

MEMORANDUM

TO: Yumiko Sekino, Tracy Rimdzius

FROM: Cheri Vogel, Stephen Lipscomb, Laura Kalb, and Timothy Bruursema **DATE:** 3/20/2015

SUBJECT: Responses to OMB comments

We thank OMB and the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), for their careful reviews of the district and state surveys that will be used to collect information for the Evaluation of Preschool Special Education Practices study. In this document, we provide responses to their comments and describe how we have modified the surveys to address them.

OMB/OSEP had two comments. The first comment is a request to include specific items developed by OSEP on barriers to preschool inclusion and professional development in the district and state surveys. The second comment is a request for clarification about whether regional respondents will be asked items in Section 6 of the district survey that pertain to characteristics of special education staff. We address these two comments below, in turn.

Request to include specific items developed by OSEP on barriers to preschool inclusion and professional development

Following item 3.13 in the district survey and item 3.6 in the state survey, several questions were inserted on barriers to preschool inclusion and professional development, noting that: “*ED developed these questions and OMB supports including them in the survey. We believe this is the right section of the survey for these questions to appear, but would be happy to discuss other options. Section 4 is also an appropriate place to include these questions.*”

We thank OSEP and OMB for recommending these items, and have added closely related versions of them to the survey instruments. Because these are existing items, we understand that maintaining comparability with other surveys where these items already appear may be important for OSEP and the research community. Our changes—made in consultation with co-principal investigators Drs. John Deke, Samuel Odom, and Patricia Snyder—revise some wording to clarify and better integrate the items into the surveys without changing their meaning.

Specifically, we added five items to the district survey (4.13, 4.14, 4.15, 5.4, and 5.5), added six items to the state survey (3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 4.3, 4.4), and adjusted any subsequent item numbers in these sections accordingly. The item text is included in the enclosed revised district and state surveys. We placed the district survey items in Sections 4 and 5 because the items on inclusion relate to Section 4’s topic of the characteristics of classrooms, and the items on professional development relate to Section 5’s topic of supporting instruction. We placed the state survey items in Sections 3 and 4 because the items on inclusion relate to Section 3’s topic of the programs serving children ages 3 through 5 with disabilities, and the items on professional development relate to Section 4’s topic of supporting instruction. Additionally, in order to

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provide a transition to the added preschool inclusion questions in the state survey, IES requested we add a new item on inclusion beyond those requested by OMB/OSEP.

Below, we explain any differences in text for these items compared with the original versions from OSEP.

Changes that apply to multiple items

- Added “[district/region]” fills when the item text referred to district programs, to make the items applicable to regional respondents
- Used text such as “including children ages 3 through 5 with disabilities in general education (inclusive) classrooms” instead of “preschool inclusion,” to use consistent terminology throughout the surveys

Changes to district survey item 4.13 (and state survey item 3.8)

- Split the response option for “Family knowledge and engagement” into separate options for “Family knowledge and beliefs” and “Family engagement,” based on co-PI recommendation
- Added a new response option for “Severity of a child’s disability” instead of treating it as its own item. Also add a response option for “Other factors.”

Changes to district survey item 4.14 (and state survey item 3.9)

- Revised “Awareness of the benefits of inclusion” to “Lack of awareness of the benefits of inclusion,” because the item stem pertains to attitudes and beliefs that are barriers
- Revised “Cultural sensitivity and awareness” to “Cultural sensitivity,” based on co-PI recommendation
- Added response options for “Lack of knowledge about and experiences with children with disabilities” based on co-PI recommendation and for “Other attitudes and beliefs”

Changes to district survey item 4.15 (and state survey item 3.10)

- Added an explicit reference to “policies at the federal, state, and local levels” in the stem because that is the focus of the information requested of respondents
- Added “policies” to each column header to clarify those headers
- Added “within the same level of government” to the response option for “Conflicting policies,” to clarify that it refers to conflicting policies within levels of government
- Changed the format from a “Yes/No” to a “Select all that apply” to reduce burden.

Changes to district survey item 5.4 (and state survey item 4.3)

- Changed “provide” to “sponsor or otherwise support” based on co-PI recommendation and to clarify that the state is not necessarily providing the training

Changes to district survey item 5.5 (and state survey item 4.4)

- Changed the format from a “Yes/No” to a “Select all that apply” to reduce burden.
- Revised the stem to use a more consistent format as other items in the survey

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Adding new state survey item 3.7 on inclusion

- Added the following “Yes/No” item at IES request: “Were any children ages 3 through 5 with disabilities who qualified for Part B services included in the general education (inclusive) classrooms during the 2014-15 school year?”

Request for clarification about whether regional respondents will be asked items in Section 6 of the district survey that pertain to characteristics of special education staff

The following comment was also included at the top of Section 6 in the district survey: *“In this section, questions alternate asking for district level data and district/region data. Are the district questions only going to be asked of district level staff?”*

We thank OSEP and OMB for pointing out this issue, which resulted from typos in the stem for items 6.4 and 6.8. Our intent is to ask questions in Section 6 only for respondents who indicate an ability to report on special education services for the sampled district. This is noted in the box that appears on page 3 of the district survey. As a result, all the items in Section 6 should refer to district level data and none need the [district/region] fill. In addition to correcting the two typos in the revised district survey, we have added a disclaimer at the top of the section indicating that this section is only asked to respondents who can respond at the district level.

cc: John Deke, Sam Odom, and Pat Snyder