowest was 0%. It should be noted that these extremes occurred in states in which there were very few students with disabilities eligible to graduate.

Figure 1 shows the special education graduation rates for all of the states. Note that states are grouped by the method used to calculate their graduation rate. Additionally, the states for which a rate is not shown did not have data available at the time of this reporting.

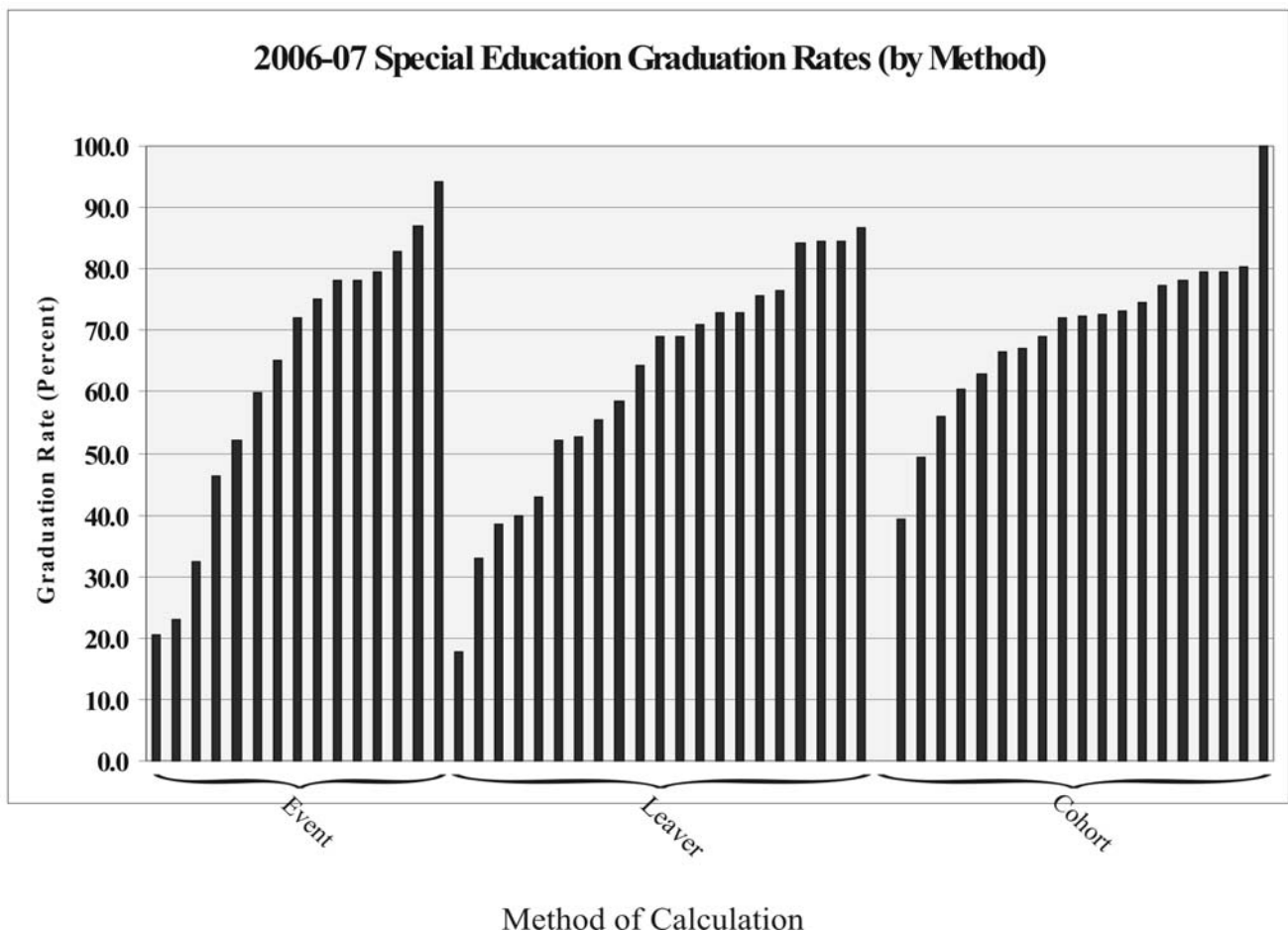


Figure 1

Event Graduation Rates from 2006-07 APR

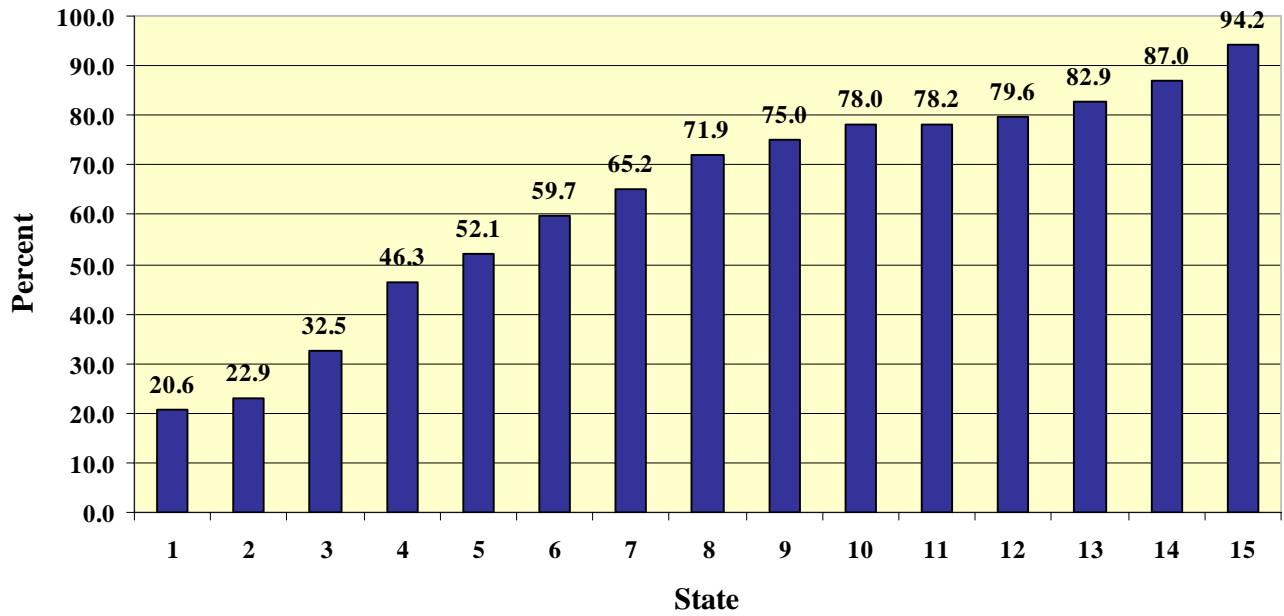


Figure 2

Leaver Graduation Rates from 2006-07 APR

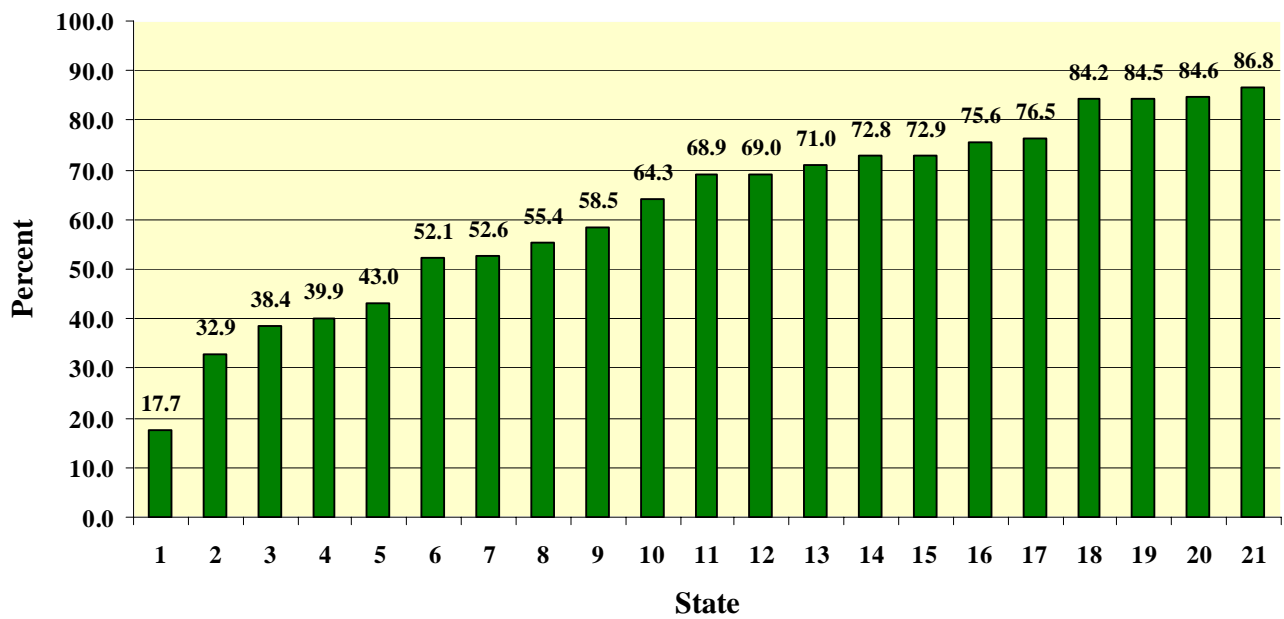


Figure 3

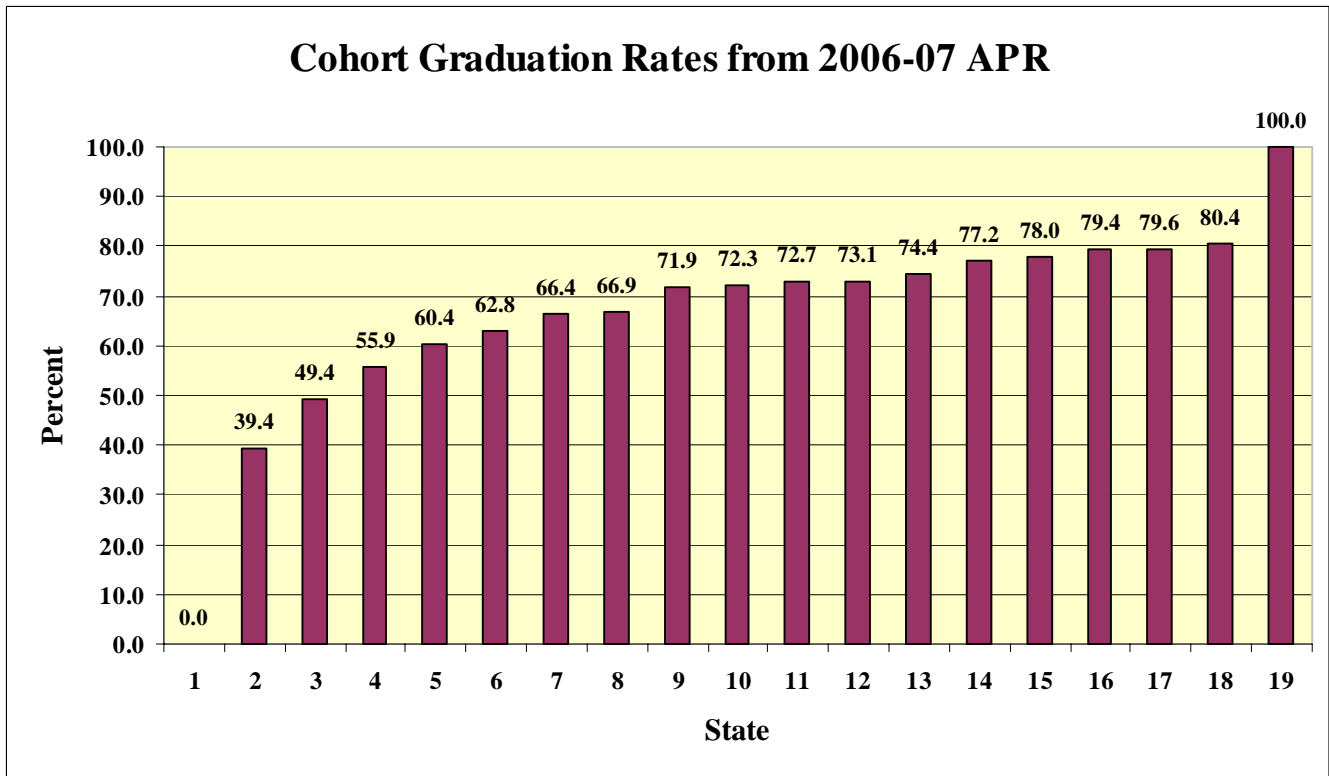


Figure 4

Three states lacked current data and were unable to calculate a rate. Another state that has an extremely small number of students with disabilities did not graduate any students with disabilities last year and, therefore, reported a legitimate rate of zero. The BIE's graduation rates are calculated using the method favored by each state in which its schools operate.

GRADUATION RATE TARGETS

Twenty-five states (42%) achieved their targeted graduation rate for students with disabilities in 2006-07 and 32 states (53%) did not. Two states did not have current data, thus could not determine whether they had achieved their targets. Given the various state targets under which BIE schools operate, it was not included in these calculations. Overall, more states achieved their targets than was reported in the 2005-06 APRs.

Thirty-two states (53%) made progress from their rates reported in the 2005-06 APR. Twenty-three states (38%) experienced slippage during the year. Five states (8%) lacked some of the data necessary to determine progress or slippage for 2006-07. Figure 5 shows these changes from last year's rates.

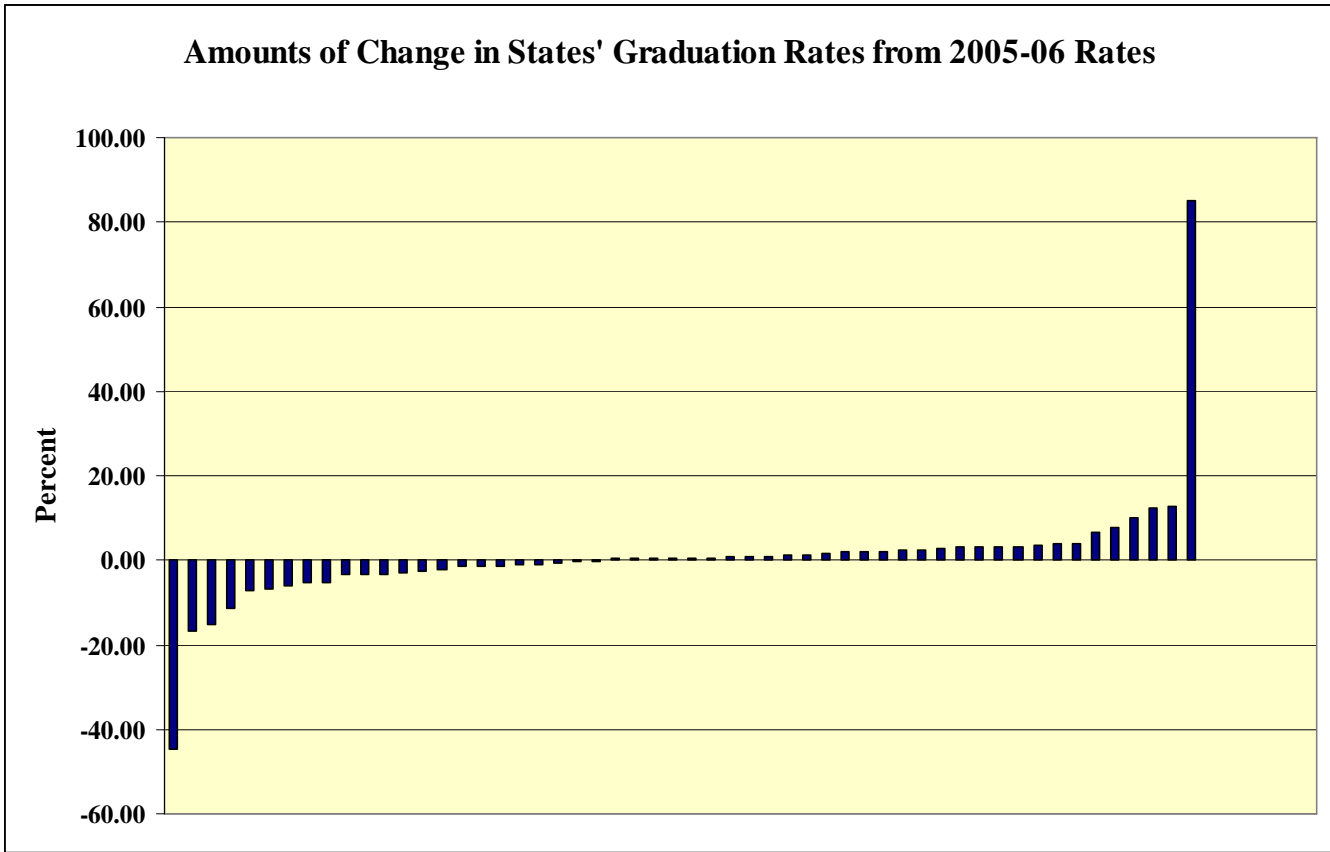


Figure 5

CONNECTIONS AMONG INDICATORS

Forty-four states (73%) identified a strong connection between Indicators 1 and 2, saying that the two indicators are so tightly intertwined that combining the efforts made sense. Many states combined their efforts to address multiple indicators, including Indicators 1, 2, 3, 4, 13, and 14.

NDPC-SD INTERACTIONS WITH STATES

All 60 states received some form of technical assistance from NDPC-SD during the 2006-07 school year. Twenty-six states (43%) indicated that they had used materials from NDPC-SD or received direct technical assistance from NDPC-SD (conference presentation or direct consultation). NDPC-SD is working actively in four states (7%) to establish model dropout-prevention initiatives at an LEA level. These results represent an increase from the figures reported in the 2005-06 APR. Table 3 shows a breakdown of these interactions using the categories specified in the OSEP template for this report.

Table 3

NDPC-SD Interactions with States during the 2006-07 school year

Nature of interaction	Number of states
A. NDPC-SD provided information by mail, telephone, teleseminar, listserv, or Communities of Practice to State	60
B. State attended a conference sponsored by NDPC-SD or received direct on-site TA from NDPC-SD	24
C. NDPC-SD is providing ongoing, intensive, on-site TA to the State toward the end of developing model demonstration sites	4

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

States were instructed to report the strategies, activities, timelines, and resources they employed in order to improve the special education graduation rate. The range of proposed activities was considerable. Many states are implementing evidence-based interventions to address their needs. Table 4 shows the number of states employing various evidence-based practices.

Table 4

Evidence-based practices listed in improvement activities of the 2006-07 APR

Nature of interaction	Number of states
One or more evidence-based practices	44
Positive Behavior Supports	20
Literacy initiatives	13
Response to Intervention	10
Mentoring programs	8

Forty-four states (73%) listed one or more evidence-based improvement activities in their APR, while the remaining 16 states (27%) did not propose any evidence-based improvement activities. There are a limited number of evidence-based programs that have demonstrated efficacy for students with disabilities; however, there are a number of promising practices.

Using the 9 categories listed in Table 5, NDPC-SD coded each state's improvement activities. Figure 6 shows the number of states engaging in each of the categories.

Table 5
Activity categories for the 2006-07 APRs

Code	Activity
A	Improve data collection and reporting
B	Improve systems administration and monitoring
C	Build systems and infrastructures of technical assistance and support
D	Provide technical assistance/training/professional development
E	Clarify /examine/develop policies and procedures
F	Program development
G	Collaboration/coordination
H	Evaluation
I	Increase/Adjust FTE
J	Other activities

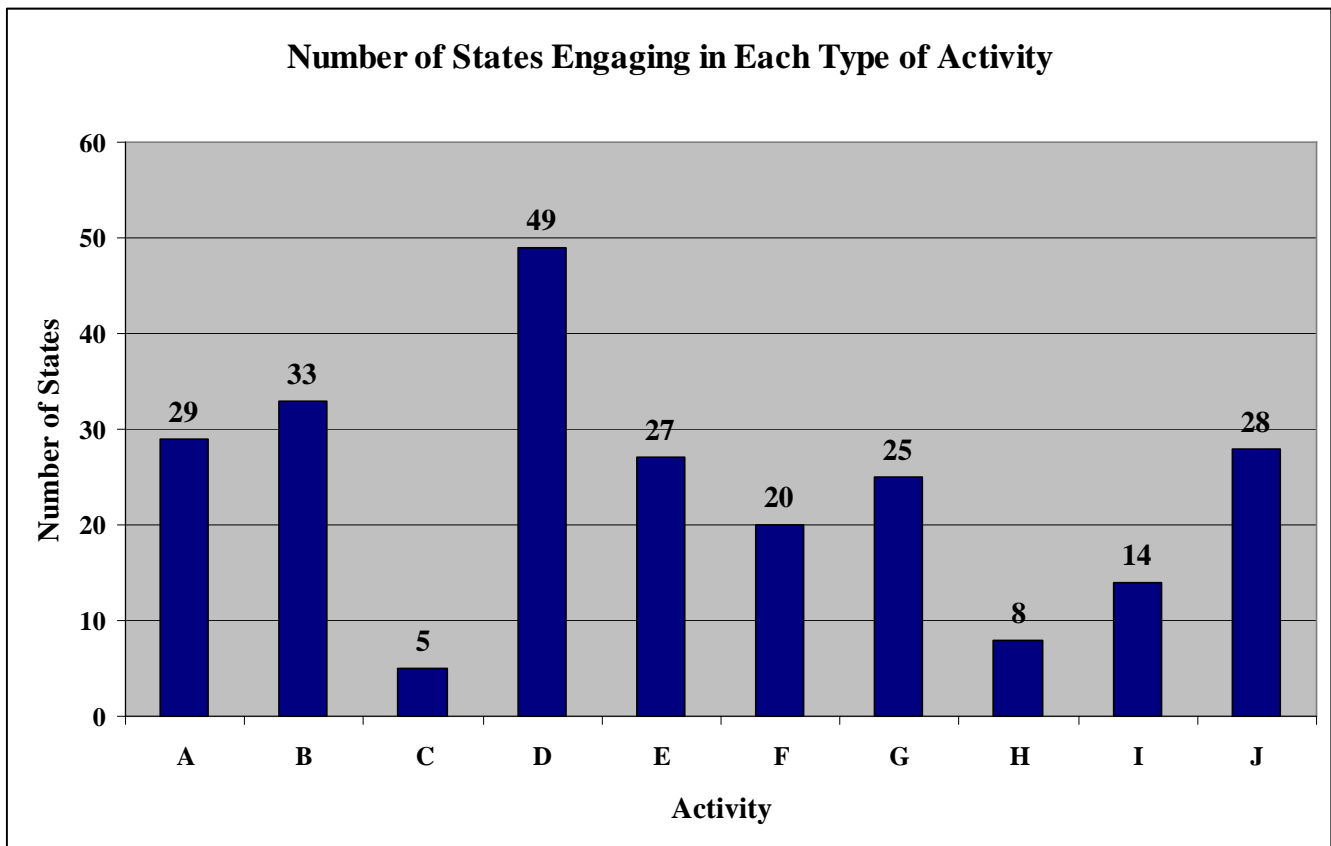


Figure 6

Figure 6 shows that the majority of states (49 states, or 82%) are engaging in one or more technical assistance, training or professional development activities (D). This followed by thirty-three states (55%) working to improve their monitoring (B) and twenty-nine states (48%) working to improve their data or reporting (A). Review and/or clarification of policies and procedures (E) was undertaken by 27 states (45%). Twenty-five states (42%) carried out some form of collaborative activity (G). Twenty states (33%) worked on development of statewide programs or initiatives (F). Fourteen states (23%) added or reassigned staff to work on school-completion efforts (I). Only eight states (13%) engaged in some form of program evaluation to determine the efficacy of their activities (H). Despite the large amount of technical assistance that occurred, only a handful (8%) of states said that they increased their TA infrastructure and support for this indicator last year (C). Many states described one or more improvement activities that were unique to their specific needs and programs (J). These activities occurred in 47% of all states.

In general, the collections of activities listed in states' APRs seem improved over last year. More states appear to be recognizing the benefit of combining activities across indicators to minimize waste and maximize effect. A substantial number of states described a group of activities that would work well to address their students' needs across the transition indicators (Inds. 1, 2, 13, and 14). Several other states included activities that addressed Indicators 3, 4, and 5 in addition in their mix of improvement activities to support school-completion.

NOTES

- While the comparison of special-education graduation rates to all-student rates has been removed from the Indicator, we would hate to see states lose sight of the importance of this relationship. In order to continue the push for progress in closing the gap between rates of school completion for students with disabilities and those of their non-disabled peers, it is imperative that we remain aware of how students with disabilities are doing in relation to all students. While there are various data-related barriers to making such comparisons easily, keeping such comparisons in mind may help us avoid complacency in this area. This said we were pleased to note that several states continue to provide data for their students with disabilities and their entire student population.
- Several states cited improvements in their procedures around data collection as well as the newly gained ability to follow individual students' progress and movement among districts as having impacted their graduation rates. Some of those states credited their improvement in graduation rate to this, whereas others blamed it for their decreased rates.
- Activities that raise states' awareness of the interconnectivity among the Part B Indicators and assist states in understanding and managing data related to those activities will continue to be beneficial to states.

Over the last year and a half, six states participated in the pilot program of the *Making the Connection Among Indicators 1, 2, 13 and 14 Institutes*, sponsored jointly by the

National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center, the National Post School Outcomes Center, and the Regional Resource Centers. Since the three pilot sessions, the centers have held one regional meeting for states in the Northeast and Mid-South regions, and have scheduled two additional meetings for fall 2008 to address states in the remaining regions. The 1½ -day-long process exposes states to strategies for collecting, reporting and using data across Part B Indicators 1, 2, 13, and 14 of the SPP/APR for program improvement. Using their own data, states work through a series of guided questions and activities that help them understand and identify strengths and needs around these Indicators.

IN SUMMARY

In general, we have seen an improvement in the overall quality and organization of the APRs as well as a trend toward improvement in the nature of the data states submitted. States' activities are generally more concerted and focused than in previous years. Additionally, more states are moving toward the use of better measures of school completion. While the slight majority of states missed their graduation rate targets last year, more states made progress over last year's rates than showed slippage. There is a recognized lag between the time at which implementation of an intervention begins and the point at which it shows measurable results. Despite this lag and the once-a-year nature of the measurement of this indicator, it appears that things might gradually be improving with Indicator 1.

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