

HOW WE VALIDATE OUR DATA

The *Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA)* requires federal departments and agencies to clearly describe the goals and objectives of their programs, identify resources and actions needed to accomplish goals and objectives, develop a means of measuring progress made and report regularly on achievement. The goals of the act include improving program effectiveness by promoting a focus on results, service quality and customer satisfaction; improving congressional decision making by providing objective information on achieving statutory objectives; and focusing on the relative effectiveness and efficiency of federal programs and spending.

Consolidating Data Collections Through *EDFacts*

Complete, accurate and reliable data are essential for effective decision-making. Given the requirements of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)*, as amended, accuracy of state and local educational agency performance data is crucial to funding decisions and management actions are taken on the basis of this performance information.

The mandatory regulation requires states to electronically submit data to the Education Data Exchange Network Submission System (EDENS), a centralized, Internet-based system of elementary and secondary education data (K-12) from 52 state education agencies. Data are available for state and local education agencies. School data include demographics, program participation, implementation and outcomes.

EDFacts became the mandatory system for states to electronically report their K–12 education data to the Department starting in school year (SY) 2008–09. The *EDFacts* system enabled the consolidation of historically separate data collection efforts, and the increased amount of data in *EDFacts* allows for even greater data collection efficiencies. The Department is using the *EDFacts* Metadata and Process System to collect each state's plan for transitioning from reporting using five racial and ethnic categories to using seven. For SY 2008–09, the collection was optional; if a state has not entered a plan, it was assumed that five categories were used for the school year.

By using the Education Data Exchange Network Submission System and *EDFacts* Metadata and Process System together, *EDFacts* is able to reduce the reporting burden for states by eliminating redundant data requests for multiple data collections. This approach also provides program offices with the ability to retire paper-based collections and improve data quality by relying solely on electronic reporting methods. In the future, the *EDFacts* initiative will employ similar strategies to increase the efficiency of data acquisition methods across the Department.

The Validation and Verification of Performance Data

OMB Circular A-11, Part 6, section 230.5, *Assessing the completeness and reliability of performance data*, requires each agency to design a procedure for verifying and validating data that it makes public in its annual performance plans and reports.

Additionally, *GPRRA* prescribes the means to verify and validate measured values. Finally, the *Reports Consolidation Act of 2000* requires that the transmittal letter included in annual performance reports contains an assessment by the agency head of the completeness and reliability of the performance data included in its plans and reports.

In response, the Department has developed a guidance document to assist principal offices responsible for reporting data on strategic and program performance measures to address issues of data integrity and credibility. The guidance provides a framework for validating and verifying performance data before it is collected and reported and is used to evaluate data prior to publication for review by the public. Additionally, the Department has developed a worksheet for each program office to use to identify the validity of the data for their unique program performance measures.

The Department's data validation criteria require that program goals and measures are:

- appropriate to the mission of the organization and that measured performance has a direct relation to the goal;
- realistic and measurable, achievable in the time frame established and challenging in their targets;
- understandable to the lay person and terminology is adequately defined; and
- used in decision-making about the effectiveness of the program and its benefit to the public.

For more information on the guidance and its implementation and to review the worksheet, go to <http://www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/index.html>.

The Institute of Education Sciences Data Quality Initiative

The Data Quality Initiative of the Department's Institute of Education Sciences, begun in 2006, is designed to improve the Department's program performance data and reporting in support of the goals of *GPRRA*. Technical assistance is being provided to approximately 30 Department grant programs.

Activities for Department program offices include reviewing grantee evaluation plans and reports; developing annual performance reporting forms; analyzing grantee annual performance data; and developing briefings and workshops focused on evaluation strategies. In 2008 and 2009, the initiative was expanded to include programs covering a wide range of elementary and secondary education topics and populations. See http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/projects/evaluation/assistance_data.asp for more details.

The National Forum on Education Statistics

The National Forum on Education Statistics, sponsored by the Department's National Center for Education Statistics, is a voluntary, participative and cooperative federal-state-local body with a mission to develop and recommend strategies for building an education data system that will support local, state and national efforts to improve public and private education throughout the United States. See more details at http://nces.ed.gov/forum/data_quality.asp.