Considerations for Making Changes to SIMR Baseline and Targets

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For more information about the IDEA Data Center's work and its partners, see www.ideadata.org. For more information about DaSy, see www.dasycenter.org.

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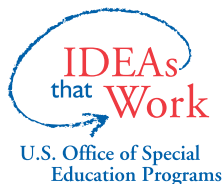
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Purpose and Intended Audience

Overview

This paper provides Part C and Part B state staff an opportunity to learn about considerations that could support changing their State-Identified Measurable Result (SIMR) baselines or targets. Since states will be working on data quality for their SIMR, it is possible that, as data quality improves, the data for baselines will change, which could lead to revising the targets.

This paper addresses four central questions:

1. What are baseline data?
2. Why change a SIMR baseline?
3. What is a target?
4. Why change SIMR targets?

> **Important Note:** This paper addresses considerations for changing baseline and targets—states should always discuss proposed changes with their OSEP State Lead.

Introduction

A State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) is a multi-year achievable plan that will increase the capacity of early intervention service programs or local education agencies to implement, scale up, and sustain evidence-based practices to improve outcomes for children and youth with disabilities and their families. Under Results Driven Accountability, OSEP has placed an increased emphasis on improving results for children and youth with disabilities. States are required to focus on a particular SIMR. The SIMR must be a child, youth, or family outcome and cannot be a process outcome. The SIMR might be, for example, a measure of school readiness, of achievement, of graduation rates, or of college or career readiness. The measure must include either (a) all children or youth with disabilities in the state or (b) a subset of these children or youth, with an explanation about how improving the result for that subset would improve that result on a statewide basis. OSEP expects stakeholders to be involved in all three phases of SSIP, which includes the selection of the SIMR, target setting, and revisions to baselines and targets.

What are Baseline Data?

In the context of the SSIP, baseline data provide information about the performance of the identified group of children or youth before the implementation of SSIP strategies. Of most importance will be the baseline value of the SIMR. These values can be aggregated from the child or youth level to the school, district, local agency, or state level. Examples of state SIMRs are early childhood outcomes, family outcomes, graduation, and postsecondary outcomes. See Appendix A for list of state SIMRs.

Establishing a baseline is important for the SSIP process because it serves as a point of reference, allowing the demonstration of change over time. When a state compares baseline data to data collected at later points in time, it will need to determine if the state is making sufficient progress toward its targets. Baseline data are used to establish targets and the amount of growth that is expected each year. The selection of an appropriate assessment or data collection tool, the proper use of the assessment or data collection tool, and the recording of the data collected from these tools are essential for the creation of a valid SIMR with a meaningful baseline.

Once the data have been selected to use for the SIMR, they need to be analyzed. The following questions should be asked about the baseline data:

- Are the data of high quality? Are they reliable and valid?
- If necessary, are there plans to improve the data quality? If so, how?
- How are the improvements in the quality of the data likely to affect the baseline and targets? Is the baseline likely to go up or down based on improving the data quality?
- What do the data show about children or youth statewide?
- What do the data show about children or youth by race, ethnicity, special education, general education, local district/program, etc.?

- Are there patterns in the data (i.e., are there subgroups that have a mean that is higher, lower, or the same as the state)? How do subgroups compare with each other?
- Will the differences affect the determination of targets?

Asking these questions will not only help a state to identify appropriate baselines and targets, but will also help the state to devise the best coherent improvement strategies.

Why Change a SIMR Baseline?

Sometimes a state must change the baseline that it provided to OSEP in its Phase I SSIP submission. The primary reason to revise a SIMR baseline is the suspect quality of the data used to set the original baseline. Here are some common reasons to question the quality of available data:

1. **The baseline data are not representative.** That is, significant proportions of the children or youth who should have been included in outcomes data are missing from the baseline data analysis, and those who were included in the data analysis differ in important ways from the targeted children or youth. If, for example, youth from large urban areas or children whose home language is not English were not included in the original baseline data analysis, the baseline may not accurately represent the state's children or youth. When more representative and accurate data are collected, the state might consider resetting its baseline using the better data. Note that SIMR data can be collected by sampling: indeed, a representative sample with a high response rate can be more valid than an attempted census with a low response rate or a response rate that varies by subgroup.

2. **State or local districts/programs have out-of-range data.** If a state's outcome data are significantly different from the national data, or local districts/

programs within a state have outcome data significantly different from the state data, this may indicate that some localities legitimately differ in important ways from other localities. It may, however, be a red flag for inaccurate data. This could be due to one or more of the following situations.

a. **Problems with data collection methods.** If personnel collecting the outcomes data do not use the appropriate data collection methods, their results will be inaccurate. If, for example, early childhood teams are using the Child Outcomes Summary Process[1] without understanding the rating scale, the ratings may not accurately reflect children's functioning. If improvement activities, such as professional development, successfully improve the data collection methods, the more accurate data could be used to revise the baseline.

b. **Problems with data reporting or data system errors.** Errors in data reporting and data entry into data systems may also cause inaccuracies in baseline data. If improvement activities, like building data system error checks, or professional development in data reporting, result in more accurate data, a state could propose to reestablish the baseline with the more accurate data.

c. **Problems with the particular data collection tool.** Unusual data patterns may be related to problems with the particular data collection tool that the state used to measure child outcomes. For example, states that use one particular assessment tool statewide to measure outcomes may find that one or more of the three early childhood outcome areas are not measured well by the selected tool. An assessment tool may have too few items in an outcome to show differences among children or youth, or an assessment tool may not cover the intended constructs in the outcome area.

3. **Changing data collection tools or methods.** When states change the tool or method for collecting child or student outcomes data, it is often because they were not satisfied with the quality and accuracy of the data resulting from the original methods. For Part B, the national movement toward Common Core Standards has resulted in many new curricula and many new assessments. When the new data collection methods are implemented successfully with fidelity, the outcomes data may be higher or lower than the original baseline. States in this situation may want to revise their baseline using the data from the new tools/methods.

4. **The state used data from research on evidence-based practices to set the baseline, since it did not have its own data.** If a state did not have its own baseline data it may have used baseline data from research. Once the state has collected its own data, it can determine the baseline, and if it is different from the evidence-based study, the state may propose to use its own data to set the baseline.

Take home message: If the data quality improvement activities in the SSIP have successfully improved the quality of the outcome data, a state should consider using the improved/more accurate data to reset its baseline.

Caution: If improvement activities have also been implemented to improve provider practices, and thus improve outcomes, the state will need to determine whether any change in outcomes is from more accurate data or from improved practices. This can be challenging to do, and states are encouraged to contact one of the OSEP TA Centers for additional assistance.

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1 For more information about the Child Outcomes Summary Process please see http://ectacenter.org/eco/pages/outcomes.asp#COSProcessModule.

What is a Target?

In the SSIP context, a target is the value of the SIMR that is expected at the end of each reporting period. The value of the baseline is one of the factors the state should consider in setting SIMR targets that are both rigorous and attainable for their children or youth. Baselines and targets enable administrators and stakeholders to determine the amount of progress that children or youth should make during the time period being examined.

Targets orient stakeholders to the goal to be accomplished and motivate states to do their best to meet or exceed the targets. Targets help to establish expectations for staff, implementing partners, and key stakeholders. Once the SSIP activities have started, targets serve as guides for monitoring progress and determining if progress is on schedule. Finally, targets promote transparency and accountability by making available information on whether the intended results have been achieved over time.

When setting targets the following should be considered:

- Targets are best based on the first year of quality data collected, not necessarily the first year of data.
- If the targets are developed from data from pilot programs, scaling-up of implementation must be considered.
- If selecting subgroups, consider using the baselines of the individual groups to set their targets.

Why Change SIMR Targets?

Three situations that may warrant changes in targets are described below.

1. **The state's baseline is revised to reflect more accurate data.** When a state revises its baseline, it will almost always need to adjust its targets to reflect growth from the new baseline. The methods the state used to project the initial targets might be used again, but in relation to the new baseline. For example, if a state projected targets that were a 5-point increase in the percentage of third-grade students with disabilities achieving at the Basic level or better in reading (e.g., the percentage of students would increase from 35 percent at baseline to 40 percent by the end of the SSIP), the state may choose to recalculate the increase from the revised baseline (e.g., the accurate baseline is changed to 30 percent, so a 5-point increase would result in a new target of 35 percent by the end of the SSIP implementation).

2. **Data from early implementers is not as expected.** If a state is phasing in its improvements in various areas in the state, the data from the first cohort(s) may be informative about the appropriateness of the state's targets. The local districts/programs first implementing the improvement activities will provide the state data about the level of achievement that occurs when the improvements are implemented. A state may want to compare the actual performance of children or youth in the first cohort(s) to the state's projected targets. If the gains are not as expected, either higher or lower, a state might propose to reset its targets, aligning its projections with the data from the earliest implementers.

3. **The state used data from research on evidence-based practices to set targets, since it did not have its own data.** If a state did not have its own baseline data to set targets, it may have used baseline data from research to establish its targets. Once the state has its own baseline and if it is different from the evidence-based study data, the state may propose to use its own data to project revised targets. (Alternatively, the state also should consider whether adjustments in implementation of improvement activities would yield better results.)

Take home message: Resetting baseline and targets is most often a result of a state having better information/data than it had when it initially set its baseline and projected its targets. The state should use this information to thoughtfully change its targets when needed.

Summary

Although Part C and Part B state staff submitted SIMR baselines and targets for SSIP Phase I, there may be a need for Part C and Part B staff to propose to OSEP reasons for revising. Since states will be working on data quality for their SIMR, it is possible that, as data quality improves, baselines will change, which could lead to revising the targets.

Baselines and targets are important because when used together they provide an opportunity to determine if states are making progress toward their outcomes. The primary reasons for a state to request a change to the SIMR baselines are due to data quality. States are dealing with issues such as representativeness of the data; data collection methods, data reporting or data system errors, data collection tools; changing data collection tools or methods; and not having their own data to report in the SSIP Phase I.

The primary reasons for a state to request a change to the SIMR targets are due to the state's baseline being revised to reflect more accurate data; unexpected data from early implementers; and not having its own data to report in the SSIP Phase I. Revising baselines and targets based on improved data quality will help states to more accurately determine the progress of children or youth as it relates to their SIMR.

Appendix A

State SIMRs

Program	SIMRs
Part C	**Early Childhood Outcomes** • Social-Emotional • Knowledge and Skills • Behavior Meets Needs **Family Outcomes** • Develop and Learn • Effectively Communicate Children's Needs and Help Children Develop and Learn **Other**
Part B	• Graduation • Reading/ELA • Math • Reading and Math • Early Childhood Outcomes • Post-School Outcomes