

SUGGESTIONS FOR POST SCHOOL OUTCOMES DATA COLLECTION

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and Indicator 14 of the Illinois State Performance Plan (SPP), Part B for 2005-2010, require the state to collect post secondary outcomes data on students with disabilities one year after leaving school (i.e. students who graduate, dropout, or age out). The Post School Survey, developed by the National Post School Outcomes Center, assesses the outcomes of individuals with disabilities one year after they have exited high school. The Illinois Post School Survey is a web-based survey process that provides a framework for local districts to collect and analyze the outcomes of exiters, and to identify areas of strength and weakness in preparing students for adult life. Former students are contacted for a brief interview to assess the areas of independent living, participation in postsecondary education, and employment.

The following information has been made available by the National Post School Outcomes Center. More information can be obtained by visiting their website at www.psocenter.org.

Suggestions For Interviewers

Send a letter about one month before interviewing begins to remind former students and their families that we will be calling and why. You may need to make several calls before someone answers. Once someone answers, expect that they will likely think you are trying to sell them something and may hang up. Quickly and politely explain who you are and why you are calling. Often your call is an interruption. If necessary, provide a chance to set up an appointment.

In most instances this post school survey data will be gathered by interviewers who contact the former student and/or his or her family member by phone to determine if the student is working and/or continuing in some sort of educational program. It is vital that interviewers gather data in an accurate and uniform manner.

The *accuracy* of the information you collect is dependent on many factors:

- In order for the respondent to give accurate answers, you need to develop rapport and trust with them. Some may need to be reassured from time to time that their answers are confidential and will not be repeated or reported to their parents, staff at school, or anyone else. Respondents may also need reassurance they are not being “graded” and that they should give the most accurate answer possible.
- It is important that you read questions exactly as they appear in the survey. Only rephrase questions, or explain them, to help a respondent who cannot understand them as they are written. Rephrasing must preserve the neutral character of the original question. Unless rephrasing is needed, ask questions exactly as written every time. Asking questions inconsistently results in inconsistent understanding and inconsistent responses. For example, Employment Section Question 1 on the Post School Survey is “Right now are you working?” If it is sometimes phrased this way and sometimes asked “You are working now, right?” very different

responses may result. The first question is asked neutrally, the second implies that work is expected, and that “yes” is the correct answer.

An example of appropriate rephrasing would be, “Do you work?” or “Do you have a job?” and if the response is “Yes,” then follow up with “When do you work?” Depending on the respondent’s understanding and responses, additional questions might be needed before a complete answer to the original question “Right now are you working?” is understood. The rephrasing and probing did not change the essential content or neutrality of the original question.

- Respondents may be inclined to give you the “right” or socially acceptable answer. Keep your tone of voice and language formal and accepting. When you ask them if they are working, they know that social norms value work and may say they are working even if they are not. To get the truth, you need to establish that you are accepting and not judgmental. For example, if they tell you that they are working and you say “That’s great” they will be more inclined to give you the answer they think you think is important or correct.
- Not only is it important to ask questions as they are written, but that you ask them in the correct order. Survey questionnaires have a prescribed sequence that changes based upon the responses given. For example, the first question on the Post School Survey is “Right now are you working?” Obviously follow-up questions need to be different based upon how this first question is answered. The Post School Survey instructs you to go to Question #5 if the answer is “No” or to Question #2 if the answer is “Yes.”
- There are questions you can ask to help clarify responses. Here are several examples:
 - “Can you be a little more specific?”
 - “I’m not sure I am entirely clear about what you mean. Could you explain it a little more?”
 - “Could I read back what I have written to be sure I have understood exactly what you wanted to say?”
 - “Could I reread the question and the answer I’ve written down just to be sure I have gotten everything you wanted to say?”
 - “I think I may not have read the question correctly, so may I read it to you again to be sure?”
- It is important to record responses accurately, representing the respondent’s perceptions. Never think you know what their next answer will be. Be patient and wait for their response. Never initially limit the responses you consider. If you are not sure what exactly a respondent means, take the time to discuss that response with them to assure you select the appropriate response.

Occasionally the former student’s disability makes participating in a phone survey difficult. It is sometimes effective to have the former student on one phone and their representative (often a parent) on another. If this is not enough of an accommodation, it may be necessary to interview the former student in person, or via a written copy of the survey.

Sending your former students a personalized letter announcing this upcoming telephone interview is critical to achieving a good response rate. A sample letter to students which can easily be personalized is available on the website. One way to personalize is to

have personnel who worked with students while they were in school sign correspondence. Individuals are more likely to respond if they know and trust those who are asking.

Repeat contact is the most important follow-up strategy to increase response rate. Follow-up serves as a reminder for those who have simply forgotten to return the survey or who were unavailable at previous contact attempts. ***Districts must document a minimum of three occasions and methods to contact the former student.*** With phone surveys, repeat calls at various times and days. Consider sending a survey via mail with an enclosed, stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Suggestions for Locating Former Students

Because the data for the Post School Survey must be collected the year after students leave school some will be hard to find. This may be true especially for youth who dropped out of school. Response rates pose a problem when target respondents cannot be located or are reluctant to respond. Therefore, districts must make every attempt to secure sufficient response rates to ensure the data collected is representative of the target population.

Provide pre-notification. Pre-notification gives youth and their families a “heads up” and encourages them to respond when the survey comes. Many districts notify students and families while they are still in school that the Post School Survey will occur. Include information about the surveys in district, school, and parent newsletters. This encourages youth and families to participate and lets them know the schools are interested in their lives after leaving high school.

Before Exiting

- Keep student demographics and contact information up-to-date; include home and cell phone numbers; home, emergency, and email addresses; and the addresses, email, and phone numbers of family members and/or best friends
- Have students complete an exit survey prior to leaving school.
- Reinforce the importance of the survey at all high school IEP meetings. Every IEP of students 14 ½ and older must contain postsecondary goals. Engage in effective transition planning and inform students and families that they may be contacted after leaving school. Explain to students and families the necessity of collecting post-school outcomes data. Share the post-school outcomes survey during IEP meetings to familiarize the student and family with the survey look and questions.

After Exiting

- Keep local data systems current. Make certain that school personnel enter the most recent student data.
- “Google” students (e.g., students may be found at www.myspace.com and www.classmates.com).
- Ask youth to update their contact information and ask them to stay in touch.

- Send a postcard with forward service or change of address request. Conduct formal postal checks through the post office. Current information may be obtained at the post office via the use of an automated vendor file of current postal change-of-address updates, the National Change of Address (NCOA) file. These files are updated as often as every 2 weeks, and maintain a record of previous address updates and, in some cases, telephone numbers. NCOA updates (for both address and telephone number) are far faster and less costly than multiple mailings or telephone numbers contacts.
- Recheck fall enrollments annually for students who may have returned.
- Administer an exit survey to every senior eligible for graduation or to those students who leave school. Encourage students who leave school (age out or drop out) to complete an exit survey.